

# ***The Conceptualization of Social Class***

## **1. Introduction**

Over the past ten years, the whole question of the marxist theory of social classes under the capitalist mode of production has undergone renewed discussion and debate. Certain important theoretical advances have been made, especially by Poulantzas (1968, 1974), Carchedi (1975a, b, & c), and Wright (1978). These have been part of wider theoretical advances in historical materialism which have come about since the change of political circumstances in the Soviet Union and the subsequent onslaught on economism which began principally with Althusser, Bettelheim, and Godelier in the early sixties. In addition to work on social class, there have been other focuses of advance: Renewed debate about the problem of the asiatic mode of production has arisen out of the split between the Soviet Union and China, and centres on whether or not there is one unique path to the dominance of the capitalist mode of production, by way of feudalism. Concern over the problem of the transition between dominant modes of production arose when the place of the Soviet Union as a transitional socialist country began to appear questionable. In this context, the idea of the automatic disappearance of class conflict with seizure of the state by the proletariat and the ensuing irreversibility of the transition process were especially illuminated by the Cultural Revolution in China. A third problem, that of the place of the state in capitalist society, has older origins, going back to the analysis of the fascist regimes of Europe. This has become theoretically more important during the current crisis with the development of popular unrest in the advanced capitalist countries and with evidence of the various means which the state has adopted to handle it. Interest in the state has been amplified by the consoli-

dation of monopoly forms of production and by the changing relationships of the advanced capitalist countries among themselves and with the third world. Finally, the epistemological bases of historical materialism have been brought into question as the awaited socialist revolution in the advanced capitalist countries continues to be postponed. The discussion since 1968 has manifested itself in doubts about whether historical materialism can produce scientific "truths" about the real world.<sup>1</sup>

The recent re-emergence of social class as an important theoretical problem can also be traced to such social causes.<sup>2</sup> The left alliances in Europe, especially in France and Italy, and more recently in Portugal and Spain, have placed the left parties in a position where they are strongly competing for bourgeois political power and are even potentially in positions to conquer it. Besides the question of tactics with regard to the state, this conjuncture poses critically the whole question of working class alliances. In addition, the forms which recent popular unrest has taken in the advanced capitalist countries — student and minority movements, regional national liberation, ecological and consumer groups, women's liberation, etc. — have to some extent, especially in the USA, placed in question the primacy of the working class as the force behind change under the capitalist mode of production.<sup>3</sup> With the development of the current crisis, the situation of non-manual salaried workers has, in many cases, deteriorated considerably, unionization has progressed, and the possibility of concrete alliances with the manual working class appears. The theoretical problem of the class position of these workers becomes critical if grave errors are not to be made within the working class movement.

The claim made here, and amplified in the final section of the article, is that much of the recent development in marxist theory of social classes, as proposed by Poulantzas, Carchedi, and Wright, will lead directly to such errors in spite of the important questions raised and the contributions made. They read *Capital* as a completed work describing all facets of capitalist society with direct empirical application, hence mixing several theoretical levels and concrete analysis. To this they add the sociological conception of the 'managerial revolution' in only slightly disguised form, and construct classes primarily on the basis of how the 'agents' behave in concrete situations. This procedure can be linked directly with the opportunism of the left parties in Europe as they form alliances on a pragmatic basis in attempts to gain government power at any cost.

For the reader unfamiliar with the positions of Poulantzas, Carchedi, and Wright, I provide very brief summaries. Poulantzas emphasizes the classical marxist dichotomy between the capitalist and the working class, but defines the latter strictly in terms of involvement in material production. Since it is "unthinkable" within marxist theory that another class exist in relation to the capitalist mode of production, all remaining members of society must be assimilated to the petty bourgeoisie, which arises from simple commodity production. This is accomplished by a demonstration that the "new petty bourgeoisie" acts and thinks like the old. Carchedi allows that a separate class can exist, the "new middle class", but constructs it from those members of society which have some of the economic functions of both the capitalist and working classes. He thus has a class whose members perform contradictory functions. Wright takes the

three classical social classes of marxist theory, capitalist, working, and petty bourgeois. Any member of capitalist society not fitting into one of these three social classes occupies a "contradictory class position" between a pair of them, and not a separate social class, as with Carchedi. Thus, all three keep what have come to be considered the classical social classes of orthodox marxist theory and only attempt relatively minor modifications. For further details, the reader must be referred to the works of these authors.

This paper is an attempt to contribute to the development of historical materialism and not to determine what Marx really meant. Although almost all elements of the theory presented here may be supported by isolated quotes from Marx, such a procedure will be avoided. Instead an attempt will be made to provide a conceptually coherent and unified basis of the theory of social classes in capitalist society within the context of historical materialism. Many of the developments presented in this paper are extremely controversial; they are presented to provoke as well as to contribute to the current debate on social class.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Methodology: Levels of Analysis

My analysis relies on two methodological principles, which will be developed in this and the following section. First, levels of theoretical analysis must be rigorously defined and clearly distinguished. Second, concepts, including those for social class, must be formed as *relationships* among categories and not on the basis of the substantive characteristics of the categories. (See the following section for details.)

In the construction of a series of levels necessary for the study of any concrete capitalist society, the method outlined by Marx in the "Introduction" to the *Grundrisse* will be followed. Starting from simple concepts which are the elements of abstract determination, we build up to the reproduction of the concrete in thought as a "rich totality of many determinations and relationships". It must be emphasized that such a distinction of levels of analysis is purely methodological; thus, these different levels cannot be studied empirically. At each successive level, new elements are added to the theory. These elements will act back upon, become integrated with, and modify the results of analysis at previous levels in a dialectical fashion, although earlier levels are always more pervasively determinant.

Besides Marx, only a few recent authors, for example Funken (1973) and dos Santos (1970), have attempted to distinguish theoretical levels. Here, Marx's analysis will be followed, in so far as it is directly applicable to the limited goal of social class analysis.<sup>5</sup> These levels of theoretical analysis are constructed for the study of capitalist societies and no claim to validity can be made, at the present stage of research, for the use of this set of levels in societies dominated by other modes of production. The resulting seven levels, beginning with the most abstract, are: (1) the process of simple commodity production; (2) capitalist production, which is a combination of a production process with the corresponding relations of production, called the capitalist mode of production; (3) to the previous level is added the process of circulation of the products, necessary to ensure reproduction of the production process; (4) to these, we add the political-juridical and ideological superstructure necessary to ensure reproduction of the relations of pro-

duction, which we then call the economic formation of society; (5) several modes of production overlap under the dominance of the capitalist mode of production in a social formation;<sup>6</sup> (6) these in turn yield the nation state and international relations; and (7) finally the concrete, historically located, conjunctural analysis of a given society involves all of the preceding theoretical concepts.

Marx has provided analyses primarily at four of these levels, the first three and the last, although he had a confusing tendency to jump to one of the middle levels in his many asides. The three volumes of *Capital* provide a development of the theory of the capitalist mode of production while such political pamphlets as the *Class Struggles in France*, the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, and the *Civil War in France* provide conjunctural analyses of French society. In addition to the asides, especially in *Capital*, some of Marx's earlier works and the *Theories of Surplus Value* provide certain elements for the fourth level, the economic formation of society, especially with regard to the state and the ideological superstructure. However, it is clear that Marx did intend to deal more systematically with the intermediate levels in the originally projected form which his work was to take. All of his work shows a consciousness of the need to distinguish these levels and he implicitly applies them in his conjunctural analyses. In contrast, the recent works on social class cited above ignore these distinctions and attempt to jump directly from mode of production to conjuncture.

The ultimate basis for the understanding of capitalist societies lies at the first level, the process of simple commodity production and the associated labour theory of value. Although a specific mechanism for the allocation of social labour exists, there is no extraction of surplus labour and hence no social classes. In spite of common misconceptions, simple commodity production is not a mode of production, but a step in the analysis of capitalist society, the basis of the capitalist production process. Hence, where this production exists, it is only an 'undeveloped' or 'atrophied' form of capitalist production.

A mode of production is defined by a specific combination of relations of production and a developing or evolving production process, where the former are generally dominant.<sup>7</sup> In a class-based mode of production, the relations of production are social relations between two classes such that the mechanism for the allocation of social labour is controlled by one of them in order that surplus labour can be extracted from the other. The production process encompasses the means of production and raw materials, labour, and the organization of the work process, including the necessary skills and knowledge. Under the capitalist mode of production, the relations of production are defined by the extraction of surplus value through the necessary sale of productive labour power paid by wages (the valorization process).<sup>8</sup> Control of the means of production by the capitalist class is only a necessary condition for these relations of production and not a definition of them. In its developed form, the production process forms the industrial system. So much, Marx provided in the three volumes of *Capital*. This level will yield the two basic antagonistic classes of capitalist society.

Throughout *Capital*, Marx demonstrates how the process of circulation is also integral to the capitalist mode of production in that, for surplus value to be extracted, the value of the commodities must be realized by

sale, by a change of ownership. This is a part of the economic process, although not of production, but is also closely connected to the juridical superstructure. This third level yields a further social class central to any society dominated by the capitalist mode of production.

In the dynamics of capitalist society, the only constant is the form of the relations of production: the extraction of surplus value. On the other hand, the production process has developed from manufacturing to major industry and the process of circulation has changed with the development of major commercial and financial sectors separated from the production process.

These first three levels provide the theory of the economic base with the relations of production as the central concept. No society can exist without some such base. However, since, under capitalism, the relations of production are exploitative relationships by which surplus is extracted, they cannot be reproduced without an ideological and political superstructure which both corresponds to and reacts upon the economic base. Many of the class antagonisms generated within the relations of production only manifest themselves as ideological or political struggle. The key, although not the unique, element at this level is the state, which has proved the source of so much recent debate in marxist theory. Connected with it will be found a further social class fundamental to capitalist society, namely the ideological class to be discussed further below in Section 6. Exploitative relations of production cannot be maintained solely by mechanisms integrated within the economic process. Hence, the necessity of this social class and the accompanying ideological and political institutions, analyzed at this level, to ensure reproduction of these relations; hence also the essential importance of this class and these institutions for the class struggle, especially for the question of the seizure of control of the state. Certain elements of the superstructure are, thus, essential to the capitalist mode of production, wherever it is dominant in a social formation. For example, an elaborated juridical system and compulsory institutionalized education for children are necessary elements of the fully-developed capitalist superstructure.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, much more variability is also possible in the superstructure than in the economic base of an economic formation of society dominated by a given mode of production. These variations will depend to a significant extent on the specific combination in dominance of modes of production<sup>10</sup> in a given theoretical social formation. However, since the superstructure is most essential in acting, more or less successfully, to overcome the contradictions inherent in the relations of production of the dominant mode, this level must be dealt with before introducing other modes of production.

A social formation consists of a number of overlapping or articulated modes of production, one of which is dominant. If no mode of production is dominant, a transitional social formation exists.<sup>11</sup> Stating that one mode of production is dominant means that the social formation consists of two or more different production processes with their corresponding relations of production but that the superstructure is characterized by the elements necessary to the dominant mode of production. The superstructure will, however, take on distinctly different forms in given societies, depending both on what modes of production are present and on the particular history

of the society. Certain elements of a previous superstructure, e.g. 'feudal', may be adapted to the capitalist form. Thus, we have an articulation of modes of production and not of economic formations of society in a social formation. All of the subordinate modes of production will be distorted to an important extent by their integration with the dominant one. Conversely, the superstructure will vary, within the necessary constraints of the dominant mode of production, depending on which other modes of production must be integrated in, and on their relative importance. For example, the superstructure of a capitalist social formation will be considerably different if the wage labour force must be produced from migrant labourers coming from a subordinate 'primitive communal' mode of production than if it need only be reproduced in an advanced capitalist social formation.

Theoretical analysis reveals three principal capitalist social formations. In the early stages of development of any capitalist society, at least three modes of production will overlap, the capitalist mode combined with itself in its simpler form as simple commodity production, plus that mode which was previously dominant. Two subcases of this may be distinguished, depending on effects acting back from the sixth level, i.e. on whether the society is one of the first to pass to dominance of the capitalist mode of production or has it imposed through imperialism. In an advanced capitalist society, only capitalist and petty commodity production will appear, since other modes have been eliminated. A third type of social formation occurs with the start of the transition to communism. Although petty commodity production may be eliminated, an overlap between capitalist and communist modes of production appears in the socialist social formation, in which the capitalist mode will at first be dominant.

International relations, and specifically imperialism, will have additional effects on social class. The most important may be the appearance of further fractions of the capitalist class and the introduction of immigrant workers.

The seventh and final level of analysis, the most important, is concerned with the most direct appropriation of the real in thought. It is here that the questions of strategies and tactics in the class struggle are addressed within a concrete society, the ultimate objective of all of the preceding analyses. Only with the development of the concepts of an appropriate social formation can the empirical analyses of the conjuncture in a given society be performed. The actual process of the class struggle occurs at this level, as determined by the concrete mechanisms theoretically described by the previous levels. The course of this struggle among the different classes, theoretically determined at all six previous levels, will depend not only on the structural constraints and possibilities of these levels but also on the tactics and strategies adopted by the different social classes, which in turn depend on the validity of their theoretical analyses.

### **3. Methodology: Concepts as Relationships**

The second methodological point concerns the construction of concepts as relationships. Concepts are not produced by a process of successive abstractions whereby particularities are removed and the inner essence remains in some 'ideal type'. Concepts are produced by defining the rela-

tionships among elements or categories. Thus, attention centres on these relationships and not on the substantive characteristics of the members of the category. For social classes, these relationships are defined with respect to the relations of production of a given mode of production. The concept of social class does not deal with the substantive characteristics of members of the social class but with relationships among the classes as categories. Hence, it does not refer to individual relationships but to group relationships. Substantive characteristics are then derivable from the social class relationships. This is true for all levels of analysis, including the conjuncture; this seventh level still concerns only social classes and not in any way individuals.

Other concepts defined as relationships may, with respect to social class, appear to be substantive characteristics. Thus, income and education, at their respective conceptual levels, are both definable as relationships among categories. However, these are not social class relationships. At the level of the concept of social class, they appear, not primarily as relationships, but as substantive characteristics of the members of the social classes.

#### **4. Mode of Production and the Two Basic Classes**

In my development of the theory of social classes in historical materialism, I shall be concerned almost exclusively with the second, third, and fourth levels of analysis, the capitalist mode of production, its circulation process, and the corresponding economic formation of society. I thus restrict myself to relations arising around the valorization process, and leave to one side aspects involving class consciousness, culture, etc. This, unfortunately, also means that I must neglect the whole question of domestic labour which is an essential part of the labour allocation process in capitalist society. We shall see that this analysis produces four social classes integral to the capitalist economic formation of society, the capitalist class, the production and circulation working classes, and the ideological class.<sup>12</sup> Only brief reference will be made to other social classes which appear at the fifth level, that of the social formation.

The study will start with the most basic level for social class analysis, the mode of production. Under capitalism, production is determined by a relationship of appropriation of surplus labour, in the form of surplus value, from one social class by another. This relationship is called capital and forms the relations of production which characterize the capitalist mode of production. The capitalist class is that group which has control over capital,<sup>13</sup> i.e. over this relationship of transfer of surplus value. By control, is meant power to allocate capital in such ways as to maximize production of surplus value in the form of profit. The allocation includes decisions about the partition and use of both constant and variable capital. This is the mechanism by which available social labour under the capitalist mode of production is assigned to various tasks; the capitalists as a class have control of this mechanism. As a result of the capital relationship, members of the capitalist class control decisions about the surplus value which is the key to the dynamic expansion characteristic of the capitalist mode of production. This control, however, is substantive and not relational until the surplus value is transformed into additional capital. In other words, it is not

primarily a process of accumulation of surplus value (in the form of wealth), but of extension of control over social labour.

It might appear at first sight that the capitalist class is restricted in this way to a group responsible for the technical allocation of resources in society. In fact, this is a dominant ideology in societies of state capitalism such as the Soviet Union. However, such is not the case. We have already seen that the process is in fact one involving decisions as to the uses to which social labour is put. In addition, the allocation of resources under the capitalist mode of production in no way involves primarily technical decisions but is a means of exploitation. For example, a factor in the choice of a new, more productive technique is the relationship between working class salaries and the rate of profit, i.e. the relative strengths of the two classes in the economic class struggle. As a central operation of capitalist society, resource and labour allocations become even more important with the change from 'free enterprise' to monopoly conditions. Decisions about investment are now made much more rationally and not left entirely to the vagaries of the market. In addition, since such allocations involve variable as well as constant capital, they can be used very directly as a political and ideological weapon against the working class. Decisions to move production investment from an area of labour unrest to a more docile region are direct means of control over the working class.

At the level of the production process, the capitalist class consists only of industrial capitalists, that is, of that group directly involved with the production process. At subsequent levels of analysis, we shall see that this is only one fraction of the capitalist class.

At the other pole of the fundamental relationship of the capitalist mode of production lies the production working class. This class is defined by the other extreme of the capital relation: it is the producer of surplus value and has no control over the means of production, over capital. Marx emphasizes that production under the capitalist mode of production has nothing directly to do with material production. He shows that such a notion is an ideological mystification produced by the bourgeois economists. The idea of material production is a substantive description and not a relational concept. Under the capitalist mode of production, labour is productive only if surplus value is produced, i.e. only if the labour falls under the capital relationship. There must be a product with use value, but it may not be material. However, the important point is that the product be a commodity containing surplus value which is extracted from one class by another.

The production working class is not defined as an aggregate of individuals each of whom has the required relationship by being a productive labourer. Under the capitalist mode of production, the production process is socialized<sup>14</sup>, consisting of a complex of inter-related parts. All workers necessary for this complex organization with its refined division of labour form part of the collective worker and hence of the production working class. The capital relationship, as relations of production, is a relationship among groups and not among individuals.

Within a complex production process carried on by the collective worker, the functions of coordination and unity are essential to its operation. All workers fulfilling this function, including foremen, supervisors, and so on, are necessary in the production of value. In this sense, they are

members of the collective worker and of the production working class, although, as individuals, they may not appear to have any productive function. I am analytically distinguishing here between the function of coordination and unity which is central to any complex production process as such, and any functions involving the relationships concerned with ensuring the extraction of surplus value, i.e. control and surveillance.<sup>15</sup> The second part of this dichotomy will be developed below in Section 6 when I study the economic formation of society.

As is well known, for capitalism to function, a reserve army of unemployed is necessary. Although, at any given moment, these individuals are not working productively, in the larger class context of the collective worker, they are directly necessary for capitalist production and form part of this class. Certain disguised forms of unemployment, such as some students and conscripted soldiers, must in specific situations also be included here.

A number of fractions of the production working class may thus be distinguished: first, there are those concerned directly with production and those concerned with the coordination and unity of that production. Given the intellectual/manual division of labour characteristic of capitalist production, a third fraction consists of those responsible for producing technical innovations used in the production process, the engineers and scientists directly involved with this type of production.<sup>16</sup> Yet a fourth fraction consists of the unemployed. A more elaborate analysis would provide a more accurate and detailed division of this working class into fractions.<sup>17</sup>

The two social classes theoretically produced at this point are the fundamental classes of any society where the capitalist mode of production is dominant.<sup>18</sup> All further questions centre around them, especially problems of alliances within the class struggle.

### **5. The Circulation Working Class**

With commodity production, and especially in its developed form as capitalist production, the economic process is not completed with the actual production since this has not been carried out primarily to yield use value. Any product of capitalist production must normally pass through an intricate circulation process before reaching the consumer, whether the individual buying consumption goods or the firm buying means of production and raw materials. This is a juridical process of transfer of ownership made necessary by the existence of commodities as private property.<sup>19</sup> Unless the process is completed, the surplus value is not realized, is not transferred to the capitalist class and the relations of production are not reproduced. Under monopoly capitalism, the vertically integrated conglomerate represents an attempt to bypass this difficulty, at least at the intermediate stages of producing a finished consumer product. Publicity and other means to stimulate and control consumer demand, which assume increasing importance under monopoly conditions, must also be included at this level, since they are used to promote the circulation of commodities.<sup>20</sup>

The circulation process consists of two elements, financial and commercial capital, corresponding to the circulation of money and of commodities. These represent the circulation of production capital in other forms and

hence other forms of the same fundamental capital relationship. Here we have two further fractions of the capitalist class, those groups controlling the allocation of the capital in these two spheres. However, as already stated, the relationship is juridical and is thus not one of direct extraction of surplus value since no value, or surplus value, is produced in circulation. For their parts in ensuring that the surplus value extracted in the production process is in fact realized, these fractions of the capitalist class are able to appropriate a portion of that surplus value. Since the financial and commercial fractions of the capitalist class have control over capital in the same way as the industrial fraction, they have the same relationship to the production working class, although mediated by the different forms which capital takes.

The financial and commercial fractions of the capitalist class do not themselves perform the labour required in the circulation process. They hire salaried workers to do it, using a part of the surplus value produced in the production process. These workers form the circulation working class which is necessary in the capitalist mode of production to ensure that the surplus value is realized, but which produces no value or surplus value itself. Thus, its relationships to the respective fractions of the capitalist class are in fact not at all similar to those of the production working class. Extra labour is extracted from the circulation working class in the sense that members of this class work longer than the time which they would require to produce the value of their labour power if they were working in production. But this is not a relation of exploitation because no surplus value is produced or extracted. Since not even value is produced, the salaries of this class must be deducted from the surplus extracted from the production working class. The existence of this class enables the portion of surplus value needed to finance the circulation process to be reduced.

As with the production working class, in the circulation working class with its complex division of labour and bureaucratic hierarchy, the functions of coordination and unity also appear. At least three fractions of this class may be distinguished: those responsible for coordination and unity, those directly involved in finance, and those in commerce, all as salaried or wage workers.

Objectively, the circulation working class does not have the strongly antagonistic relationship with the capitalist class which the production working class does, since there is no extraction of surplus value. This is reflected at the phenomenal (conjunctural) level in the weaker position, for example with regard to strikes, which they hold.<sup>21</sup>

The relationship between the two working classes is mediated but important. Because of the characteristics of the capitalist mode of production, additional surplus value must be extracted from the production working class in order to finance the necessary circulation process, including payment for the labour power of the circulation working class. However, since this mediation passes through the capitalist class and the whole structure of the capitalist mode of production, it is non-antagonistic and these two classes form 'natural' allies in the class struggle. All of their oppressive relationships can only be abolished by dismantling the capitalist system.<sup>22</sup>

It is arguable that the two working classes conceptualized here form fractions of the same class in the same way that we have the fractions of the

capitalist class. I must submit that this is not the case since the inter-class relationships are different: surplus value is only extracted from the production working class. On the other hand, all fractions of the capitalist class emanate from relations of direct control over capital. Although this relationship to the means of production does take on different forms, because of the ultimate exchangeability of all capital for money capital, all of these fractions do have the same social class relationships.

## 6. The Ideological Class

The capitalist production process is regulated by an exploitative relationship among social classes which cannot be maintained and reproduced solely by means of the mechanisms available within the mode of production itself. Although most important, separation of the direct producers from the means of production is not sufficient. Ideological and repressive measures are also necessary in order to ensure reproduction of the relations of production. These are the specific province of the superstructure. Central to this level, the regulation of the relations of production, are the state and a social class of 'ideological occupations (Stände)', as Marx called it, although the two by no means coincide.<sup>23</sup>

As with the circulation working class, the ideological class does not produce value, or surplus value, and hence must be paid by deduction from the surplus value extracted from the production working class, much of it in the form of taxes. This class, then, has this same relationship to the production working class as does the circulation working class, but, here, this relationship is not the only one nor is it the most important. On the other hand, such a similarity does not appear in the relationship of the ideological class to the capitalist class, since members of the former are not usually directly hired as wage or salaried workers by the latter. Instead, the ideological class holds a much more autonomous relationship, although mediated dependence still persists through the transfer of surplus value. However, even this dependence is reduced through the autonomy permitted by the direct extraction of surplus as taxes.<sup>24</sup>

One of the most important reasons for the relative autonomy of the ideological class lies in its very special relationship to the capitalist class. As individuals<sup>25</sup>, all capitalists are in a necessarily competitive position with regard to each other; they have little internal means of uniting to defend their class interests in the way which the working classes do.<sup>26</sup> Such a contradiction within the capitalist mode of production requires, in addition to and linked with an autonomous state, this relatively autonomous social class to represent and protect these interests of the capitalist class. Often measures taken by the ideological class go directly against the individual interests of the members of the capitalist class, even of one entire fraction of the class. But they are necessary for the continued dominance of all capitalists as a class.

At the second level, of capitalist production, the production working class is bound into the relations of production by the lack of control over the means of production. However, because of the contradictions entailed by exploitation, as well as the competition arising at the level of circulation, this is not sufficient to ensure reproduction of the relations of production. The ideological class attempts, with varying degrees of success, to overcome these contradictions.

The most important relationship of the ideological class to the two working classes is one of repressive and ideological control. Central to this is the absolute maintenance of private property and contract relationships, the ideology of possessive individualism, and that of capitalism as the eternal system. To these ends, certain institutions exist: the political-judicial system of government and bureaucracy, the military-police apparatus, the educational system, the mass media. All contribute to what Gramsci called the hegemony of the dominant classes. All must exist in the capitalist economic formation of society, but none have an absolutely predetermined form at this level. As previously pointed out, the exact form and interrelationships of these institutions are further determined at the level of the social formation, depending on what modes of production are present and on their relative importance, as well as at the conjunctural level.

Relationships tending to maintain and reproduce the relations of production are not found exclusively outside the economic process. The functions of control and surveillance are concerned with these specific relationships within that process. Those responsible, not for the coordination and unity required by the technical division of labour, but to enforce continuation of the production process within the context of the capital relationship of extraction of surplus<sup>27</sup>, form this group. A convincing argument can be made to include this group within the capitalist class, since it is the function of capital to ensure the extraction of surplus value. Against this, I argue here that a type of relationship exists which is distinct from that presented above between the capitalist and production working classes, and that it is very much closer, if not identical, to the relationship between the ideological and working classes. The capitalist class directly and indirectly allocates social labour in order to extract surplus labour, whereas the ideological class acts to ensure that this exploitative relationship is maintained and reproduced. The latter occurs within the production process, as the functions of control and surveillance, as well as outside it.

On the other hand, this superstructural level reacts back on the collective worker at the production level to create internal contradictions. Those workers performing functions of coordination and unity will, almost invariably, be involved in control and surveillance as well. Thus, a division is introduced directly into the production working class. A similar split appears with the technical and scientific workers whose knowledge is essential to the production process. The strictly technical manual/intellectual division of labour now appears to be insurmountable, but for political and ideological reasons.

I emphasize again that social classes are concrete entities in society, defined by concrete social relations. However, they in no way necessarily correspond to discrete groups of individuals in the society, even at the seventh level of analysis, of a concrete society, since given individuals often have several sets of social class relations, i.e. have various portions of their social labour allocated in different ways. Which set or portion predominates in a given conjunctural situation, i.e. which side an individual takes in the class struggle, depends on a complex of factors not covered by social class theory which is limited to these seven levels. Thus, the same individual technician may create a new technique which greatly increases material production while simultaneously working in other ways to increase exploita-

tion. We have contradictory individual, not class, locations.

Technicians can be involved in two ways in maintaining the relations of production within the production process. Often, they work directly at control and surveillance; for many engineers, this is a promotion from "purely technical" work. But technicians are also responsible for developing innovations in the work process which increase the surplus labour extracted. We may distinguish, with Friedman (1977, p. 78), two basic forms of control of the production process: direct control and responsible autonomy. The former refers to Taylorism, the latter to various forms of "workers' control".

Thus, one manifestation of the conceptualization of the ideological class which the present analysis highlights is the current move on the part of the dominant classes in many advanced capitalist countries towards forms of "workers' control" or "workers' participation". Especially when the initiative, or willing acquiescence, comes from these dominant classes, it is essential that the working classes not be misled into believing that this is an important step towards the abolition of capitalist relations of production. Rather, it contributes, especially at the ideological level, to the maintenance of these relations of extraction of surplus value, while, perhaps, improving certain of the workers' short term substantive conditions.

As with the two working classes, the work process within the ideological class often has a complex division of labour. All individuals belonging to the class do not necessarily perform functions which directly act to maintain and reproduce the capitalist relations of production, if they are nevertheless essential to the mechanism as part of the collective ideological worker. The most important example is probably the secretaries involved in this work.

A considerable number of fractions of the ideological class have been revealed in the preceding development. There are the fractions directly responsible for repression, the armed forces and police; the fraction involved in governmental and juridical functions, including politicians, civil servants, judges, lawyers; that involved in strictly ideological functions, including schools, churches, and mass media; and that in control and surveillance of the production process, the appropriate members of 'management', as well as the union bureaucracy in many instances.<sup>28</sup>

It is now apparent that a homogeneous group of managers does not exist in a social class analysis. The whole notion of a 'middle class' is much more complex than that simplistic idea adopted directly from bourgeois sociology by certain Marxists.<sup>29</sup> Instead of this one group, we find sections of what are called managerial and supervisory personnel scattered throughout all four fundamental social classes of the capitalist economic formation of society.

As always in historical materialism, juridical ownership is specifically distinguished from real economic control. In spite of their juridical attachment, state owned productive enterprises enter the analysis at the level of the mode of production. Although they may not ostensibly produce a profit, they do contribute directly to the production of surplus value at the global social level, at least in part by contributing to the increased profits of individual private capitalists.

Any moves by the working classes to form alliances with fractions of the

ideological class are fraught with many dangers. In spite of certain superficial resemblances to the circulation working class, this class is definitely "on the other side of the barricades".<sup>30</sup> As far as the army is concerned, "disappointment" over its revolutionary potential in, for example, Portugal and Peru, can be seen in this context. Another example of working class alliance with other fractions of this class is the Parti Quebecois movement for independence, which may be expected to lead to the same kind of results. The question is, thus, not one of alliances but rather of control over institutions or apparatuses. On the other hand, given the relatively autonomous nature of the ideological class with respect to the capitalist class, certain individuals may cross the class boundaries, at least at the ideological level. This class even provides certain of the intellectual leaders of the working class. However, here we have not a class but an individual phenomenon.

Since the concrete forms of the superstructure depend on the specific social formation, that is on the other modes of production present, and on the conjuncture, here we may often find evidence of early changes within a transitional social formation. Hence, Gramsci's emphasis on the need for the working class to conquer hegemony as a first necessary step in the socialist transition.

## **7. The Articulation of Modes of Production**

The theoretically most predictable combination of modes of production in a social formation under the dominance of the capitalist mode is with simple commodity production, since the latter is only an undeveloped form of the former, unable to exist on its own as a dominant mode of production. Several 'social classes' may be distinguished within simple commodity production: independent manufacturers (artisans and craftsmen), small shopkeepers, and peasants or small farmers.<sup>31</sup> In a capitalist social formation, these are often taken as fractions of one class, the petty bourgeoisie. This class is not integral to capitalist society, however, since it does not appear at the level of the economic formation of society.

In advanced capitalist social formations, combination with petty commodity production is most usual. Often it is the only other form of production present. The same is not true for theoretical capitalist social formations suitable for the analysis of countries further down the imperialist chain, the third world countries. Here, certain other modes of production, especially the 'primitive communal' mode will often be present.

Further details of analysis at this level will not be presented here, since many distinct combinations are possible depending on the relationships among the modes of production. In every case, the capitalist mode of production will act to distort the 'pure' form of the other modes and the capitalist superstructure will be suitably modified to incorporate the other modes within the social formation.

Unless the social formation is in the transitional socialist stage towards communism, the social classes appearing at this level will all be essentially reactionary. For example, the petty bourgeoisie acts to preserve commodity production in the only form it knows, the capitalist one. But it sees the golden age as one of individuals in free and equal competition and feels threatened by monopoly. This is directly opposite to the position of both

the circulation working class and the ideological class. Thus, any working class strategy must take such factors into account and form at most short term tactical alliances with social classes arising at this level.

### 8. Discussion of the Social Class Debate

With the preceding analysis in mind, we can see that recent developments in the theory of social classes have not followed either of the stated methodological principles. The notion of a "new petty bourgeoisie" (Poulantzas) and of "contradictory class positions" (Wright) both reflect an attempt to integrate elements of simple commodity production directly into the capitalist mode, instead of analyzing them at their appropriate levels. In a similar way, Carchedi's "economic identification" of the new middle class and of the state employees operates at the level of mode of production, a level at which such a class cannot properly be "identified".

This confusion of levels leads to two serious errors which are of direct relevance to working class tactics and strategies. Classes distinctive to the capitalist economic formation of society are assimilated to a close association with a class, the petty bourgeoisie, arising out of an articulation of distinct forms of production. This implies that the relationships of the "new" and the "old" petty bourgeoisie to the working class are very similar, when in fact they are not. Alliances based on such assumptions will almost necessarily lead to disastrous consequences for the working class, to the benefit of petty bourgeois interests (as defined in this paper) and increased strength of the hegemony of the capitalist state.

The second error involves the combination of two distinct social classes, the circulation working class and the ideological class, within a single entity, whether called the "new petty bourgeoisie" or the "new middle class". Such an identification of these two classes as one whole leads to the assumption that an alliance can be made with this 'class' or at least that the same position can be taken with regard to the entire group. We have already seen what differences in position on the part of the production working class are imposed by the distinctions provided in my analysis.

Some of the errors with respect to levels of analysis can be traced to a disregard for the correct way to construct the concept of social class, as a set of relationships, and not as the substantive characteristics of members of each category. Poulantzas (1968, 1974) has gone the farthest down this road, as he does not accept that a class exists unless it acts like one. In other words, this behaviourist position, which is necessary to overcome the statics of his structuralism, operates only at the seventh level, of the conjuncture in a given concrete society. Corresponding to this, we also find Poulantzas' concern to define the working class only in terms of *material* production and not in terms of the relationships implied by the production of surplus value.

Przeworski (1977) has pursued Poulantzas' work by placing the emphasis on the behaviourist side, on class struggle, as the basis of class formation. He does not appear to realize that the relations of production are relations of struggle, that a class-in-itself can only be defined as antagonistic relations to other classes. He thus poses a false opposition, already present in the work of Poulantzas, between objective position and class struggle. In spite of his statement that "a number of alternative organizations of classes

is possible at any moment of history" depending on class struggles (p. 344), he retains the classical capitalist/working class opposition, while, however, considering the possibility of a "class" which is "neither immediate producers nor organizers but who are nevertheless necessary for capitalist reproduction" (p. 399). Unfortunately, he does not attempt to concretize this analysis. On the other hand, he provides interesting elements concerning the social organization of the surplus labour existing outside these two or three social classes, which suggest fruitful possibilities for further research.

Wright (1978) provides a relatively sophisticated critique of Poulantzas which will not be reproduced here. However, the main 'theoretical' reason behind this critique is the fact that Poulantzas' definition of the working class provides, statistically, too small a group within the USA! His construction of "contradictory positions" between the petty bourgeoisie and the working and capitalist classes stems directly from his confusion of levels, although in certain ways it is an advance on Poulantzas and Carchedi. Clarke (1977) has recently provided a much more profound critique of Poulantzas, and of the sociology of the Althusserian school in general. However, he does not attempt to contribute positively to the development of the theory of social classes since he is primarily concerned with the capitalist state.

To a large extent, Carchedi (1975a, b, & c) provides a more sophisticated class analysis than those discussed above. He makes important theoretical points with respect to the collective worker and to the distinction between coordination and unity versus control and surveillance. Although he does mix levels, combine the production and circulation working classes, and not distinguish capitalist from ideological class relationships, he largely avoids the confusion with the petty bourgeoisie present in the other two writers. However, the framework within which he restricts his analysis does not allow him to accomplish satisfactorily the task which he sets himself.

Crompton and Gubbay (1977) have developed and systematized the work of Wright and Carchedi. However, they provide no new elements but nuance some of the earlier writers' conclusions. As indicated by the title of their book, they remain at the level of the economy, as does Kay (1979), and must necessarily be restricted in their social class theory.

Work which is closer to part of the present analysis, that of the ideological class, has been done by the Ehrenreichs (1977). They correctly see the importance of this class and its role with respect to the relations of production. However, as is commonly the case, they take the relations of production to be defined by control of the means of production, instead of by the specific mechanism for control of social labour. This leads them to define this class by two phenomenal characteristics, receiving a salary and not owning the means of production. They thus see it in conflict with both the capitalist and the working classes. But the salary is only a juridical form linking this class in appearance to the working class; one must consider its origin in the surplus value to avoid falling into erroneous political conclusions.

All of these approaches appear to have at least one element in common. They all seek to theorize some means by which the proletariat can form an alliance with the ideological (or 'professional-managerial') class; in other

words, to show how the latter can play a revolutionary role. As members of this class, these writers can thus find place for their radical sentiments. But when systematic Marxist analysis is counterposed to radical sentiment, the conclusion must be clear: The ideological class does *not* have an objective interest in the overthrow of capitalism.

#### NOTES

- 1 It is doubtful if much of this critique of epistemology can really be considered an advance, at least *within* historical materialism, especially since its major proponent, the Hindess and Hirst school, has abandoned all of the most important principles while still proclaiming itself marxist. The work of Sohn-Rethel is, of course, not touched by this reservation.
- 2 Przeworski (1977) provides an historical perspective on social class analysis.
- 3 For a somewhat different approach to these topics than that of the present writer, see Negri (1978).
- 4 To a significant extent, this article is the result of discussions in and around my graduate seminar (Sociology 512, 1976-1978) at the University of British Columbia.
- 5 See also the discussion by Rubin (1973, pp. 31-34 & 248).
- 6 This term is used here with reservations, since it will certainly be confused with current empiricist use of the term to refer to an amalgamation of levels four through seven.
- 7 In specific historical periods, this dominance may be reversed in a given society.
- 8 An assumption of this paper is that no major change occurs in the relations of production, i.e. in the law of value, in the different periods of development of capitalism, and specifically under its monopoly form (see Lindsey, 1979b). Thus, this class analysis is intended to hold for all societies where the capitalist mode of production is dominant. For the periodization of capitalism, see Negri (1978) and Fine and Harris (1979, pp. 104-145).
- 9 Which is not to say that until the latter exists, we do not have domination of the capitalist mode of production. The historical process by which a mode of production becomes dominant does not instantaneously put an appropriate superstructure in place. For example, in the case of Britain, the stages seem to have involved successively religion (Protestantism), justice, and finally education, as the most important institution of integration.
- 10 See the next paragraph.
- 11 Then, contradictions within a dominant mode of production leading to its dissolution form the necessary conditions for the loss of dominance of that mode of production within a social formation.
- 12 Wolpe (1975, p. 230) suggests in passing a similar analysis into four basic classes in capitalist society, but provides no theoretical development of them. For an empirical application of the theory presented here, see Lindsey (1979a), where certain relevant references to Marx are also provided.
- 13 Juridical ownership is discussed below in section 6.
- 14 One strategy of the capitalist class to counter the worker power inherent in this socialization process is to break up the huge factory complexes into smaller units and to resort to subcontracting, creating what has become known as the dissemi-nated worker. This has been especially the case in Italy.
- 15 Although the terms have been adapted from Marx by Carchedi (1975a), the concepts used here are different from those employed by the latter author. Control is restricted to labour and not applied to capital as a whole, and thus refers to reproduction of the relations of production. The distinction, then, is not between the capitalist class with only the function of control and surveillance and the

15 cont'd.

- "new middle class" with both that function and the function of coordination and unity but, as we shall see, between the ideological class with the former function and the collective worker of the production working class with the latter.
- 16 We shall see below that these technical innovations are not neutral, as many orthodox marxists tend to believe. However, students of the labour process sometimes tend to go too far in the opposite direction, suggesting that all innovations are only intended to reinforce exploitation. The capitalist mode of production is progressive in the sense that it does increasingly revolutionize material production. See especially Coriat (1976) for the relationship between these two aspects.
  - 17 In this and the following sections, little attempt is made to theorize possible class fractions, and the analysis rests at a pre-theoretical, virtually empirical stage. Further development could not be presented satisfactorily, in any case, within the context of this general article.
  - 18 Kay (1979) provides the details of social class analysis restricted to this level.
  - 19 Rubin (1973, Ch.19) provides a clear discussion of the distinction between production and non-production workers under capitalism and of the role of property rights in the circulation process. Crompton and Gubbay (1977, pp. 85-98) also give a good description of these circulation workers, but unfortunately do not follow through in their subsequent class analysis. Much of the recent debate on productive labour can be clarified if one considers it in the perspective of the allocation of social labour, instead of the control of surplus value in its fetishized form as commodities.
  - 20 Although ideology is involved, it is not directly for maintenance of the relations of production (to quell worker resistance), thus appearing here and not at the next level.
  - 21 However, subjectively, members of this class may feel the antagonism to somewhat the same extent in that the same amount of extra labour may be extracted. Often this is not the case. Instead there may be a distinct differential of wages which helps to promote a division between the two working classes and to impede possible class alliances.
  - 22 Note that the possibility of this alliance is not objectively grounded in the apparent extraction of surplus labour, which is only a phenomenal similarity, and plays no role in the inner laws of the capitalist mode of production. If necessary, some or all of the extra labour in the circulation process can be paid for; the same is not true of surplus value extracted in the production process, since it is central to the existence of this mode of production and cannot be eliminated without destroying it.
  - 23 Confusion may arise here with Althusser's distinction between ideological and repressive state apparatuses. I include members of the repressive apparatus in this ideological class (as did Marx). It seems most preferable to retain the term used by Marx in *Capital* (Vol. I, International Publishers, p. 446; Pelican, p. 574) and in the *Theories of Surplus Value* (Part I, Progress Publishers, pp. 175, 300-301). In English editions, it is translated as ideological classes, groups, or professions. Bernardo (1977) and the Ehrenreichs (1977) appear to be among the few who have attempted a theorization of this class. The latter call it the professional-managerial class (PMC), a term rejected here because of its sociological occupation-based reference. Bernardo calls it the managers (*os gestores*) or technocracy, terms which seem to refer primarily to business (private or state), and thus suggest a certain economism. On the other hand, he has a tendency to enlarge the class so much as to include the circulation working class within it. The only relevant work of his available in English is a pamphlet published by Solidarity, "Crises, Historical Forms of their Appearance, and Recuperation."

- 24 Negri (1978) demonstrates how this autonomy is reduced as monopolies, and especially state monopoly capitalism (not to be confused with the same term used by the Eurocommunists), develop. One of the major historical changes in class structure is the modification of this class, a fact which was already very evident in Marx's day. I, however, disagree with the Ehrenreichs' (1977) contention that the class appeared with monopoly capitalism. They neglect the long-term historical development of capitalist society, with its specific adaptations from previous modes, such as religion, and the early importance of new forms such as property laws.
- 25 Not necessarily individual people, but individual units, the "collective capitalist", e.g. a joint stock company.
- 26 Although divided on the labour market, the production working class is united in the socialized labour process. On the other hand, under monopoly capitalism, certain means of combination do become available to the members of the capitalist class. With the further reduction in competition under state capitalism, this possibility of union is actualized.
- 27 Friedman (1977) and Sohn-Rethel (1978) provide detailed analyses of the means by which the exploitative relation is maintained within the production process under monopoly capitalism.
- 28 Without question, the place of the union bureaucracy is not a simple matter. Its role has lain primarily at the level of circulation, uniting the working classes in an inherently divisive area, the market for labour power. On the other hand, where the greatest possibilities exist, in the production process, it has often come to perform the work of control and surveillance. For these reasons and others, many on the left, especially the Italians (for example, Tronti, 1977; Negri, 1978), reject its usefulness for the working classes at the present point in history.
- 29 Although, as Joao Bernardo has pointed out to me, the notion of a managerial class originated with certain currents of marxist thought, and was subsequently brought over into bourgeois sociology.
- 30 We thus find a major division between the capitalist and ideological classes, forming the bourgeoisie, and the two working classes, forming the proletariat.
- 31 Peasants and manufacturers arise at the first level. However, in the analysis of capitalist society, they disappear again at the second level because of the division into the capitalist and production working classes. On the other hand, they remain, and the shopkeepers appear, if we move directly from the first to the third level, skipping this crucial second level. Note, however, that a social class of peasants may also appear through articulation with other modes of production, for example the 'feudal'.

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