

Proletariat into a Class: The Process of Class Formation from Karl Kautsky's *The Class Struggle* to Recent Controversies

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I

THE difficulties encountered by Marxist theory in analyzing the class structure of concrete capitalist societies had already appeared at the time of the formation of the socialist movement. Their roots are to be found in the formulation by Marx of the problematic in which processes of class formation are seen as a necessary transition from a "class-in-itself" to a "class-for-itself," a formulation in which economic relations have the status of objective conditions and all other relations constitute realms of subjective actions.

In place of this formulation we must think along the lines, also suggested by Marx, in which economic, political, and ideological conditions jointly structure the realm of struggles that have as their effect the organization, disorganization, or reorganization of classes. Classes must thus be viewed as effects of struggles structured by objective conditions that are simultaneously economic, political, and ideological.

Class analysis is a form of analysis that links social development to struggles among concrete historical actors. Such actors, collectivities-in-struggle at a particular moment of history, are not determined uniquely by objective conditions, not even by the totality of economic, political, and ideological conditions. Precisely because class formation is an effect of struggles, outcomes of this process are at each moment of history to some extent indeterminate.

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Class analysis cannot be limited to those people who occupy places within the system of production. It is a necessary consequence of capitalist development that some quantity of the socially available labor power does not find productive employment. This surplus labor power may become socially organized in a number of different forms. These forms are not determined by the process of accumulation but directly by class struggle.

Processes of formation of workers into a class are inextricably fused with the processes of organization of surplus labor. As a result, a number of alternative organizations of classes is possible at any moment of history.

II

Karl Kautsky's *The Class Struggle* is of interest for a number of reasons. It was a semiofficial document of the German Socialist Party: an extensive commentary on the program adopted by the party at its Erfurth Congress in 1891, a program largely designed by Kautsky himself. As such, it constituted the authoritative exposition of the socialist doctrine for the purposes of political activity by socialist militants. It represented the theory of scientific socialism in its politically operational form, as that theory was known to active socialists.¹ In addition to the *Communist Manifesto* and parts of Engels's *Anti-Duhring*, it was precisely Kautsky's "catechism of Social Democracy," as he himself described the book in the preface to the first German edition, that organized the thoughts and the efforts of socialists, not only in Germany but wherever socialist parties existed.² Kautsky, as editor of the party's theoretical

1. We must not forget, in the midst of the contemporary discussions of Marx's thought, that the *Grundrisse* and several other notes written by Marx after 1853 were not known to Marxist theoreticians until recently, while his early manuscripts were first published in the 1920s and did not become generally known until the 1950s. Whatever is the thought that can be recognized today as that of Marx, this is not the thought that underlay the activity of socialists during the greater part of the history of working class movements.

2. Karl Kautsky, *The Class Struggle* (New York: Norton, 1971), introduction by Tucker, p. 2. According to Hans Kelsen, "the works of Kautsky not only systematized the thought of Marx and Engels and made them, in an exemplary fashion, fruitful in the current historical situation but also contributed to making this thought accessible to broad circles. Marxism spread around the world not so much in the form of original writings of Marx and Engels as through the work of Kautsky." Cited in Marek Waldenberg, "Poczatki debaty wokół rewizjonizmu," *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 11 (1967): 3 (translation mine). Similar statements concerning the impact of Kautsky were made by the Mensheviks Nikolayevski and Abramovitch concerning Russia, by Topolevic concerning Serbia, by Daszynski concerning Poland, and up to a certain moment by Lenin. *The Class Struggle* was translated into fifteen languages before 1914; in Russia eight editions appeared during this period.

journal, was at the time the official theoretician of the party, the "Pope of Socialism," as Joll calls him.³

Perhaps even more importantly, Kautsky's book represents "orthodox Marxist thought," as this thought functioned not only within the context of the debates of the time, but in the form in which it has been perpetuated for nearly a century. Afraid of simplifying orthodoxy, Marx disclaimed being "a Marxist." Kautsky was a Marxist, and his book is a codified summary of "Marxism."⁴

To understand the place of *The Class Struggle* in the history of Marxist thought is to understand that 1890 was precisely the moment when Marxism, socialist theory, and the socialist movement became fused within continental socialism. Earlier socialist thought was motivated by moral and thus ahistorical ideals, and this ethical foundation reappeared in an altered form in Bernstein's return to Kant. Socialism was originally an invention of a morally sensitive bourgeoisie. This socialism, which Marx and Engels described as utopian, was founded upon individual judgments of rights and wrongs of existing and future societies.

Marxism was the theory of scientific socialism. The existing society, identified as capitalist, was historical, doomed to extinction.

3. James Joll, *The Second International, 1889-1914* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 91. For the status of Kautsky as the successor to Marx see Jacques Droz, *Le Socialisme démocratique* (Paris, 1966), p. 45. Werner Sombart, *Socialism and the Social Movement* (London, 1909), cites an anecdote that best illustrates Kautsky's position. At the Amsterdam Congress of the Second International, Jaures attacked the German comrades: "You hide your importance behind the verbiage of mere theoretic formulas, which your distinguished comrade Kautsky will supply you with until the end of his days." On the role of Kautsky at the Erfurth Congress, for which *The Class Struggle* was written, see George Lichtheim, *Marxism* (New York: Praeger, 1965), pp. 259-78.

4. Benedict Kautsky's assessment of the work of his father merits citing:

Kautsky was—as his master, Marx—simultaneously an economist, a sociologist, and an historian. Only because of this he could have created a consistent system, constituting only then marxism out of fragments left by Marx—fragments which Engels only began to build as a unified structure. In order to complete this task, Kautsky had to simultaneously strive towards two goals: he had to popularize Marx and to fill with his own investigations the numerous gaps left in Marx's legacy. In both tasks he was highly successful, and it is principally Kautsky's merit that marxism was not only a scientific doctrine but also a force exerting strong influence upon politics and social development.

Cited in Waldenberg, "Poczatki debaty," p. 3 (translation mine). None of the above is meant to imply that *The Class Struggle* was a valid interpretation of Marx's thought. Indeed, one of the problems that must be resolved in analyzing the experience of the Second International is "how and why a version of the theory that hardly exhausts, and in part falsifies, the theoretical project of Karl Marx managed to express the immediate interests of the industrial working class. . . ." Andrew Arato, "The Second International: A Reexamination," *Telos* 18 (Winter 1973-74): 2.

A new, socialist society was inevitably present on the historical horizon not because capitalism was morally wrong or unjust, but because an inquiry into the laws of development of capitalist society was sufficient to persuade any impartial observer that it is a necessary consequence of the very organization of the capitalist society that this society would "burst asunder."⁵

Marx was thought to have discovered the laws of motion of capitalist society. These are laws in the sense that they operate with inevitability in some, even if not specified, long run. The developments they describe are necessary: neither the ingenuity of capitalists exercised in defense of capitalist relations, nor the passivity on the part of the workers can alter the long-term developments. But these developments can be retarded or accelerated by actions of organized classes. Moreover, this inevitability itself operates through human agency. It imposes a historical mission on the specific class that suffers most under capitalist relations and that is uniquely in the position to alter these relations, namely, the proletariat. Socialism, the inevitable consequence of capitalist development, and the working class, those who "have nothing to lose but their chains" and whose emancipation would bring a universal emancipation, are related as mission and agent. "When we speak of the irresistible and inevitable nature of the social revolution," Kautsky emphasized, "we presuppose that men are men and not puppets; that they are beings endowed with certain wants and impulses, with certain physical and mental powers which they will seek to use in their own interest. . . . We consider the breakdown of the present social system to be unavoidable, because we know that the economic evolution inevitably brings on the conditions that will compel the exploited classes to rise against this system of private ownership."⁶

Thus socialism was but an enlightened expression of historical

5. Thus the *Communist Manifesto* asserts that "the theoretical conclusions of the communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer. They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes." Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. Harold Laski (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), p. 150. In "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific" Engels described the status of the theory: "From that time forward socialism was no longer an accidental discovery of this or that ingenious brain, but the necessary outcome of the struggle between two historically developed classes—the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Its task was no longer to manufacture a system of society as perfect as possible; but to examine the historico-economic succession of events from which these classes and their antagonism had of necessity sprung, and to discover in the economic conditions thus created the means of ending the conflict." In *Marx and Engels*, ed. Lewis Samuel Feuer (Garden City, N.J.: Anchor Books, 1959), p. 89.

6. Kautsky, *Class Struggle*, p. 90.

inevitability. To be a socialist was to be scientific, to have understood the necessary laws of social development. To be scientific was to be a socialist, to have rejected the bourgeois ideology of the eternal nature of any system of social relations.⁷ Hence to be a socialist was to be a Marxist.⁸

Kautsky's book thus constitutes an expression of a political movement at a crucial stage of its development, a source for the understanding of the doctrine carried by socialists into factories and parliaments, homes and lecture halls. Yet its importance is contemporary. It is not possible to understand contemporary controversies concerning the concept of class without identifying the root of these controversies. And this root, I shall argue, lies exactly in the doctrine of scientific socialism: in Marxist theory in its political form as the guiding doctrine of the socialist movement. And here Kautsky's book is a key.

III

Kautsky's discussion of classes is separated into two main themes. He begins by specifying those aspects of the development of capitalism that affect the structure of capitalist relations of production. This is a theory of "empty places"—places within a social formation dominated by large capitalist production. At this level classes appear only as categories of persons occupying similar positions vis-à-vis the means and the process of production. Concrete persons appear only as "personifications" of such categories, as "carriers" or "supports" of the places. This is the level of "class-in-itself," class identified in terms of objective characteristics. At this level the occupants of places

7. Sombart, who was highly critical of Marx's theory, is perhaps the best contemporary observer to cite. In a book written originally in 1896, he summarized as follows "the historic significance of the Marxian doctrines for the Social Movement."

Marx laid down the two foundations on which the movement was to rest, when he enunciated that its end in view was the socialization of the instruments of production, and the means to achieve that end class war. . . . By making the Social Movement the resultant of historic development, Marx showed what the real factors were which brought it about, showed how the movement was based on the economic conditions of a particular time at a particular place, and on the personal characteristics of the men and women living in those conditions. In other words, he proved that on economic and psychological grounds it was inevitable, and he thus became the founder of historical (as opposed to rationalistic) or realistic (as opposed to Utopian) Socialism. [Sombart, *Socialism*, p. 63.]

8. When in 1911 a contributor to a Swedish socialist journal suggested that one can be a socialist without being a Marxist, because of a moral rejection of inequality and injustice, his voice was regarded as heresy. Herbert Tingsten, *The Swedish Social Democrats* (Totowa, 1973), p. 129.

are "sacks of potatoes": they share the same relation to the means of production and hence the same objective interests; yet they remain simply as categories, not as subjects.

Having identified the effects of capitalist development for the structure of places within the system of production, Kautsky systematically examines the relation of each of these categories to the socialist movement. Specifically, he analyzes those effects of capitalist development and of capitalist ideological relations that make the particular categories prone to supporting or opposing the socialist movement by virtue of their interests.

In Kautsky's view capitalist development distributes members of a society into economic categories. Members of these categories become organized into classes. The problem for political analysis is to identify those categories generated in the course of capitalist development whose interests make them vulnerable to class organization.

Is this a "historicist" formulation of the transformation of a class-in-itself into a class-for-itself? Are classes formed at the level of relations of production alone, to appear politically only as epiphenomena, as necessary "reflections" at the level of the superstructures of the relations of production? What are the "classes" that move history: those defined as places in the relations of production or those that appear as political forces? Finally, what is the function of socialist movements in the process of class formation?

These are questions that have only recently become explicitly problematic. They certainly have no part in Kautsky's thought. What happened in the history of Marxist thought was that the problem of class became conceptualized in a particular way, based in one form or another on the distinction, introduced in the *Poverty of Philosophy*, between class-in-itself and class-for-itself. Class-in-itself was a category defined at the level of the "base"—a base that is simultaneously objective and economic. Class-for-itself became the group in the sociological meaning of this term, that is, class characterized by organization and consciousness of solidarity. Given these categories, the problem—both theoretical and practical—became formulated in terms of transformation of "objective," that is, economic, into "subjective," that is, political and ideological, class relations.

This kind of formulation can generate only two answers, regardless of the specific form they assume in concrete historical situations. In the deterministic version, objective relations necessarily become transformed into subjective relations. Since objective relations define

interests and since politics is a struggle about realization of interests, it becomes a matter of deduction that objective positions, the positions in the relations of production, become "reflected" in expressed interests and political actions. One way or another, sooner or later, objective class relations spontaneously "find expression" at the level of political activity and consciousness.⁹

The second response is ultimately voluntaristic. In this view, objective conditions do not lead spontaneously, "of themselves," to political class organization; or they lead at most, as in one celebrated analysis, to the formation of a reformist, syndicalist, bourgeois consciousness of the proletariat. Classes become formed politically only as a result of an organized intervention of an external agent, namely, the party. The process of spontaneous organization stops short of assuming a political form. This political form can only be infused by parties under concrete historical conditions of crises.¹⁰

Where then did Kautsky stand in terms of this eternal *problématique* of Marxist thought? He asserts that the function of the socialist

9. The limiting case of this solution are the views of Rosa Luxemburg, which certainly lend themselves to a number of interpretations. Her "spontaneism," if this is what it was, rested on the notion that classes are formed only in the course of class struggles, economic and at the same time political. As Nettl emphasized, the *existence* of the party was not enough, only repeated confrontations, particularly the mass strike, could lead to political organization of the working class. Yet at the same time, the transformation of objective into subjective class was *necessary* in her view: organization led to increased intensity of class conflicts, class conflicts generated increased organization and consciousness, and so on, dialectically history marched on. Peter Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg* (London, 1969), p. 137. For a discussion of alternative interpretations of Luxemburg's views see Paul Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg: Her Life and Work* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), and Lucio Magri, "Problems of the Marxist Theory of the Revolutionary Party," *New Left Review* 60 (1970): 97-128.

10. Lenin's conception is too well known to require a summary. But in the context of this discussion it is interesting to note that it was first presented in *What Is to Be Done* (Moscow, 1964), p. 38, through the words of Kautsky's commentary on the 1901 Programme of the Austrian Social-Democratic Party, words that Lenin described as "profoundly true and important": "Many of our revisionist critics believe," Kautsky said,

that Marx asserted that economic development and the class struggle create, not only the conditions for socialist production, but also, and directly, the *consciousness* of its necessity. . . . But this is absolutely untrue. Of course, socialism, as a doctrine, has its roots in modern economic relationships just as the class struggle of the proletariat has, and, like the latter, emerges from the struggle against capitalist-created poverty and misery of the masses. But socialism and the class struggle arise side by side and not one out of the other; each arises under different conditions. Modern socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge. . . . The vehicle of science is not the proletariat, but the *bourgeois intelligentsia*: it was in the minds of individual members of this stratum that modern socialism originated, and it was they who communicated it to the more intellectually developed proletarians, who in their turn, introduce it into the proletarian class struggle from without and not something that arose within it spontaneously.

movement is to "give to the class-struggle of the proletariat the most effective form." The duty of socialists is to "support the working-class in its constant struggle by encouraging its political and economic institutions." These definitions of the function of socialist parties appear in his discussion of the *Communist Manifesto*. The work of Marx and Engels raised "socialism beyond the utopian point of view" and "laid the scientific foundation of modern socialism." Marx and Engels gave to "the militant proletariat a clear conception of their historical function, and placed them in a position to proceed toward their great goal. . . ." Hence it seems that the proletariat is defined as a class at the level of economic relations, that it spontaneously acquires consciousness of its historical mission, and that the function of the party is but to assist, support, participate in the political struggle of that economically defined class.¹¹

Yet these explicit statements seem to contradict the theoretical conception implicit in Kautsky's formulation of the problem of the class struggle. Indeed, Kautsky's problem is better defined in terms of the function assigned by Marx and Engels to the communist movement in the *Manifesto*: the formation of the proletariat into a class.¹² Marx had always insisted that the proletariat exists as a class only in active opposition to the bourgeoisie, that it becomes organized as a class only in the course of struggles, that it is a class only when it becomes organized as a political party. It is not exactly clear how Marx saw the transformation of economic categories into politically organized classes taking place—what role he assigned to spontaneous self-organization¹³ or what role he attributed to parties and other agents of class formation.¹⁴ Yet he did think of classes as being

11. Kautsky, *Class Struggle*, p. 199;

12. Marx, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 150.

13. "Organize itself as a class." *Ibid.*, p. 162.

14. According to Magri, Marx himself was not aware of the problems generated by this formulation. In Magri's words these problems are the following:

Confined to the immediacy of prevailing conditions, the proletariat cannot achieve a complete vision of the social system as a whole, nor promote its overthrow. Its practice as a class can only develop by transcending this immediacy via the mediation of revolutionary consciousness. What then is the process, the mechanism by which this consciousness is produced? Or, to pose the question more precisely, can this class consciousness develop within the proletariat spontaneously, by virtue of an intrinsic necessity, based on the elements that are already present in its social objectivity and which gradually come to dominate over the other elements that originally condemned it to a subordinate and fragmented condition? Or must revolutionary consciousness represent a transcendence of the immediacy of the proletariat, produced by a qualitative dialectical leap—a complex interaction between external forces and the spontaneous action of class itself? Marx did not confront this problem. [Magri, "Problems of the Marxist Theory of the Revolutionary Party," p. 101.]

formed in the course of class struggles, and, particularly in his historical analyses, he emphasized the independent impact of ideological and political relations upon the process of class formation.

Kautsky's analysis is based on the assumption of the active role of parties and other political forces in the process of class formation. Some of this process is spontaneous. Workers are in his view, for example, spontaneously distrustful of socialist ideology as something introduced from the outside. Yet socialist parties, trade-unions, and ostensibly nonpolitical organizations all play an active role in the process of class formation. Indeed, the very problem of the class struggle concerns the conditions of the organization of workers by socialist parties.

Why then this apparent inconsistency between the construction of the problematic and the explicit statements concerning the function of socialist movements? The reason is, I believe, fundamental for the understanding of the long-standing difficulties concerning the organization of workers as a class. It seems that Kautsky believed that by 1890 the formation of the proletariat into a class was a *fait accompli*; it was already formed as a class and would remain so in the future. The organized proletariat had nothing left to do but to pursue its historical mission, and the party could only participate in its realization.

When Marx and Engels wrote the *Communist Manifesto*, socialism was an idea that was available to workers only "from above." Kautsky himself observed that "socialism is older than the class struggle of the proletariat. . . . The first root of socialism was the sympathy of upper-class philanthropists for the poor and miserable. . . . Socialism was the deepest and most splendid expression of bourgeois philanthropy."¹⁵ As such it was an idea that was infused into the working class from the outside. Yet whether the exact place was Peterloo, Lyon, or Paris, at some time during the first half of the nineteenth century the proletariat appeared on the historical horizon as a political force, distinct from the amorphous masses of the "lower classes." This was exactly the point of Marx's analysis of the June insurrection—the insurrection that in his view marked the appearance of the class struggle characteristic of capitalism, namely, the political struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.¹⁶

15. *Class Struggle*, p. 192.

16. Hobsbawm dates this political emergence of the proletariat to 1830: "The second result [of the revolution of 1830] was that, with the progress of capitalism, 'the people' and 'the labouring poor,' i.e., the men who built barricades—could be increasingly identified with the new industrial proletariat as 'the working class.' A proletarian socialist revolutionary movement came into existence." Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution* (New York:

By 1848 the problem was to organize this emerging proletariat into a class, to separate it from the masses of *le peuple*, to imbue it with consciousness of its position and its mission, and to organize it as a party. In comparison, by 1890 the proletariat indeed seemed already organized as a class. Workers were militant; they were organized into parties, unions, cooperatives, clubs, associations. They voted in elections, participated in strikes, appeared at demonstrations. In 1890 there were mass political organizations clearly identified as those of the proletariat. And although, as Bernstein pointed out, it was perhaps true that the proletariat was not organized in its entirety as a mass political party, Kautsky's perception of the role of the party seems only natural.¹⁷

The leading socialist theoreticians of the period, men like Kautsky, attempted to unite only those views which were actually present among the workers with the general doctrines of Marxism. It would be completely false and unhistorical, however, to maintain that Kautsky and his friends invented the principles of the Second International. On the contrary, the socialist labour movement during the period of the Second International from 1889 to 1914 is the historical product resulting from the evolution of the European proletariat. This type of labour movement necessarily resulted from the conditions which had developed up to 1889."¹⁸

Thus, it seems that Kautsky thought that the task set by the *Manifesto*—the formation of the proletariat into a class—had already been accomplished. The proletariat was already organized as a class, and the socialist party was nothing but "a part of the militant proletariat."¹⁹ As the process of proletarianization of other classes proceeded, various groups would join the ranks of the proletariat and become members of the working class, which was then becoming the "immense majority." Now the function of the party was simply to support the struggle of the proletariat, already formed as a class.

New American Library, 1962), p. 146. By 1848 political reactions of the *classes inferieures* ceased to assume the form of sporadic riots against prices or taxes, as the proletariat broke away from *le peuple* and for the first time became organized. In particular, the introduction of universal franchise provided the working class with a form of organization and separated it from other lower classes. Francois Furet, "Pour une definition des classes inferieures à l'époque moderne," *Annales: Economies, Societies, Civilisations* 18 (1963): 473.

17. Eduard Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), p. 105. But in Rosa Luxemburg's view as of 1899: "The great socialist importance of the trade-union and political struggle consists in socializing the knowledge, the consciousness of the proletariat, in organizing it as a class." Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg*, p. 111 (italics supplied).

18. Arthur Rosenberg, *Democracy and Socialism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), p. 291.

19. Kautsky, *Class Struggle*, p. 183.

IV

But who were these "proletarians" of whom a class was formed, of whom the socialist party was nothing but a part? Three years before writing *The Class Struggle*, Kautsky published an article in which he distinguished between the concepts of "the proletariat" and "the people." In this article, he maintained that although in the future "the people" would become proletarianized, and the socialist movement will become the movement, in Marx's words, "of the immense majority for the immense majority," at the moment the proletariat was not a majority in any country.²⁰ Yet in the book he maintains that the proletariat already is the largest class in "all civilized countries." He constantly moves back and forth between a narrow and broad definition; the narrow one in which proletarians are the manual wage-earners in industry, transport, and agriculture, and the broad one in which proletarians include all those who do not own means of production and must, therefore, sell their labor power if they are to survive. Actually, at one point he even includes in the proletariat "the majority of farmers, small producers, and traders [since] the little property they still possess today is but a thin veil, calculated rather to conceal than to prevent their dependence and exploitation."²¹

Hence the concept of proletariat has the consistency of rings of water: the core of it consists of manual, principally industrial workers; around it float various categories of people who have been separated from the means of production; and on the periphery there are those who still hold on to the property of means of production but whose life situation, conceived in quite Weberian terms, distinguishes them from the proletarians only by their "pretensions."²²

In order to understand the source of Kautsky's ambivalence it is necessary to note that the concept of the proletariat seems to have been self-evident for the founders of scientific socialism. Proletarians were the poor and miserable people who were thrown off the land and forced to sell themselves, piecemeal, as a commodity, "like every other article of commerce," to a capitalist. They were "an appendage of the machine," of whom "only the most simple,

20. Tingsten, *Swedish Social Democrats*, p. 135.

21. Kautsky, *Class Struggle*, p. 43.

22. French linguistic tradition includes a term for each of these rings. *Les classes inférieures* traditionally included all those who were not distinguished by virtue of birth or status. *Les classes labourieuses* comprised all who worked. The newcomer, *la classe ouvrière*, eventually became Marx's "proletariat." The corresponding English terms—lower classes, laboring classes, and the working class—do not seem to have such a standardized meaning.

most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack" was required.²³ The proletariat, Engels wrote, was called into existence through the introduction of machinery, and the first proletarians belonged to manufacture and were begotten directly through it.²⁴ They were the people who toiled day and night, next to a machine, in noise and dirt, producing they knew not what just to survive until the following day so that they could sell themselves again.

At the same time, proletarians were important as those who put into motion the modern, that is, socialized, means of production. Although farmers and independent small producers also "worked," socialization of production was the necessary course of future capitalist development. Hence proletarians occupied a unique position in the capitalist society: they were the ones who actually applied the modern means of production to produce all that which was made. They were the only people who were necessary to make all that the society required, and they could make it on their own, without those who did nothing but live off their labor and appropriate its fruit.²⁵ As Mandel emphasized, Marx and Engels "assigned the proletariat the key role in the coming of socialism not so much because of the misery it suffers as because of the place it occupies in the production process."²⁶

In 1848 one simply knew who were the proletarians. One knew because all the criteria—the relation to the means of production, manual character of labor, productive employment, poverty, and degradation—all coincided to provide a consistent image. "If a working man doesn't smell of filth and sweat two miles off, he isn't much of a fellow": this remark of a Norwegian capitalist best tells the

23. Marx, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 141.

24. Steven Marcus, *Engels, Manchester and the Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), p. 142. For a general discussion of the impact of the introduction of machines upon the formation of an industrial proletariat see Jurgen Kuczynski, *The Rise of the Working Class* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), chap. 2. Bergier formulates this relationship succinctly: "the introduction of a new power source superseding that of man, wind, or running water soon wrought a clear distinction between the industrialist, who owned this comparatively expensive machine and the looms it drove, and the worker, who was paid to run it." J.F. Bergier, "The Industrial Bourgeoisie and the Rise of the Working Class," in *The Fontana Economic History of Europe*, ed. C.M. Cipolla, *The Industrial Revolution* (London, 1973), p. 397.

25. Marx in *The Capital* and Engels in *Anti-Duhring* both emphasized the technical role of capitalists as organizers of the process of production. Yet the development of public companies was sufficient to demonstrate that the function of the organization of production is independent technically of the property of the means of production, and workers can organize the process of production on their own. See below for a more detailed discussion of the concept of "productive labor."

26. Ernest Mandel, *The Formation of the Economic Thought of Karl Marx* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p. 23.

story.²⁷ "Class position" and "class situation" were synonymous. And, as Rosenberg observed: "The class-consciousness with which the industrial workers of Europe were imbued led them to lay great emphasis on their specific position and on those factors which differentiated them from all other economic groups."²⁸

To restate the point more abstractly: *in the middle of the nineteenth century the theoretical connotation of the concept of proletariat, defined in terms of separation from the means of production, corresponded closely to the intuitive concept of proletariat conceived in terms of manual, principally industrial, laborers.* No ambiguity had yet arisen because material conditions closely corresponded to their theoretical description.

It is, therefore, perhaps indicative that Engels felt it necessary to introduce a definition of the proletariat as a footnote to the 1888 English edition of the *Communist Manifesto*. According to this definition, "by proletariat [is meant] the class of modern wage labourers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order to live." Kautsky echoed this definition: "proletarians, that is to say, . . . workers who are divorced from their instruments of production so that they produce nothing by their own efforts and, therefore, are compelled to sell the only commodity they possess—their labour power." And in a summary of an international discussion conducted in 1958 by communist journals and research institutes, the Soviet commentators defined the proletariat as "the class of people separated from the means of production, having therefore to live from the sale of

27. Edvard Bull, "Industrial Workers and Their Employers in Norway around 1900," *Scandinavian Economic History Review* 3 (1955): 67. National differences in the timing and the form of development of industrial proletariat were profound. Moreover, there are significant historiographical controversies concerning both the origins of factory workers and their standard of living, as compared with artisans and peasants of the last generation before the industrial revolution. Nevertheless, there is a sufficient agreement to a number of generalizations supporting the thesis of the coincidence of various criteria of the status of workers: (1) workers became concentrated in factories and mines, primarily in textiles, metallurgy, and mining; (2) they operated machines; (3) they lived in abominable conditions; (4) they worked in exactly the same conditions. Workers were distinct from artisans because they owned none of the tools that they used and worked where the tools were. They were distinct from beggars, and so on, because they worked. They were distinct from serfs and slaves because they were free.

For summaries of literature concerning early industrial workers see Kuczynski, *Rise of the Working Class*; and Bergier, "Industrial Bourgeoisie." Jon Elster, "Optimism and Pessimism in the Discussion of the Standard of Living during the Industrial Revolution in Britain" (Paper prepared for the 14th International Congress of the Historical Sciences; San Francisco, 1975) contains a superb clarification of the issues involved. Marcus, *Engels, Manchester and the Working Class*, is clearly worth reading, but perhaps most important for the understanding of Marx's and Engels's vision of workers is the latter's *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* (New York: Macmillan, 1958).

28. Rosenberg, *Democracy and Socialism*, p. 291.

their labor power to the owners of capital and exploited in the process of capitalist production.”²⁹

But by 1958 this definition includes secretaries and executives, nurses and corporate lawyers, teachers and policemen, computer operators and executive directors. They are all proletarians, they are all separated from the means of production and compelled to sell their labor power for a wage. Yet a feeling of uneasiness, already visible in Kautsky, continues to be pronounced. For whatever reasons, some of the proletarians neither act as proletarians nor think like proletarians. In the 1958 discussion, voice after voice repeats the same message: salaried employees are proletarians, but they do not yet know that they are. The German Economic Institute participated in the discussion with the argument that the majority of salaried employees “like workers do not own means of production and are compelled to sell their labor. The price which they obtain for this commodity—their salary—is in most cases not higher than that of workers. In spite of it a large part of salaried employees does not include itself, as it is known, into the working class and is predisposed to bourgeois ideology. The cause of this fact should be sought first of all in that their work differs from the work of workers.” The American Institute of the Problems of Work as well as the British journal *Marxism Today* dispute the diagnosis of their German comrades but agree with the factual assertions. “If there ever existed any objective conditions allowing us to consider white collar workers as representatives of the middle class,” says the American Institute, “now these conditions have disappeared. Only their subjective evaluation of their situation has not yet changed. . . .” The editors of the British journal repeat that “in terms of conditions of work and size of revenues white collar workers are becoming increasingly similar to workers, although most of them do not yet realize it.” And the Soviet summary reflects the discussion: salaried employees are workers but they do not yet realize it, so that the unification of the working class is yet to be achieved.³⁰

This line of argumentation is so widespread that it may seem peculiar to have singled out this discussion as a subject of particular attention.³¹ But what is striking about these analyses is the repeated

29. Marx, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 131; Kautsky, *Class Struggle*, p. 43; *Przemiany w strukturze klasy robotniczej w krajach kapitalistycznych* (Warsaw, 1963), p. 43 (translation mine).

30. *Przemiany*, pp. 78, 88, 96, 54.

31. I cannot resist one more illustration: “salaried workers . . . find themselves carefully separated from the rest of the proletariat by the artifice of the bourgeoisie, not by

emphasis on the "not yet" status of consciousness and organization of salaried employees. Already in the *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels observed that capitalism "has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into wage labourers." And Kautsky echoed Marx again, at the same time anticipating by sixty-five years that "not yet": "a third category of proletarians . . . has gone far on the road to its complete development—the educated proletarians. . . . The time is near when the bulk of these proletarians will be distinguished from the others only by their pretensions. Most of them imagine that they are something better than proletarians. They fancy they belong to the bourgeoisie, just as the lackey identifies himself with the class of his master."³²

By 1890 the term *proletariat* seems to have already lost that immediate intuitive sense that it conveyed at the time of the *Manifesto*. It is again instructive to listen to a contemporary observer. Writing in 1896, Sombart analyzed the meaning of the term: "In order to get a true conception of this class we must free ourselves from the picture of a ragged crowd which the term brought to mind before we read Karl Marx. The term 'proletariat' is now used in a technical sense to describe that portion of the population which is in the service of capitalist undertakers in return for wages and elements akin to them. The word in this meaning is taken from French writers, and was introduced into Germany by Lorenz von Stein in 1842." And again, the same problem appears. The bulk of this class is according to Sombart formed by "the free wage-earners." They are a minority, about one third of the German population. "But the picture becomes entirely different," Sombart continued, "when to the true proletariat, to the full bloods, are added the innumerable half-bloods—the poorest class of the population, *il popolino*—and also those amongst small farmers and mechanics who live the life of the proletariat, as well as the lowest grade among officials, such as those in the Post Office."³³ The problem is even further compounded by the fact that wage-earners are not always the poorest people around. They are not only better off than the Russian peasant or the Chinese coolie; some wage-earners earn more than university teachers, and "in America the average income of this class falls not much below the maximum

scientific analysis. The fact they that wear a white shirt and are paid at the end of the month is hardly sufficient to place in question their objective membership of the working class, even if their subjective consciousness remains confused." Maurice Ajam-Bouvier and Gilbert Mury, *Les Classes sociales en France* (Paris, 1963), 1: 63.

32. Marx, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 135; Kautsky, *Class Struggle*, pp. 36, 40.

33. Sombart, *Socialism and the Social Movement*, p. 6.

salary of an extraordinary professor in Prussia."³⁴ No wonder Max Weber felt it necessary to distinguish between "class situation" and "status situation."³⁵

When applied in the 1890s, the abstract definition of proletariat includes "full-bloods" and "half-bloods," wage-earners and others who live like them, those who are ragged and those who wear the uniforms of the Prussian officialdom. And in 1958, while the Soviet theoreticians did not tire in pointing out that only those who are incapable of thinking in dialectical terms could commit the error of not understanding that salaried employees are simply proletarians, they argued in the same breath that the role of different fractions of the proletariat is not the same, that industrial manual workers play the leading role in class struggle; more, the program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union insisted on "the alliance between the working class and the broad strata of salaried employees and a large part of the intelligentsia."³⁶ Full-bloods and half-bloods, blue-collar and white-collar, proletarians and "the people," workers and "masses of the exploited and oppressed": all these terms are symptomatic of an obvious theoretical difficulty, of a problem that seems no nearer a solution today than in the 1890s.

V

Kautsky was wrong. Neither he nor Marx drew from Marx's theory of capitalist development the consequences for the evolution of class structure. The source of the ambiguity of the concept of the proletariat lies in the dynamic of capitalist development itself.

I will argue below that the proletariat could not have been formed as a class once and for all by the end of the nineteenth century because capitalist development continually transforms the structure of places in the system of production and realization of capital as well as in the other manners of production that become dominated by capitalism. More precisely, the penetration of the capitalist manner of producing into all areas of economic activity results in the separation of various groups from the ownership of the means of production or from the effective capacity to transform nature into useful products. At the same time, the increasing productivity of labor decreases in relative terms the capitalist utilization of labor power. As a result,

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

35. A careful clarification of Weber's terminology is presented in John Goldthorpe and David Lockwood, "Affluence and the British Class Structure," *The Sociological Review* 11 (1963): 133-63.

36. *Przemiany*, p. 54 (italics supplied).

the process of proletarianization in the sense of separation from the means of production diverges from the process of proletarianization in the sense of creation of places of productive workers. This divergence generates social relations that are indeterminate in the class terms of the capitalist mode of production, since it leads exactly to the separation of people from any socially organized process of production.

Let us examine this argument and its implications in some detail. Kautsky's own description of capitalist development and of its effects upon class structure was based on the first section of the Erfurth Programme, which asserted that "production on a small scale is based on the ownership of the means of production by the laborer. The economic development of bourgeois society leads necessarily to the overthrow of this form of production. It separates the worker from his tools and changes him into a propertyless proletarian. The means of production become more and more the monopoly of a comparatively small number of capitalists and landowners."³⁷

Kautsky examines carefully the categories of places being destroyed in the course of capitalist development. Thus, he first talks about the "disappearing middle classes—small business and farmers." As capitalism permeates all forms of production, small property of various kinds is destroyed, particularly when capital becomes concentrated in periodic crises. Only small stores are surviving, but they are becoming "debased," becoming increasingly dependent upon the rhythm of capitalist accumulation. Another mechanism of proletarianization is the capitalist organization of service and productive activities traditionally performed in the household such as weaving, sewing, knitting, and baking. This externalization of production and services from the household does constitute a form of separation from the means of production, since those who have previously performed these activities, particularly women, are forced to seek employment outside the household because of increasing poverty and are obliged to purchase the products and services previously generated internally.³⁸

37. Kautsky, *Class Struggle*, p. 7.

38. The notion of "separation from the means of production" requires more elaboration than it has received thus far. In Marx's analysis of primitive accumulation, this separation consisted of the legally forced separation of cultivators from the land. In the theory of concentration of capital, the notion is that small producers will not be able to compete economically with large capitalist firms. But this separation can assume more subtle forms, for example, when services traditionally performed within the household become externalized into capitalistically organized activities. (See below for Kautsky's analysis of this phenomenon.) Furthermore, should not compulsory retirement and compulsory education

What are the places simultaneously being created as smallholders, craftsmen, artisans, and women become proletarianized? Are they separated from the means of production or from the capacity to produce on their own? Some are the places of industrial proletarians. While this process is nowhere described systematically, Kautsky seems to think that capitalist development constantly increases the number of factory workers.³⁹ Moreover, this industrial proletariat is supposedly becoming increasingly homogeneous. While Kautsky observes with an unusual degree of bitterness what he considers to be the remnants of internal divisions among workers—divisions based on skill—he is persuaded that the introduction of machinery which eliminates the need for skill, and the growth of surplus labor, which pushes wages down, are removing the internal differentiation of the proletariat and increasing internal homogeneity.

But the process of proletarianization spreads to areas of economic activity other than industrial production. "It is not only through the extension of large production," Kautsky argues, "that the capitalist system causes the condition of the proletariat to become more and more that of the whole population. It brings this about also through the fact that the condition of the wage-earner engaged in large production strikes the keynote for the condition of the wage earners in all other branches." Thus, for example, in the large stores "there is constant increase in the number of employees—genuine proletarians without prospect of ever becoming independent."⁴⁰

Yet, most importantly, the rate at which capitalism destroys small production is greater than the rate at which it generates places of productive capitalist employment. The process of proletarianization—separation from the means of production—creates "the army of superfluous laborers." "Enforced idleness," Kautsky asserts, "is a permanent phenomenon under the capitalist system of production, and is inseparable from it."⁴¹

be treated as such a separation? The question also arises whether separation from the means of production is sufficiently broad as a description of the process by which various groups are hurled into the capitalist labor market. Beggars, for example, of whom in France in 1800 there were probably as many as workers, lost their means of subsistence legitimized by Catholic ideology when the "economic whip" replaced the concept of communal responsibility for the poor.

39. Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism*, felt that there is an inconsistency in the argument according to which accumulation of capital is supposed to reduce need for labor yet numbers of workers are said to increase with the growth of the mass of capital. Clearly the issue concerns the relative rates of the growth of capital and of the productivity of labor. This is not a simple issue, as the controversies concerning the concept of capital manifest.

40. Kautsky, *Class Struggle*, pp. 35, 36.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

"Proletarianization" is thus a concept with a double meaning. In terms of the destruction of places in pre- and early-capitalist organization of production it means separation from the ownership of the means of production and from the capacity to transform nature independently. But in terms of creation of new places within the structure of advancing capitalism it does not necessarily denote creation of new places of productive, manual labor. Craftsmen, small merchants, and peasants do not become transformed into productive manual workers. They are transformed into a variety of groups the status of which is theoretically ambiguous. And contemporary debates make it abundantly clear that this gap has widened in the course of the past eighty years. The problems in the conceptualization of class structure arise principally, although not exclusively, from the appearance of people variously termed salaried employees, white-collar workers, nonmanual workers, *ouvriers intellectuels*, service workers, technicians, "the new middle classes."

Again Kautsky's book provides some interesting clues concerning the origin of this difficulty. "Idle labor" includes the unemployed, the "slums," personal servants, the military, and numerous people who somehow find pursuits that provide them with subsistence. Thus "idle labor" should not be understood to mean labor that is not expended in any manner but merely as labor that is not applied to produce any of the things that a society needs. But what are the mechanisms by which this idle labor becomes structured in these particular social forms?

While the destruction of small property and the generation of "enforced idleness" are discussed in structural terms as necessary consequences of capitalist development, the creation of particular forms assumed by this labor seems to result from individual entrepreneurship. Most revealing is Kautsky's discussion of the group he calls the "educated proletarians."⁴² How is this category generated in the process of capitalist development?

Having listed the emergence of proletarians in large industrial production and in commerce, Kautsky announces the "there is still a third category of proletarians far on the road to its complete development—the educated proletarians."⁴³ At this moment the discussion suddenly focuses on the household. We are told that the petit bourgeois knows that the only way in which he can prevent his son from becoming a proletarian is to send him to college. But he

42. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

43. *Ibid.*

must be concerned not only about his sons, but also about his daughters. Division of labor results in externalization from the household into industries of several activities such as weaving, sewing, knitting, and baking. It thus becomes a luxury to maintain a household in which the wife is only a housekeeper, a luxury that small property holders can less and less afford. "Accordingly," Kautsky maintains, "the number of women wage-earners increases, not only in large and small production and commerce, but in government offices, in the telegraph and telephone service, in railroads and banks, in the arts and sciences."⁴⁴ Nothing is said about those laws of capitalist development that would describe the growing need for government positions, telegraph and telephone services, railroads and banks, and so on. People, particularly middle-class women, are forced to seek education. Hence they become educated; hence they are employed in all these offices. But where do the offices come from? The entire argument is limited to the supply side. It is a "human capital" argument.

Does Kautsky at all anticipate the growth of the new middle class? He mentions the office workers in the context of evolution of households. Later he anticipates the appearance of some personal service occupations in their proletarianized rather than personal form, namely, barbers, waiters, cab drivers, and so on.⁴⁵ But the group that Kautsky sees as ever-increasing is that "crew of social parasites who, having all avenues of productive work closed to them, try to eke out a miserable existence through a variety of occupations, most of which are wholly superfluous and not a few injurious to society—such as middlemen, saloonkeepers, agents, intermediaries, etc."⁴⁶ Here are the very nerves of the modern capitalist society: the superfluous parasites. In all these cases—office workers, barbers, and middlemen—Kautsky feels that these are occupations that people pursue only because they are separated from the means of production and yet cannot find productive employment. Hence they resort to such superfluous pursuits in order to survive.

This is all that Kautsky had to say in *The Class Struggle*⁴⁷ about those places in the system of production that nowadays con-

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 167.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

47. This is not to say that elsewhere, particularly in the polemic against Bukharin, he did not see "foremen, engineers, technicians, agronomers, managers, administrators, and directors" as necessary functions in the capitalist organization of production. For a summary of this polemic and its attendant issues see J.J. Wiatr, *Spoleczenstwo* (Warsaw, 1965), pp. 200 ff.

stitute perhaps more than a half of the labor force.⁴⁸ He saw nothing structural about the appearance of the "new middle classes," viewing all the middle-class pursuits as ephemeral, marginal forms in which people pushed out of the process of production attempt to escape the fate to which they are exposed by capitalist development. Is this just an individual limitation, an accidental error of a distinguished yet fallible Marxist theoretician?

VI

Ever since the 1890s when the concept of proletariat first became problematic, time after time, conjuncture after conjuncture, this issue appears with renewed theoretical and political urgency. Who are all those people whom capitalism generates at an ever accelerating pace, who are separated from the means of production, who are forced to sell their labor power for a wage, and yet who do not quite work, live, think, and act like the proletarians? Are they workers, proletarians? Or are they "middle class"? Or perhaps simply "non-manuals," as in the practice of survey researchers? Or "la nouvelle petite bourgeoisie"? Or agents of capitalist reproduction and hence simply the bourgeoisie?

The problem could not be resolved by fiat. What was needed was some model of a "developed class structure," some way to abandon the fiction of a dichotomous class division of capitalist social formations, some way of analyzing class positions that would go beyond the notion of two classes being associated with each mode of production, plus the eternal petite bourgeoisie. Kautsky's method was to think of all classes other than the proletariat and the bourgeoisie as ascending or descending to these basic "poles" in the course of history of capitalism; hence, to classify them by direction of their motion. This method reappeared in a little known but most interesting analysis by Courthéoux of the 1962 French census. But the critical influence was Weber's.

48. One should note that in industry (including mining and construction)—which was supposed to represent the future of the capitalist society—class structure was nearly dichotomous. According to the 1882 German census, there were about 1,500,000 employers, about 3,500,000 workers, and only 90,000 clerical and technical personnel in this sector. The respective figures for Sweden in 1900 are 125,000 employers, 442,000 workers, and 22,000 office and technical personnel. In France in 1881 there were 1,169,000 employers, about 3,000,000 workers, and 236,000 office employees. The data for Germany and Sweden are from the respective censuses. French information is based on J.C. Toutain, "La Population de la France de 1700 à 1959," *Cahiers de l'Institut de Science Economique Appliquée*, no. 133 (January 1963), tables 75-77.

Weber's critique of Marx's concept of class provided the theoretical foundations for the analysis of social differentiation (stratification) within the bourgeois sociology. This critique asserted that the position within the relations of production (property of the means of production) is not sufficient to determine class situation, since the position in the relations of distribution (market, life-style, and attendant status) and in the relations of authority (power) do not reflect only the relations of property. Moreover, status and power are not dichotomous. The system of stratification distributes people along continuous strata, bulging in the middle to generate the "middle class." The resulting consequences are well known: empirical descriptions of "socioeconomic standings" became independent of any historical understanding; the vision of classes as historical actors became replaced by statistical analyses of distributions of income, education, and prestige; the analysis of social differentiation became separated from the analysis of conflict. Attention has focused on "status incongruence," and the foreman became a typical victim of this disease.

Returning to Geiger's analysis of 1925, Dahrendorf examined systematically the consequences of the Weberian orientation for Marx's theory of class without rejecting it *tout court*.⁴⁹ The result of his analysis was an "objective pluralism." Modern capitalist societies, Dahrendorf argued, consist of a multitude of groups, but these groups are not formed arbitrarily. They are generated by objective relations: relations of property and relations of authority, mutually independent from each other. He did eventually reject the very foundation of Marx's analysis, arguing that property relations are defined by the authority to dispose of the means of production and the product. Hence property is only a special case of authority; society is built upon authority, not exploitation, and so on.

Wright's recent *New Left Review* article recuperates the problematic of the objective determination of class. Since even the economically active population in the United States cannot be easily "pigeon-holed" into the boxes of workers and capitalists, Wright proceeds to generate additional dimensions. "Substantive social processes comprising class relations" are thought to distribute individuals into classes independently of the "juridical categories of class relations," and a gradation is introduced to distinguish "full," "partial," "minimal," and "no" control over resources, means of produc-

49. Ralf Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1959).

tion, labor power, and the degrees of legal ownership.⁵⁰ The result is "contradictory locations": all kinds of places where these degrees do not exactly coincide. The foreman reappears as "the contradictory location closest to the working class." Numbers of people falling into each category are then counted on the basis of 1969 United States data, and the conclusion is that "somewhere between a quarter and a third of the American labour force falls into these locations near the boundary of the proletariat." Added to the 40-50 percent of the noncontradictory working class, these numbers constitute a great majority having "a real interest in socialism."⁵¹ We are then told that "class struggle will determine the extent to which people in these contradictory locations join forces with the working class in a socialist movement. . . . And the possibilities of a viable socialist movement in advanced capitalist societies depend in part on the capacity of working-class organizations to forge the political and ideological conditions which will draw these contradictory locations into closer alliance with the working class."⁵² Or as Kautsky prophesied, "the more unbearable the existing system of production, the more evidently it is discredited . . . the greater will be the numbers of those who stream from the non-proletarian classes into the Socialist Party and, hand in hand with the irresistibly advancing proletariat, follow its banner to victory and triumph."⁵³

The problem of the relation between objectively defined classes and classes qua historical actors will not be resolved by any classification, whether with two or many objective classes, with or without contradictory locations. The problem persists because such classifications, whether made in party headquarters or within the walls of the academia, are constantly tested by life, or more precisely, by political practice. Wright's "contradictory locations" are contradictory only in the sense that his assertions about the "real interest in socialism" are not borne out by the consciousness and the organization of those who are supposed to have this interest. On paper one can put people in any boxes one wishes, but in political practice one encounters real people, with their interests and a consciousness of these interests. And these interests, whether or not they are "real," are not arbitrary; their consciousness is not arbitrary; and the very political practice that forges these interests is not arbitrary.

50. Erik Olin Wright, "Class Boundaries in Advanced Capitalist Societies," *New Left Review* 98 (1976): 33.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

53. Kautsky, *Class Struggle*, p. 217.

The problematic of class-in-itself places the problem of classification at the center of analysis because classes as historical actors, the classes that struggle and whose struggle is the motor of history, are thought to be determined in a unique manner by objective positions. Underlying this problematic is the assertion of the objective conflict of short-term material interests of workers (wage-earners) and capitalists (surplus-takers). Since at any instant of time the product is fixed by definition, the more wage-earners obtain for the sale of their labor power, the less capitalists get either in the form of replacement of the means of production or in the form of surplus. In Marx's view, wages and profit "stand in inverse ratio to each other. Capital's share, profit, rises in the same proportion as labour's share, wages, falls and vice versa. Profit rises to the extent that wages fall; it falls to the extent that wages rise." Moreover, this focus on the instantaneous distribution led Marx to maintain that "even the most favourable situation for the working class, the most rapid possible growth of capital, however much it may improve the material existence of the worker, does not resolve the antagonism between his interests and the interests of the bourgeoisie. *Profit and wages* remain as before in inverse proportion."⁵⁴ Hence, capitalism as a system is supposed to be characterized by the objective conflict of short-term material interests imputed to individuals in their status as carriers or personifications of objective places. Class-in-itself is viewed as a category of individuals who have common interests by virtue of the positions they occupy. At the same time, the defense of short-term objective interests is supposed to constitute the mechanism by which class organization is set into motion, leading eventually to the realization of a long-term and equally objective interest in socialism. Hence, a classification of objective positions (locations, places, classes) seems sufficient to identify the interests that determine those classes that can emerge to struggle with each other. Once objective positions are identified, the potential classes-for-themselves are uniquely determined. "Class" denotes here a class of occupants of places; and the problem to be analyzed within this problematic is only how does a collection of individual-occupants-of-places become a collectivity-in-struggle for the realization of its objective interests.

This formulation of the problematic of class is exactly what makes so thorny the appearance of nonmanual employees. The only way in which their presence in a capitalist society can be accommodated within this problematic is by a redefinition of the relations that determine the objective bases of class formation.

54. Karl Marx, *Wage Labor and Capital* (Moscow, 1952), pp. 35, 37.

Hence a new classification of objective positions is required, and at the same time such a classification appears sufficient to resolve the problem.

In the remaining parts of this text I will argue that the question of class identity of nonmanual employees forces us to rethink the entire problematic of class formation. Classes as historical actors are not given uniquely by any objective positions, not even those of workers and capitalists. I will show that the very relation between classes as historical actors (classes-in-struggle) and places within the relations of production must become problematic. *Classes are not given uniquely by any objective positions because they constitute effects of struggles, and these struggles are not determined uniquely by the relations of production.* The traditional formulation does not allow us to think theoretically about class struggles, since it either reduces them to an epiphenomenon or enjoins them with freedom from objective determination. Class struggles are neither epiphenomenal, nor free from determination. They are structured by the totality of economic, political, and ideological relations; and they have an autonomous effect upon the process of class formation. But if struggles do have an autonomous effect upon class formation, then the places in the relations of production, whatever they are, can no longer be viewed as objective in the sense of the problematic of "class-in-itself," that is, in the sense of determining uniquely what classes will emerge as classes-in-struggle. What this implies is that classifications of positions must be viewed as immanent to the practices that (may) result in class formation. The very theory of classes must be viewed as internal to particular political projects. Positions within the relations of production, or any other relations for that matter, are thus no longer viewed as objective in the sense of being prior to class struggles. They are objective only to the extent to which they validate or invalidate the practices of class formation, to the extent to which they make the particular projects historically realizable or not. And here the mechanism of determination is not unique: several projects may be feasible at a particular conjuncture. Hence positions within social relations constitute limits upon the success of political practice, but within these historically concrete limits the formation of classes-in-struggle is determined by struggles that have class formation as their effect.

Classes are an effect of struggles that take place at a particular stage of capitalist development. We must understand the struggles and the development in their concrete historical articulation, as a process.

VII

The great contribution of Gramsci, a contribution developed by Poulantzas, was to recognize that ideological and political relations are objective with regard to class struggles.⁵⁵ At least two kinds of determination thus became distinguished: the determination, by the relations of production, of the organization of ideological and political relations and the determination, by the totality of these objective relations, of the relations among the concrete men and women who are their carriers, including the relations of class struggles. Economic, ideological, and political relations as a totality impose a structure upon class struggles, but they become transformed as effects of class struggles. Poulantzas's notion of "double articulation" is a novel and an important one in this context. The form of a class struggle is determined by the totality of economic, ideological, and political relations characterizing a particular historical situation, but it is determined only up to the limits of the possible effects of class struggles upon these relations. To simplify: given a particular conjuncture, a number of practices can be developed, but the range of effective practices, that is, of practices that can have the effect of transforming objective conditions, is determined by these very conditions. This view, which attributes to ideological and political relations the status of objective conditions of class struggles, breaks away from the economistic and historicist elements inherent in the formulation of the "class-in-itself."

Poulantzas rejects the view, which he terms "historicist," according to which classes as historical actors spontaneously appear in one way or another out of the relations of production. He emphasizes the independent role of ideology and political organization in the process of class formation. Yet in the heat of the polemic against historicism, history seems to be scorched with the same flame. It becomes a history that proceeds from relations to effects without any human agency.⁵⁶

Poulantzas thinks of classes in terms of "pertinent effects" in the political realm of the structure of social relations, which in turn are determined by the totality of forms in which the economic, ideological, and political relations are organized in a given socioeconomic

55. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971); Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes* (London, 1973).

56. F. E. Cardoso, "Althusserianismo o Marxismo?" in *Las Clases sociales en America Latina*, ed. R. B. Zenteno (Mexico, 1973).

formation. The differentiation of "levels" between economic, ideological, and political leads him to develop a large number of taxonomic categories by which political effects of classes can be identified without examining their organization. He thus develops an elaborate terminology to distinguish places of different classes and fractions in the "block in power": ruling, hegemonic, governing, supporting, and so forth. Yet these classes remain suspended in the air. They never acquire bodily representation; they are never more than "effects" that in turn affect something else, since Poulantzas never inquires into the manner in which classes emerge in a particular form from within the relations of production. Strictly speaking, there is nothing in Poulantzas's language that would allow him to speak of the "working class," "the bourgeoisie," and so forth. Classes appear as such at the level of "social relations," but we are not told how they happen to appear in any particular form.

This difficulty is not new. While Dahrendorf represents perhaps a universally shared view when he asserts that "class involves a certain amount of class consciousness and political solidarity, if the term is to make any sense at all," already in 1909 Sombart felt that "the greatest impediment to clear comprehension of the term 'social class' is that it is confounded with 'political party'." So did Plekhanov.⁵⁷

The general problem is the following: If classes are thought to exist objectively at the level of the relations of production, then during many historical periods the concept of class may be irrelevant for the understanding of history, such as when these classes do not develop solidarity and consciousness or when they have no political effects. On the other hand, if classes are identified at the level at which they appear as organized or at least "pertinent" political forces, then the problem appears how to trace back these classes to places in the social organization of production. The distribution of the carriers of the relations of production does not become simply "reflected" at the level of politics and ideology; yet the emergence of political forces is nonarbitrary with regard to the distribution of carriers of these relations. Or, to put it bluntly, if everyone who is a manual worker in industry is expected to behave politically qua worker, then the theory is simply false; if everyone who is a potential socialist is considered a worker, then the theory is meaningless in the positivist sense of the word. The first interpretation of Marxism

57. Dahrendorf, "Recent Changes in the Class Structure of European Societies," *Daedalus* 93 (1964), p. 252; Sombart, *Socialism and the Social Movement*, p. 3; E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution* (London, 1966), 1: 29.

is prevalent among many students of political behavior, who then discover a large "residuum" of cleavages other than class, sometimes larger than class cleavage.⁵⁸ The second interpretation underlies the kind of voluntaristic thinking in which public service workers were thought not to belong to the working class when the prospects of their unionization seemed dim, yet today they are an integral part of the "working-class majority."

In order to resolve this difficulty it is necessary to realize that classes are formed in the course of struggles, that these struggles are structured by economic, political, and ideological conditions under which they take place, and that these objective conditions—simultaneously economic, political, and ideological—mold the practice of movements that seek to organize workers into a class. I will now examine these assertions.

Perhaps it is most important that the problem is simultaneously theoretical and political. Classes are not a datum prior to the history of concrete struggles. Social reality is not given directly through our senses. As Marx said, and as Gramsci was fond of repeating, it is in the realm of ideology that people become conscious of social relations. What people come to believe and what they happen to do is an effect of a long-term process of persuasion and organization by political and ideological forces engaged in numerous struggles for the realization of their goals.⁵⁹ Social cleavages, the experience of social differentiation, are never given directly to our consciousness. Social differences acquire the status of cleavages as an outcome of ideological and political struggles.⁶⁰

58. Robert Alford, *Party and Society* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963); Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960); Richard Rose and Derek Urwin, "Social Cohesion, Political Parties and Strains in Regimes," *Comparative Political Studies* 2 (1969): 7-67.

59. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 192.

60. E. P. Thompson's succinct clarification of this point is useful: "The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born—or enter involuntarily. Class-consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value systems, ideas, and institutional forms. If the experience appears as determined, class-consciousness does not." *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963), pp. 9-10.

In turn, Sartre's 1952 discussion is more problematic, both in terms of its place in Sartre's thought and its Leninist overtones. In that text Sartre argued that "the simple objective condition of producer defines the concrete man—his needs, his vital problems, the orientation of his thought, the nature of his relationship with others: it does not determine his belonging to a class." Jean Paul Sartre, *The Communists and Peace* (New York: G. Braziller, 1968), p. 96. He continued to argue that "classes do not naturally exist, but they are made," that classes are effects of struggles in which parties (or unions or whatever) are the conditions of effective identity, i.e., the identity of classes as subjects. These assertions express the theses of this paper, but Sartre's own emphasis on the preideological, prepolitical "simple objective condition of producer" led him at that time to an external, voluntaristic view of the party, namely Leninism.

Classes are not a datum prior to political and ideological practice. Any definition of people as workers—or individuals, Catholics, French speakers, Southerners, and the like—is necessarily immanent to the practice of political forces engaged in struggles to maintain or in various ways alter the existing social relations. Classes are organized and disorganized as outcomes of continuous struggles. Parties defining themselves as representing interests of various classes and parties purporting to represent the general interest, unions, newspapers, schools, public bureaucracies, civic and cultural associations, factories, armies, and churches—all participate in the process of class formation in the course of struggles that fundamentally concern the very vision of society. Is the society composed of classes or of individuals with harmonious interests? Are classes the fundamental source of social cleavage or are they to be placed alongside any other social distinction? Are interests of classes antagonistic or do they encourage cooperation? What are the classes? Which class represents interests more general than its own? Which constitute a majority? Which are capable of leading the entire society? These are the fundamental issues of ideological struggle. The ideological struggle is a struggle *about* class before it is a struggle *among* classes.

The process of class formation is not limited, however, to the realm of ideology. Political struggles, organized in a particular manner, also have as their effect the very form of the organization of class struggles. Kautsky understood this link clearly. "The economic struggle," he argued, "demands political rights and these will not fall from heaven. To secure and maintain them, the most vigorous political action is necessary."⁶¹ Political struggles concern the form of the state—of capitalist political relations—because the form of the state structures the form of class struggles.⁶² In Marx's view, universal suffrage "unchains" class struggles by allowing the dominated classes to openly organize in pursuit of their interests and by providing social mechanisms by which these interests can be pursued within limits. Bonapartism, in turn, is a form of state that forcibly represses class struggle on the part of the workers as well as of the bourgeoisie.

Under capitalist relations of production the carriers of the relations of production do not appear as such at the level of political institutions. Capitalist ideological and legal relations individualize the relations between these carriers as they appear in politics. Within capitalist political institutions they become individuals, "citizens,"

61. Kautsky, *Class Struggle*, p. 186.

62. Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*.

rather than capitalists, workers, and so on.⁶³ But this clearly does not signify that collective political actors do not constitute class organizations. To the contrary, what it means is precisely that *if* classes are to appear in politics they must be organized as political actors. Again, political class struggle is a struggle about class before it is a struggle among classes.

Neither does economic class struggle emerge mechanically from places within the system of production. Within the context of the problematic of the class-in-itself, it seems as if the relations of production determine *at least* the classes qua historical actors at the level of economic struggles—classes-in-economic-struggle. Lenin, as we know, thought for some time that such classes in economic struggle are determined by the relations of production, but they are all that is determined. If economic struggles could indeed be separated from politics and ideology, or at least if classes were indeed first formed at the level of economic relations and only then became organized politically and ideologically, one could have thought that classes are objectively determined at the level of the empty places within the system of production. Economic struggles, however, always appear historically in their concrete articulation within the totality of struggles, always in a form molded by political and ideological relations. The very right to organize is an effect of struggles that in turn shapes the form of class organization. Hence, the organization of economic struggles is not determined uniquely by the structure of the system of production.

Let us then record some conclusions to which we shall return: (1) classes are formed as an effect of struggles; (2) the process of class formation is a perpetual one: classes are continually organized, disorganized, and reorganized; (3) class formation is an effect of the totality of struggles in which multiple historical actors attempt to organize the same people as class members, as members of collec-

63. Since Poulantzas's argument to this effect in *Political Power and Social Classes* is well known, we should perhaps cite an earlier view:

Every minority rule is therefore socially organized both to concentrate the ruling class, equipping it for united and cohesive action, and simultaneously to split and disorganize the oppressed classes. . . . With a more or less conscious division of labor, all these [ideological apparatuses] further the aim of preventing the formation of an independent ideology among the oppressed classes of the population which would correspond to their own class interests; of binding the individual members of these classes as single individuals, mere 'citizens,' to an abstract state reigning over and above all classes; of *disorganizing these classes as classes*. . . . [Georg Lukacs, *History and Class-Consciousness* (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 65-66.]

tivities defined in other terms, sometimes simply as members of "the society."⁶⁴

E. P. Thompson once said that "class is defined by men as they live their own history, and, in the end, this is its only definition."⁶⁵ "In the end" this statement is correct, but we must understand more precisely what it means. It does not mean that classes organize themselves spontaneously, once and for all, or in a unique manner. What it does mean is that classes are the continual effects of the totality of struggles, struggles that assume particular forms given the organization of economic, ideological, and political relations.

VIII

Struggles that take place at any particular moment of history are structured by the form of organization of economic, political, and ideological relations. Politics and ideology have an autonomous effect upon the processes of class formation because they condition the struggles in the course of which classes become organized, disorganized, and reorganized.

Luxemburg's view of capitalist democracy emphasizing "the division between political struggle and economic struggle and their separation" is perhaps illuminating here. "On the one hand," Luxemburg wrote, "in the peaceful development, 'normal' for the bourgeois society, the economic struggle is fractionalized, disaggregated into a multitude of partial struggles limited to each firm, to each branch of production. On the other hand, the political struggle is conducted not by the masses through a direct action, but, in conformity with the structure of bourgeois state, in the representative fashion, by the pressure upon the legislative body."⁶⁶

"The structure of bourgeois state" has at least two effects: it separates the economic from the political struggles and it imposes a particular form upon the organization of classes in each of these struggles. Trade unions become organizations separate from political parties, and the organization of classes assumes a representative form. It is important to have in mind the counterfactual, even if so brilliantly advocated, alternative: the mass strike, which is simultaneously economic and political and in which the entire class directly engages in struggle. The mass strike is viewed as the act of superceding precisely

64. Thus Gramsci says: "The history of a party . . . can only be the history of a particular social group. But this group is not isolated; it had friends, kindred groups, opponents, enemies. The history of any given party can only emerge from the complex portrayal of the totality of society and State. . . ." *Prison Notebooks*, p. 151.

65. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 11.

66. Rosa Luxemburg, *Huelga de masas, partido y sindicatos* (Cordoba, 1970), p. 111.

those determinants that are imposed upon the process of class formation by the structure of bourgeois state. Yet in the "parliamentary period," "normal for the bourgeois society," workers become organized to some extent independently by unions and parties, and the masses do not act directly. They act through their leaders who at this moment become "representatives," representatives in the bourgeois state.

The methodological tenets of this analysis are worth repeating. In Luxemburg's view a class becomes formed as more than one collectivity-in-struggle, in this case as unions and electoral parties, but conceivably as cooperatives, clubs, intellectual circles, neighborhood associations, and so on. These collectivities-in-struggle constitute forms of insertion of occupants of places within the system of production in the "bourgeois state," that is, in a particular system of political and ideological relations. The manner in which these multiple collectivities-in-struggle are formed is molded by the structure of the bourgeois state, that is, precisely by the manner in which political and ideological relations are organized in a capitalist society.

Following these methodological principles let us examine somewhat more systematically those features of capitalist economic, political, and ideological relations that structure the struggles through which classes are formed.

The capitalist system of production is a system in which that part of the total social product that is withheld from current consumption is institutionalized in the form of profit, which is private in the sense that workers qua immediate producers have no claim to the product that they generate. While it is a technical fact of any economic organization that accumulation cannot take place in the long run without a part of the product being withheld from current consumption and allocated to increase productivity, the distinguishing characteristic of capitalist organization of production is that this part is appropriated privately and allocated to uses on the basis of the preferences of capitalists who are profit-takers. Hence, under the capitalist organization of production, profit is a *necessary* condition for the future realization of short-term material interests of any group in the society. If capitalists do not appropriate profit, if they do not exploit, then there will be no investment, no production, no consumption, no employment. Yet at the same time, the fact that capitalists appropriate profit is not a *sufficient* condition for the improvement of the material conditions of any group. Capitalists can invest productively, but they can also consume profit, hoard it, waste it, export it abroad. Exploitation *now* is a necessary

but not a sufficient condition for the improvement of the material life conditions of anyone in the future.⁶⁷

Capitalist democracy thus becomes the socially organized mechanism by which immediate producers can express their claims to that part of the product that has been extracted from them in the past and used to expand the amount of scarce goods. While as immediate producers workers have no institutionalized claim to the product, as citizens they can process such claims through the institutions of bourgeois democracy, fundamentally through the electoral institutions. Capitalist democracy is a system of institutionalized struggles over the realization of short-term interests, in which the outcomes are, within limits, indeterminate with regard to the positions occupied by people within the relations of production. Since the outcomes of conflicts processed through the democratic political institutions are within certain limits indeterminate, electoral institutions offer to the immediate producers a limited, yet sufficiently real opportunity to realize their short-term material interests. Participation in these institutions is instrumental with regard to realization of short-term interests.

Capitalist democracy is a particular form of organization. While the immediate producers can process their claims through unions, voluntary associations, clubs, newspapers, courts, and so on, the validity of such claims rests ultimately upon their electoral success. Capitalists struggle for the realization of their short-term material interests in the course of their everyday activity within the system of production. They continually "vote" for allocation of societal resources as they decide to invest or not, employ or fire labor, purchase or sell state obligations, export or import, ad infinitum. Moreover, they exert a direct influence over the state, since the state is dependent upon their private, economic actions. Workers, in turn, must seek to process their claims through elections, although obviously not only through elections. And elections are games of numbers, in which successes and failures are measured in votes, wherever they come from.

Capitalist relations of material production generate a particular knowledge of these relations. Since profit is the necessary condition of universal expansion, capitalists appear within capitalist societies as bearers of universal interest.⁶⁸ Their present interests happen to coincide with the future interests of anyone in the society: the larger

67. See Adam Przeworski, "Toward a Theory of Capitalist Theory," (Unpublished paper, Chicago, 1977), for details.

68. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*.

the profits that they appropriate, the greater the capacity of the entire society to improve the future conditions of material life. Demands on the part of any other group to improve the current conditions of their life appear as inimical to the realization of interests of the entire society in the future. Under capitalism conflicts over wages and profits appear as the trade-off between the present and the future. Capitalists are in a unique position by virtue of the organization of the capitalist system of production: their interests appear as universal, while the interests of all other groups appear as particularistic.⁶⁹

Moreover, the part of the product that is appropriated by the capitalists appears to be a reward to the "factor" that they contribute to production, "capital." Capitalist relations of production mystify exploitation under the appearance of the equivalence between the labor expended in the act of production and the wage paid for the labor power. One must take Marx, and Lukacs, seriously. At the level of the "immediate," the "lived" experience, social relations appear in an inverted form as relations among things; distribution appears to be a payment to the "factors of production"; profit made in the course of exchange, not labor. Exploitation is not immediately apparent to those whose surplus labor is being appropriated.

At the same time, given the capitalist organization of production, it is possible for any worker to escape his condition by becoming a bourgeois while it is not possible for *all* workers to do so. By definition, as long as a society is organized as capitalist, all workers cannot simultaneously become capitalists. Yet under conditions of economic freedom and legal equality, any worker can become a bourgeois. This fallacy of composition⁷⁰ mystifies the structural barriers immanent to the system of production by offering to individuals an opportunity to improve their life conditions.

These are some structural features of the organization of social relations as a capitalist democracy. They do not exhaust the list of determinants of concrete struggles. Some of such determinants become transformed over time, in the course of capitalist development.

69. This analysis, developed by Gramsci, should now be modified to take into account the ideological revolution made possible by Keynes's economic theory. In the light of this theory, it became legitimate to demand higher wages, since increases in wages lead to increased demand; hence, even if not automatically, increased investment, output, employment, and so on. Wage demands thus become universalistic: higher wages are in the interest of the entire society since they accelerate economic growth. Nevertheless, even if workers buy more, it is still capitalists who invest and they must obtain profit if they are to invest.

70. Jon Elster, "Contradictions: A Framework for the Theory of Political Organization" (Paper presented for the ECPR Workshop on Political Theory, London, 1975).

Others are specific to particular forms of organization of social relations in different capitalist societies. I have listed only some structural characteristics that are invariant and common to all societies organized as capitalist democracies. These characteristics constitute the objective conditions—economic, political, and ideological—under which various movements develop their practices of class formation.

IX

The assertion that social relations structure class struggles must not be interpreted in a mechanical fashion. Social relations—economic, political, or ideological—are not something that people “act out”⁷¹ in ways reflecting the places that they occupy, but are a structure of choices given at a particular moment of history. Social relations are given to a historical subject, individual or collective, as realms of possibilities, as structures of choice. Society is not a play without a director in which carriers of social relations act out their parts, but rather it is a set of conditions that determine what courses of action have what consequences for social transformations. Classes do not emanate from social relations, whether economic relations alone or in combination with all other relations. They constitute effects of practices, the object of which is precisely class organization, disorganization, or reorganization. Social relations are objective with regard to the processes of class formation only in the sense that they structure the struggles that have the formation of classes as their potential effect.

It is necessary, therefore, to examine the manner in which the organization of a society as a capitalist democracy appears as a structure of choices to those movements seeking to form workers into a class. In particular, I will attempt to demonstrate that the practice of socialist movements is not arbitrary but rather is structured by the economic, political, and ideological relations of capitalist democracy in such a manner as to generate a particular pattern of class formation.

Socialist movements are an outgrowth of historical conditions, and as such they are subject to multiple determinations. Socialist theory itself is nonarbitrary since it constitutes a particular form of consciousness of historical reality. It contains a *telos*, and it is not free of interest, but it also interprets a concrete historical reality.

71. Pierre Bourdieu, “Marriage Strategies as Strategies of Social Reproduction,” in *Family and Society*, ed. Robert Forster and Orest Ranum (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

Political predictions are always relative to a purpose, yet they are nonarbitrary in the anticipation of effects of political practices.⁷² "Measures of the sort proposed by the Socialist Party," says Kautsky at one point, with a full understanding of this determination, "are calculated to improve the position of the small producers so far as it is possible to improve it under existing conditions. To assist them as *producers* by fortifying them in the retention of their outlived method of production is impossible, for it is opposed to the course of economic development."⁷³

To assert this kind of determination is not to argue, however, that political forces are always compelled by historical circumstances to correctly understand the historical processes in which they participate.⁷⁴ Yet unless one adopts the vision in which science develops in the laboratory,⁷⁵ one must understand that political practice is a process of theory testing. "We *are* eating the pudding," as Althusser puts it.

This point bears some emphasis. That political forces interpret and mold social reality must not lead us to the conclusion that this process is therefore voluntaristic; that somehow objective constraints exist at the level of social reality qua object of knowledge and yet not at the level of the subject embedded in the very same relations the knowledge of which he produces. If social reality is lawful, so must be the social process that produces the knowledge of this reality.

Socialist forces enter into the process of class formation with a theory of capitalist development and class structure. They become organized on a terrain of particular institutions. Their mode of appeal and of organization is determined both by the theory and by the immediate goals compatible with the theoretical understanding of

72. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 171.

73. Kautsky, *Class Struggle*, p. 214.

74. This seems to be the implication of Lukacs's view in which the party becomes the organizational mediation between the "potential" and the "actual" consciousness, where the former constitutes the closest approximation to objective "universal" truth that is possible at a given moment of historical development. See Lukacs, *History and Class-Consciousness*. See also Lucio Colletti, *From Rousseau to Lenin* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), p. 91; and Piccone's apt characterization of Hegelian marxism, in which "the historical validity of the proletarian perspective is *solely a result of its objective goal* of genuine universality through the abolition of classes altogether and, consequently, the realization of a society of subjects." Paul Piccone, "Korsch in Spain," *New German Critique* 6 (1975): 156 (italics supplied).

75. As does Thomas Kuhn in his influential book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). The popularity of this view seems to some extent due to its standing halfway between Schlick and Lenin: science is a social process but "social" means enclosed within academia, where the discourse is formulated in terms of logical truths.

the concrete conjuncture. In the course of practical activities they discover that some aspects of the theory are not politically operational, that practice guided by the theory is politically or ideologically ineffective. They are compelled, by the very practice, to re-examine the theory in order to identify those elements of it that constitute barriers to effective practice.

What then are these barriers? I have argued that objective conditions appear to the historical actors as structures of choices, as realms of possibility and impossibility. What then are these choices?

The first choice faced by any movement attempting to form workers into a class is whether to participate in the bourgeois political institutions, more specifically, in the electoral institutions. This issue has continued to divide working-class movements, from the split within the First International in 1870 through the debates within the Second International about participation in bourgeois governments until today. As each movement enters into electoral competition, new movements appear to continue the tradition according to which participation in the parliamentary battles among "frog and mice" is simply a manifestation of "parliamentary cretinism." Yet precisely because workers are exploited as immediate producers and precisely because elections are within limits instrumental toward the satisfaction of their short term material interests, all socialist parties either enter into electoral struggles or lose their supporters. The strategy of total noncooperation, a strategy pursued by the German socialists prior to the Erfurth Congress, was unfeasible. It was unfeasible because it created a risk of alienating workers, the specter of a completely apolitical syndicalist movement concerned exclusively with short-term economic demands. As Schumpeter observed, "a wholly negative attitude, though quite satisfactory as a principle, would have been impossible for any party of more than negligible political importance to keep up. It would inevitably have collided with most of the real desiderata of organized labor and, if persisted in for any length of time, would have reduced the followers to a small group of political ascetics." "No party," Schumpeter continued, "can live without a program that holds out the promise of immediate benefits."⁷⁶ For workers the only way to obtain immediate benefits is to utilize the opportunity provided by bourgeois political institutions, regardless of how limited that opportunity might be.

This necessity of organizing workers on the terrain of electoral

76. Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1942), pp. 316, 317.

institutions has profound consequences for the political practice of socialist parties. They become the electoral, the "bourgeois," parties of the working class. And practical consequences are sufficiently direct: elections are contests of numbers, electoral success requires recruiting the maximal number of supporters, whoever they may be.⁷⁷

Thus, electoral parties of workers face the choice whether to act as a class organization or to seek electoral success.⁷⁸ Electoral success requires that class structure be conceptualized in terms of propensity of mobilization and support; it requires socialist parties to adhere to the broadest conceivable concept of the proletariat and even to go beyond this broad concept by emphasizing similar life situations and "parallel interests." In search for electoral support socialist parties appeal to members of other classes as they organize workers into a class.⁷⁹

It may be instructive at this point to return to Kautsky. His analysis of the relations between the occupants of places within the system of production and the socialist movement is formulated in terms of an electoral strategy and its corollary search for support. Kautsky understands that socialist parties are not the only organization of workers. Socialist parties must cope with the fact that workers are distrustful of socialism, that they still perceive socialism as an idea of the enlightened bourgeoisie. Moreover, differences in skill create an internal division among workers. But this distrust and these differences are being overcome in the form of the "movement of labor, or the labor movement." The proletariat is becoming homogenized: both at the expense of the labor aristocracy and of the disorganized mob. What emerges is a wage-earning industrial prole-

77. In the 1895 introduction to Marx's *Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850* (Moscow, 1960), p. 23, Engels heralded the electoral successes of the German S.P.D., predicting victory for the working class through electoral means. His prediction was conditioned, however, upon "conquering the greater part of the middle strata of society, petty bourgeoisie and small peasants." Already in 1886, Engels wrote to an American friend that "one or two million votes . . . in favor of a workers party acting in good faith, are actually infinitely more valuable than a hundred thousand votes obtained by a platform representing a perfect doctrine." Letter from Engels to Vishnevetsky, December 28, 1886.

78. See Adam Przeworski and John Sprague, "A History of Western European Socialism" (Paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D. C., 1977), for details.

79. Thus elections, contrary to MacIver's or Lipset's views, are not simply a peaceful expression of class struggles. They are a form of organization of class struggles. Classes do not simply become organized; they become organized in a particular way. See Robert Morrison MacIver, *The Web of Government* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1947); and Lipset, *Political Man*.

tariat, and this proletariat increasingly comes to dominate all other proletarians. And, "it is precisely this militant proletariat which is the most fruitful recruiting ground for socialism. The socialist movement is nothing more than that part of this militant proletariat which has become conscious of its goal."⁸⁰

However, the Socialist Party represents the interests not only of the narrowly defined proletariat, but of all people who are "oppressed and exploited" by capitalism. "The Socialist Party," the Erfurth Programme states, "struggles not for any class privileges, but for the abolition of classes and class-rule, for equal rights and equal duties for all, without distinction of sex and race." Most important for our discussion, the party represents not only the future universal interest. It promotes interests of people other than workers in its current activity, "it is the champion of all the exploited and oppressed." It is becoming a *national* party; "it tends to become the representative, not only of the industrial wage-earners, but of all laboring and exploited classes, or in other words, of the great majority of the population." The Socialist Party, the Erfurth Programme asserts, "opposes in present-day society, not only the exploitation and oppression of wage workers, but also every form of exploitation and oppression, be it directed against a class, a party, a sex, or a race."⁸¹

But how do socialists appeal to workers, to carriers of capitalist relations of production? We have seen that exploitation is not immediately apparent to those whose surplus is being appropriated. The spontaneous experience is one of economic deprivation and one of opportunities for individual advancement. Capitalist relations must be demystified, must be criticized, if the exploitation and the possibility of emancipation are to become visible to the immediate producers. But if any ideology is to be effective in instituting an image of social relations, if it is to achieve the effect of generating a collective project of social transformation, then it must correspond to the manner in which people experience their everyday life. Hence, the effectiveness of socialist ideology with regard to workers depends upon characteristics of their life situation that are secondary from the point of view of class membership, namely, size of revenue, life style, position within the relations of authority, work conditions, character of work—"misery," "poverty," "oppression." Socialist ideology becomes structured in terms of absolute

80. Kautsky, *Class Struggle*, p. 183.

81. *Ibid.*, pp. 159, 211, 210, 160.

or relative poverty ("equality"), in terms of work conditions, in terms of life conditions, in terms of all these Weberian characteristics. These characteristics are objective, in the same manner as height, weight, or eye color. Yet they become "real," they come to validate and invalidate the practices of class formation because socialist movements are forced to appeal to these characteristics by virtue of the immediate knowledge generated by the capitalist relations of production.

But these characteristics do not always, and did not since the middle of the nineteenth century, coincide with the theoretical denotandum of the working class.⁸² Those separated from the means of production, forced to sell their labor power for a wage, and exploited in the course of capitalist production need not be poor in terms of historically relative criteria. Poverty, oppression, misery, boredom, fatigue, even alienation, do not distinguish workers denoted by the concept of exploitation from all kinds of people who happen to be poor, oppressed, or deprived. Moreover, these secondary characteristics internally differentiate the theoretically defined workers.

In conclusion, the political practice of socialist movements has its determinants in the structure of capitalist economic, ideological, and political relations. Inserted into electoral competition, socialist movements view class structure in terms of the interest-determined likelihood of collective identification with the "working class." Given the rules of electoral competition, these movements become concerned about the numbers as they attempt to maximize politically expressed support. At the same time, they are forced to emphasize those characteristics of the narrowly defined proletariat that do not distinguish it from many other groups in capitalist societies.

Political and ideological relations of bourgeois democracy lead

82. This is one source of difficulties involved in Lenin's definition of class. According to this definition, "classes are large groups of people distinguished from one another by their positions in a given historical system of social production by their relations to the means of production (usually sanctioned and regulated by law), by their role in social organization of production and, what follows, by the manner of acquiring and the magnitude of the share of social wealth which they dispose. Classes are such groups of people of which one can appropriate the labor of another because of their different positions in a given economic system." V.I. Lenin, *Sochineniya* (Moscow, 1949-52), 29: 377.

The problem is that several characteristics that Lenin treats as synonymous do not remain in a constant relation to developmental stages of particular capitalist socioeconomic formations. Size of income need not follow closely the relation to the means of production: in contemporary Sweden incomes from employment slightly exceed those derived from property, although the latter do not include undistributed corporate profits. The role of the owners of the means of production in the social organization of production also becomes altered when the state assumes several functions of private firms.

to the organization of the working class in the form of mass electoral parties. As a result, the process of organization of workers as a class becomes fused with the process of mobilization of popular political support. These parties at the same time organize workers and seek electoral support of the "masses." They continually seek support among the old petite bourgeoisie and, as capitalist development proceeds, they increasingly focus their organizing efforts on the various categories of people who do not participate directly in the capitalist process of production, in particular the "new middle class."⁸³

This fusion of the process of formation of the working class with supraclass political mobilization has consequences that extend beyond a search for electoral allies. It has effects not only upon the manner of class organization of the nonmanual wage-earner, but also upon the general dynamic of ideology in capitalist societies and in turn upon the manner of organization of workers. As socialist movements appeal to people other than workers, they dissolve that privileged nexus, that unique relationship between the proletariat and "its party." They cease to be that "organic" expression of the historical mission of the proletariat, distinct from and opposed to all other parties. But the disassociation of the nexus between workers and the socialist movement has the general effect of reinforcing a classless image of society. It decreases the salience of class as the basis for collective identification. It leads, therefore, to the resurgence of other bases of collective identification, whether these are based on the size of revenue, character of work, religion, language, region, sex, or race. In this sense, the process of organization of the masses disorganizes the workers.

83. This elementary formulation of the problem of class formation has direct implications for arguments around the issue of "deradicalization" of the working class in the course of capitalist development. The debate about deradicalization is addressed to an incorrectly formulated problem. What it presupposes, as Thomas Burton Bottomore, *Classes in Modern Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), actually observed, is that there was some glorious past in which the working class was militant. The working class was simply not organized as a class, and this absence of organization, coupled with a trigger-happy posture on the part of the bourgeoisie, led to instances in which workers were forced to revert to acts of heroism in desperate defense of their subsistence. In the course of history the working class became organized, largely in the form of unions and parties. Collective bargaining and competitive elections make such acts of sacrifice no longer necessary. Organized workers do not have to climb barricades every time capitalism experiences an economic crisis, but this implies little about their "militancy." History of working class in the now developed capitalist societies is a history of *organization* on the only terrain in which such an organization was not completely repressed and at the same time was to some extent effective—the terrain of bourgeois institutions. It is a history of organization, not of "deradicalization."

X

Throughout the history of Marxist thought the same problem has repeatedly appeared under various guises with regard to class analysis. This problem can be defined as a dilemma in terms of which classes are thought either to emanate spontaneously and uniquely from relations of production or to require a voluntaristic, external agent in the form of a vanguard party if they are to be formed as collective actors. This dilemma leads to practical controversies that focus on the form of party organization (mass versus vanguard), on the strategy of coalitions (tactical versus fronts versus blocks) and on the strategy of revolution (from above versus insurrectionary).

At the same time, this dilemma generates theoretical difficulties, for it makes it impossible to formulate the question of why carriers of economic relations do not act politically as class members, at least in terms other than "not yet." If the places occupied in the relations of production are thought to be the only determinant of collective organization, then, indeed, once the working class is formed as a "class-in-itself," it should progressively become a political actor. Thus, to the extent that workers do not act politically qua workers, Marxist theory turns out to be at least "incomplete," and "residual" explanations must be found as to why, for example, French working-class Catholic widows are virtually certain to vote for the right.⁸⁴

These difficulties arise out of two assumptions that are traditionally found in Marxist class analysis: (1) that only the relations of production constitute objective determinants of class relations, and (2) that classes are continuous historical subjects, that is, once they are formed, they only continue to develop as political actors.

An alternative formulation of the problematic of class analysis emerges when some consequences are drawn from Marx's theory of capitalist development and, in particular, when these consequences are placed within the perspective in which (1) ideological and political relations are seen as structuring the processes of class formation in concrete historical conjunctures, and (2) these relations are themselves viewed as being socially produced in the course of class struggles. Classes then become viewed as continual effects of struggles enclosed within the structure of economic, ideological, and political

84. Mattei Dogan, "Political Cleavage and Social Stratification in France and Italy," in *Party Systems and Voter Alignments*, ed. S.M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan (New York: Free Press, 1967): 129-97.

relations upon the organization and consciousness of the carriers of the relations of production.

This formulation resolves the dilemma by introducing a more complex model of causality to account for the determination of class relations. The dilemma appears within the model in which the only mechanism of determination is the expression of objective economic *relations* in subjective-ideological-political *struggles*. In place of this model, our conceptualization distinguishes the determination of objective ideological and political *relations* by objective economic relations from the determination of struggles by the structured totality of these relations. Moreover, this last mechanism of determination is *reciprocal* in the sense that while the structured totality of economic, ideological, and political relations constitutes at each moment of history the conjuncture of class struggles, these struggles in turn have the effect of transforming or preserving these relations. In other words, while objective conditions determine the limits of class struggles, these struggles can transform such determinants by altering economic, ideological, or political relations.

By recognizing the objective nature of ideological and political relations, this formulation permits us to analyze the effects of these relations upon the processes in the course of which classes are continually organized, disorganized, and reorganized. Hence, while organized movements are viewed within this perspective as active agents of class formation, their practices are neither "external" to anything nor free from determination. To the contrary, this formulation directs us to analyze the objective determinants of the practices of concrete historical actors with regard to the process of class formation. We have indicated possible directions for such an analysis by showing that, during "normal" times of capitalist democracy, working-class movements must become organized as mass electoral parties that do not distinguish workers from members of other classes.

This formulation leads at the same time to an emphasis on the discontinuity of class organization. Classes are no longer viewed as continuous historical subjects. Class struggles, by which we mean struggles *about* class formation as well as struggles *among* organized class forces, always take place in specific conjunctures. Their form becomes altered with the change of conjunctures, for example, with the introduction of universal suffrage or of legally enforced collective bargaining, with the decay of the legitimizing effects of the market, and, particularly, with changes in the form of capitalist state.

Thus, class struggles cannot be reduced to struggles between or among classes. Or, to put it differently, classes-in-struggle are an effect of struggles about class. But who are those who are struggling if struggles about class are prior to classes? In what sense are they prior? Are all struggles class struggles? How can we recognize class struggles?

Who struggles about class formation if struggles about class are prior to classes-in-struggle? In each successive historical conjuncture some carriers of the relations of production are organized as such, some are not organized in any manner, and some appear in struggles about class organization in forms that do not correspond in a one-to-one manner to places occupied in even a broadly conceived system of production, such as "members of the society," "the poor," Catholics, Bavarians, and so on. Perhaps it is better to formulate the point in a converse form: students, women, Protestants, consumers are not classes and to the extent to which they appear as collective actors in struggles, these conflicts are not between or among classes. The concrete actors who appear at the phenomenal level, "in struggle" in a particular historical situation, need not correspond to places in broadly conceived relations of production, precisely because they are an effect of struggles about class formation. Indeed, the bourgeoisie is successful in the struggles about class formation when social cleavages appear at the phenomenal level in forms that do not correspond to positions within the relations of production. Thus, in each concrete conjuncture struggles to organize, disorganize, or reorganize classes are not limited to struggles between or among classes.

Does this view imply that Marx's statements concerning class struggle as the universal feature and the motor of history are tautological, since any struggle that might have led to class formation is a class struggle? To put it differently: can there be a historical period in which means of production are privately owned, yet in which no class struggles occur, or is it true by definition that there are always class struggles, whether or not the participants are classes? It seems to me that if class struggle is understood as one between or among classes, then these statements are empirical and false: there have been periods with different modes of production in which conflicts between classes did not occur. If class struggle is understood as any struggle that has the effect of class organization or disorganization, then these statements are tautological. This is how I think they *should* be interpreted. What they assert is that all conflicts that occur at any moment of history can be understood in historical terms if and only if they are viewed as effects of and in turn having

an effect upon class formation. These statements play the role of a methodological postulate.

This postulate directs us to analyze the connections between conflicts at concrete moments of time and development over long periods of time. Here lies the uniqueness of Marxist theory in general and of the Marxist concept of class in particular. As Marx himself realized, the unique status of this theory rests neither upon the observation that societies are divided into classes, nor upon the assertion that societies undergo lawful transformations in the course of their histories; it rests instead upon the postulate according to which class struggle is the motor of history, that is, the concrete conflicts and the long-term developments *systematically* affect each other. Moreover, they do so in a particular manner: conditions inherited from the past determine the realm of possible transformations of these conditions at a particular moment. Under the conditions that are objective in the sense that they are inherited and are thus given at any moment, concrete actors enter into conflicts to preserve or to transform in a particular manner these conditions.

But why should the analysis of this connection between conflicts at a moment and development over time be a *class* analysis, why should it be formulated in terms of the relation between concrete collective actors and places within a broadly defined system of production and exchange? Why should we ask questions concerning the composition of the concrete collectivities-in-struggle in terms of the locations of their members within the system of production? Why should we ask questions concerning the relations between the historical projects of such collectivities-in-struggle and the interests of people identified again by their location within the system of production? Conversely, why should we analyze outcomes of concrete struggles in terms of their consequences for the preservation or transformation of the relations of production?

It is obvious that concrete struggles can be analyzed in terms other than those of class: they can be analyzed as struggles among groups with different levels of income or different degrees of authority, such as struggles between sexes, races, religious groups, regions, ethnic groups, and so on. Should then a conflict over local control of schools, the rift between Catholics and Protestants, or the division between Anglophones and Francophones be analyzed in class terms, and if so, why? Should the feminist movement? Should the black one?

I can only suggest an answer, incomplete and rudimentary. In analyzing any struggle, the questions to be considered are these: What brings the particular conflict about? What led the participants

to be organized in the particular form? What are the potential outcomes? What are the consequences of these outcomes for future development? All of these questions concern objective conditions: the conditions that made the emergence of a particular conflict possible, the conditions that made the particular organization, ideology, relations of forces possible, the conditions that make particular outcomes plausible or implausible; and finally, but importantly, the conditions that may be created as the result of a particular conflict. The feminist movement could have become a mass movement only when economic conditions permitted a new division of labor: racial problems in the United States cannot be resolved without a major economic transformation, and so on. This is not to argue that economic, political, or ideological conditions uniquely determine the dynamics of such movements and that the analysis of struggles can therefore be reduced to an analysis of objective conditions. Objective conditions determine realms of possibility, but only of possibility: their analysis is thus necessary but not sufficient for the understanding of concrete struggles.

The theoretical function of class analysis is thus to identify the objective conditions and the objective consequences of concrete struggles. "Class" then is a name of a relation, not of a collection of individuals. Individuals occupy places within the system of production; collective actors appear in struggles at concrete moments of history. Neither of these—occupants of places or participants in collective actions—are classes. Class is the relation between them, and in this sense class struggles concern the social organization of such relations.

None of the above, however, answers the original question, namely why is the reference of class analysis to the system of production even broadly defined? Indeed, is it not inconsistent to insist on the objective nature of political and ideological relations with regard to the concrete struggles and yet to seek the reference of these struggles in terms of the system of production alone? It is here that my answer becomes rudimentary and, to a great extent, programmatic. What is lawful about historical development is the development of the forces of production, specifically, the process of capitalist accumulation. The places-to-be-occupied by concrete individuals become transformed in the process of development of the forces of production, and they become transformed in a manner characteristic of the organization of a capitalist system of production. If "authority relations" developed autonomously in a specific manner, then we would, à la Dahrendorf, analyze the concrete struggles in terms of the connections between the concrete collectivities-in-struggle and

the places occupied within those relations. If the "value system" developed autonomously in a specific manner, then we would, à la Parsons, establish the relations between the concrete struggles and the structure of the value system. To put it differently, if the continuity of history were to be found among relations of authority or among societal values, then we could understand social development in terms of the relations between concrete historical actors and the structure of authority or the structure of the value system.⁸⁵

The assumption of class analysis is thus that the historical development of capitalist societies is to be understood in terms of the development of the capitalist system of production, more specifically, in terms of the process of the accumulation of capital and all of its attendant consequences. This assumption is programmatic in the sense that all hypotheses central to any theory direct us to a particular mode of analysis.

XI

None of these conclusions should be treated as anything but possible directions into which Marxist class analysis might move or perhaps is moving. Several arguments certainly require clarification; several hypotheses call for a historical validation. Nevertheless, it might be useful to examine the implications of this perspective for the specific problem that served as the leitmotif throughout this essay, namely, the class character of the "middle class."

It has been suggested recently that the theory of the growing polarization between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat was not the only theory developed by Marx, or at least not the only theory consistent with the main core of his economic thought. Nicolaus, in particular, has argued that the polarization thesis dates back to the *Communist Manifesto*, a text written "before Marx had more than the vaguest notions of the political economy of capitalism."⁸⁶

85. This assertion raises a number of questions concerning Weber and Parsons. I am persuaded that Weber did not have, and given his methodological tenets could not have had, a theory of history. The case of Parsons is more ambiguous, for it may be thought that he did develop a theory linking social development with social structure, where the mapping is provided by the concept of "role." Yet in my view Parsons does not have a theory of history because: (1) the motor of change, functional disturbances, are treated as given exogenously, (2) the structuring subsystem—the value system—is not described as a set of empty places, and (3) the manner in which value systems condition behavioral systems is not specified.

86. Marx, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 24. Surprisingly, another person whose notions must have been equally vague accepted this thesis without agreeing with Marx's economic analysis in the *Communist Manifesto*. Proudhon wrote in 1863: "... little by little all classes are reduced to two: the upper, that is an aristocracy, bourgeoisie, or patriciate, and the lower, that is the common people or proletariat." Stewart Edwards, *Selected Writings*

But as Marx freed himself from the "Hegelian choreography," he developed a theory that fully anticipated the necessity of the growth of new intermediate classes in the course of capitalist development. The textual evidence cited by the proponents of this thesis consists principally of one quote from the *Theories of Surplus Value*, in which Marx criticizes Ricardo, who "forgot to emphasize . . . the constant increase of the middle classes, who stand in the middle between the workers on the one side and the capitalists and landed proprietors on the other side, who are for the most part supported directly by revenue, who rest as a burden on the laboring foundation, and who increase the social security and the power of the upper ten thousand."⁸⁷

But the issue does not concern the text. The problem is whether "the law of the surplus class," as Nicolaus terms this thesis, follows from Marx's economic theory or at least is logically consistent with it. Nicolaus, in particular, argues that the emergence of middle classes is a necessary logical consequence of Marx's theory. His argument rests completely on an underconsumptionist reading of Marx. Since workers consume less than they produce, Nicolaus argues, someone must consume more than they produce, ergo, there must emerge a "surplus class." A few quotes from Marx concerning Malthus are then adduced in support of this interpretation.

Interpretations of Marx's theory in underconsumptionist terms are generally based on an implicit and unwarranted assumption that surplus cannot be consumed in the form of constant capital rather than revenue.⁸⁸ But the issues here are more specific. It is true that production of surplus product beyond the costs of constant capital and workers' subsistence is in any capitalist society a necessary condition for physical survival of persons who are not directly engaged in the production of those commodities satisfying basic material needs. If there is no surplus, no one but workers can survive. But the converse of this argument—that surplus is a *sufficient* condition for the emergence of the middle class—is both unpersuasive and incomplete.⁸⁹

of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (Garden City, N.J.: Anchor Books, 1969), p. 168.

87. Martin Nicolaus, "Proletariat and the Middle Class in Marx: Hegelian Choreography and the Capitalist Dialectic," *Studies on the Left* 7 (1967): 45; John Urry, "Towards a Structural Theory of the Middle Class," *Acta Sociologica* 16 (1973): 176; Ian Gough, "Marx's Theory of Productive and Unproductive Labour," *New Left Review* 76 (1972): 70.

88. David Yaffe, "The Marxian Theory of Crisis, Capital and the State," *Economy and Society* 2 (1975): 186-232.

89. The concept of the "middle class" carries distributional connotations. It has indeed happened in most developed capitalist societies that some salaried employees and petits

The problem of places other than capitalists and workers appears in Marx not because there is surplus product that cannot find consumers but because there is surplus *labor power* that cannot find productive employment. Rejecting the regulatory character of Malthusian population dynamic,⁹⁰ Marx argued that, regardless of the dynamic of population, capitalism will in the course of its development reduce the relative number of people who are necessary to produce, thereby generating the "relative surplus population." This is indeed a fundamental law of capitalist accumulation: the production of "relative surplus population" that, as Marx said, "exists in every possible form. Every labourer belongs to it during the time when he is only partially employed or wholly unemployed."⁹¹

The starting point of the analysis of the middle class must be the dynamic of capitalist accumulation. This accumulation has one structural effect of basic importance from our point of view, namely, that it generates surplus labor as a long-term tendency as it generates surplus product repeatedly in single cycles of production. Marx's model, faithfully followed by Kautsky, is the following. Accumulation of capital is a necessary condition of capitalist production. As capital becomes accumulated, capitalist relations of production expand to all areas of economic activity. Subjected to capitalist competition, small producers of all kinds are pushed out of the process of production. They become available for purchase as sellers of labor power, the only commodity they can sell if they are to survive. Yet at the same time, under the pressure of competition, capitalists are compelled constantly to develop and introduce labor-saving innovations, to revolutionize methods of production by increasing the mass and the value of capital in its objectified form and thereby by making

bourgeois obtain incomes larger than most workers and smaller than most capitalists. These patterns of income distribution are important for they construct the immediate experience of social relations and thus serve to validate competing ideologies. But they do not explain, they must be explained. That some people obtain incomes larger than some yet smaller than others does not account for their role as a historical subject in the process of transformation or preservation of social relations. The question is precisely why did class struggles result in the situation in which particular categories of places in the capitalist system obtain particular shares of surplus as revenue. To treat the distributionally defined "middle class" as an actor in the struggles by which shares of surplus product become allocated to particular categories would be clearly tautological, for it would assume exactly that which must be explained. The question is why certain sectors of the petite bourgeoisie and of salaried employees are located in the middle of income distribution; the answer cannot be that it is because they are the "middle class."

90. Paul Sweezy, *The Theory of Capitalist Development* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1942), pp. 86 ff.

91. Karl Marx, *Capital* (New York: International Publishers, 1967), I: 640-44.

production independent of living labor. The result is a growing hiatus between the quantity of available labor power and labor necessary for capitalist production. In a rational society, labor would be distributed in such a way as to provide some free time for everyone.⁹² But under capitalism some people are simply excluded from productive exercise of their labor power.

Surplus labor power is thus generated when capitalist development simultaneously destroys other forms of organization of production and reduces the relative need for labor within the capitalist system of production. The rates of the process by which surplus labor power is generated depend upon (1) the marginal rate of growth of labor productivity with regard to the growth of capital (measurement problems are obvious), (2) the marginal rate at which noncapitalist places of production are destroyed when the productivity of capitalist labor expands, (3) the rate of growth of capital with regard to time, and (4) the rate of growth of population. These indications are probably sufficient to abandon the facade we have maintained above: that this is a simple process, proceeding smoothly and steadily. Clearly, one is directed right back to a theory of capitalist development, and it is at least uncertain whether any such theory can today answer the questions posed by this formulation.⁹³

Nevertheless, whatever the exact dynamic of this process, in order to develop a theory of class structure in capitalist formations it is necessary to understand the forms of class organization assumed by this surplus labor power. The problem for Nicolaus is to explain how the "surplus class" assumes the particular form of a "middle class."⁹⁴ It is conceivable that all surplus product would accrue to capitalists and surplus labor would starve; it is conceivable that it would be consumed by a "welfare class," composed of those permanently excluded from economic activities; that it would be distributed over the life-spans of different individuals, and so on. In none of these cases would there be a middle class standing "between" workers and capitalists.

Faced with this problem, both Nicolaus and Urry argue that capitalist development makes it technically necessary that a middle

92. There is nothing utopian about fishing in the afternoons.

93. Note moreover the arguments by Burawoy and Castels who, while disagreeing on some important points, demonstrate that migrant workers may be used under some conditions as productive labor, thus accelerating the process of the generation of surplus labor. See Michael Burawoy, "The Functions and Reproduction of Migrant Labor: Comparative Material from Southern Africa and the United States," *American Journal of Sociology* 81 (1976): 1050-87; and Manuel Castels, "Immigrant Workers and Class Struggles in Advanced Capitalism: The Western European Experience," *Politics & Society* 5 (1975): 33-66.

94. Urry, "Towards a Structural Theory of the Middle Class."

class would emerge. "The rise in productivity," Nicolaus asserts, "requires such a class of unproductive workers to fulfill the functions of distributing, marketing, researching, financing, managing, keeping track of and glorifying the swelling surplus product. This class of unproductive workers, service workers, or servants for short, is the middle class."⁹⁵

It is within this context that we must view the role played by the concept of "productive labor" within the recent controversies about class.⁹⁶ If we accept Mandel's succinct summary, productive labor is "all labor which creates, modifies, or conserves use-values or which is *technically indispensable* for realizing them" ⁹⁷ Productive labor becomes a category relevant in the course of discussions of class because it is this labor that is necessary to produce all that is produced, because this is the labor that is exploited, and because this is the labor that is capable of taking over and organizing the process of production without capitalists.⁹⁸ It is productive labor that Marx expected to diminish in terms relative to the total supply of labor power, hence producing a "surplus population" that can "exist in every possible form."

The question thus becomes what labor is necessary for capitalist accumulation. Given capitalism at a particular stage of its development, what are the requirements for reproduction of capitalist social relations? The problem is not a definitional one; nor does it have anything to do with any interests, as O'Connor seems to believe.⁹⁹ Marx's hair-splitting over workers in storage houses constituted an attempt to answer precisely this question: are all warehouse workers necessary for capitalist accumulation or only those who store products that are perishable?¹⁰⁰

We do not know what kinds of labor are necessary for the production of capitalist relations. We are today less inclined to believe, as Marx did, that capitalist relations, not only of production but also legal and ideological relations, reproduce themselves "of themselves," by mere repetition of cycles of production.¹⁰¹ We tend to

95. Nicolaus, "Proletariat and the Middle Class in Marx," p. 46.

96. Gough, "Marx's Theory of Productive and Unproductive Labour"; Yaffe, "Marxian Theory"; Nicos Poulantzas, *Les Classes sociales dans le capitalisme aujourd'hui* (Paris, 1974); Emmanuel Terray, "Proletaire, salarie, travailleur productif," *Contradictions*, vol. 2 (1972); and Mifhat Vaisov, "Sui concetti di lavoro produttivo e improduttivo," *Critica Marxista* 9 (1971): 121-35.

97. Mandel, *Formation of the Economic Thought of Karl Marx*, pp. 191-92.

98. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

99. James O'Connor, "Productive and Unproductive Labor," *Politics & Society*, vol. 5 (1976).

100. Gough, "Marx's Theory of Productive and Unproductive Labour."

101. Marx, *Capital*, 3: 694.

suspect, therefore, that all those people employed in the "apparatuses" are actually necessary for continuing capitalist accumulation. But we have few, if any, specific answers. Actually, the tendency has been to jump into the abyss of functionalism; whatever happens seems to be a "function" that has the effect of reproducing capitalist relations, and all that happens is necessary to reproduce capitalism.

It does not matter that for Nicolaus unproductive workers are *required* to fulfill the functions, but what is important is that certainly not all of the relative surplus population becomes so functionally employed. While Marx and Engels often emphasized the technical role of capitalists and their delegates as organizers of the process of production and while Marx explicitly mentioned engineers and others as part of the "global laborer," all those people who command, catalogue, manage, mediate, and serve are frequently treated as a superfluous artifact of *political* class relations of capitalism and not as a necessary outcome of capitalist accumulation.¹⁰² Moreover, Marx's "servants" were certainly not Nicolaus's "middle class." They are people who cannot find any productive employment, who are left to their own fate to "eke out a miserable existence." If they are to succeed in surviving, they can indeed do so only as "servants," and thus they include all those not "usefully" employed: domestic servants as well as policemen, lawyers and criminals, valets and politicians. These are the people whom Kautsky described as described as "parasites" and about whom Marx had only to say that "from whore to pope, there is a lot of such rubble."¹⁰³

102. Engels, *Conditions of the Working Class in England*, p. 107. Still in his "choreographic" stage, Marx referred to "an unemployed surplus population for which there is no place either on the land or in the towns, and which accordingly reaches out for state offices as a sort of respectable alms, and provokes the creation of state posts." Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Moscow, 1934) p. 1120. Also Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 13: "The democratic-bureaucratic system has given rise to a great mass of functions which are not all justified by the social necessities of production, though they are justified by the political necessities of the dominant fundamental group." In the 1970 postscript to "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," Louis Althusser took a surprisingly intentionalist position with regard to this issue, arguing strongly that

The reproduction of the relations of production, the ultimate aim of the ruling class, cannot therefore be a merely technical operation training and distributing individuals for the different posts in the 'technical division' of labour. In fact there is no 'technical division' of labour except in the ideology of the ruling class: every 'technical' division, every 'technical' organization of labor is the form and mask of a *social* (= class) division and organization of labour. The reproduction of the relations of production can therefore only be a class undertaking. It is realized through a class struggle which counterposes the ruling class and the exploited class. [In *Lenin and Philosophy*, ed. Louis Althusser (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), pp. 183-84.]

103. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, ed. Martin Nicolaus (New York: 1973), pp. 272-73.

Is the middle class technically indispensable for capitalist accumulation? "The economic machinery of the modern system of production," Kautsky wrote, "constitutes a more and more delicate and complicated mechanism: its uninterrupted operation depends constantly more upon whether each of its wheels fits in with the others and does the work expected of it. Never yet did any system of production stand in such a need of careful direction as does the present one." We would thus expect the author to continue by saying, exactly as Nicolaus and Urry do, that capitalism creates numerous places the function of which is to coordinate, direct, plan, manage, and administer this complicated system. But this is not Kautsky's conclusion. Instead, Kautsky continues, "the institution of private property makes it impossible to introduce plan and order into this system."¹⁰⁴

Perhaps one has to go back to *Capital* and particularly to the more popular *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* to appreciate more fully this emphasis on the anarchy of capitalist production, on the incompatibility of plan and order with the institutions of private property. Living in the post-Keynesian era, we may forget that Marx's theory was written during a time when even a census, not to speak of any encroachment by the state upon the capitalist's sovereignty within a factory, was treated by the bourgeoisie as synonymous with the end of all freedoms and with the advent of the dictatorship.¹⁰⁵ We must not forget the persistent emphasis on the anarchy of capitalist production characteristic of socialist thought of the late nineteenth century. "The contradiction between socialized production and capitalist appropriation," Engels wrote, "now presents itself as an *antagonism* between the organization of production in the individual workshop and the anarchy of production in society generally."¹⁰⁶ While production within each plant is purposeful and organized according to plan, capitalism as a system of production is incapable of overcoming its spontaneous, chaotic nature. Its anarchy leads to periodic crises, crises that accelerate the development of contradictions. And although capitalists respond to the contradic-

104. Kautsky, *Class Struggle*, p. 52.

105. According to Toynbee a census proposed in England in 1753 was "rejected as subversive of the last remains of English liberty." [1956:7] In an article in the *New York Daily Tribune* of July 22, 1853, Marx cited the *Times* to the effect that "if the parliament prohibited the capitalist to keep workers at work for 12, 16, or some other number of hours, England,' says *Times*, 'would no longer be a country of free people.' "

106. Engels, "Socialism," pp. 97-98.

tions by forming trusts and monopolies and although eventually the state must undertake the direction of production, the anarchy inherent in capitalist production can only be overcome by the abolition of private ownership of the means of production.¹⁰⁷

In sum, the recent attempts at reinterpretation of Marx's theory of the middle class point out to a new direction for the development of Marxist theory. Yet thus far they do not advance much beyond Kautsky's analysis. Everyone agrees that, with varying speed, capitalist development leads to the separation of small producers from their means of production and that this process is accompanied by the growth of "surplus labor." Yet two crucial questions remain unresolved: who besides the immediate producers and the organizers of the process of labor is technically necessary for continued capitalist accumulation, and what is the class status of those who are not necessary?

XII

Without imputing it to Marx, let us accept the assertion that some places that are neither those of immediate producers nor of organizers of labor are indeed indispensable for the process of capitalist accumulation to continue. For lack of a better term, let us think of these places as constituting a "reproductive" category—a category composed of such places in the social division of labor that do not involve direct participation in the work of transformation of nature into useful products but that are nevertheless technically indispensable if capitalist production is to continue at the social scale. Engineers as well as teachers of engineers will certainly be located among such places, and perhaps even television broadcasters, if the "ideological apparatuses" are indeed technically needed for the reproduction of capitalist relations of production.

But even if some places other than those of immediate producers and organizers of production are indeed necessary, there exists in each capitalist society a large quantity of labor power that is not used in the processes either of material production or of reproduction of social relations. This is the equivalent of Marx's "surplus labor," corrected for whatever might be the deficiencies of his analysis. The presence of such surplus labor power is manifest, and it becomes reflected in the difficulties that we encounter attempting to analyze the class structure of any developed capitalist society. It is characteristic that, for example, Wright's analysis of the class

107. One should also not forget Lenin's statement (in *State and Revolution*) that any cook can be taught to run a socialist society.

structure of the American society is limited to the "economically active population," that is, it does not include housewives, students, retirees, institutionalized population, those more or less permanently on welfare, and so on.¹⁰⁸ In other words, it includes only about one half of the adult population of the United States.

The capitalist system of production separates in the course of its development a certain quantity of labor power from participation in the process of production, even most broadly defined. This separation is, as a tendency, a lawful effect of capitalist development, which implies that any analysis of surplus labor must again constitute a class analysis in the sense described above: it must link the place of surplus labor in concrete historical struggles with the development of the capitalist system of production.

The process of the generation of surplus labor power is a *tendency* in the following sense. While the logic of the capitalist system imposes upon the individual capitalist a rationale that calls for a constant search for increasing productivity, the actions of capitalists as individual rational entrepreneurs are mitigated by the effects of struggles, particularly those that lead to interventions by the state in the system of production. Given the complex model of causality drawn above, the role of struggles with regard to the processes of class formation is twofold. First, class struggles taking place within each conjuncture have effects upon economic, political, and ideological relations and hence indirectly upon subsequent processes of class formation. Secondly, given the particular structure of economic, ideological, and political relations, class struggles affect directly the class organization of persons located differentially in the system of production. The indirect effects of class struggles have consequences for the entire class structure, since they modify the system of production out of which classes are formed. Thus the very process of the generation of surplus labor is affected by class struggles. Interventions by the state into the system of production have a general effect upon the structure of the economic system, and in several capitalist societies the state has a deliberate policy of class formation. Credit policy, for example, has a direct effect upon the survival of the petite bourgeoisie. On the other hand, the struggle of the unions against automation as well as its demands for full employment may have the effect of retarding the growth of productivity and slowing down the generation of surplus labor.

The central point of this argument is, however, the following: the capitalist system of production does not structure the forms of surplus labor; it generates surplus labor but does not distribute

108. Wright, "Class Boundaries."

this surplus labor into places-to-be-occupied. It leaves surplus labor as "servants" in Marx's sense. The determination of places is limited to the broadly conceived relations of production, namely, all those relations that are necessary for the continued capitalist accumulation to take place. Beyond the broadly conceived relations of production—distribution, circulation, education, legitimation, and whatever—there are no "places," no positions structured prior to class struggles, no positions to be filled. Surplus labor may assume the form of employment in the state administration; it may assume the form of early retirement, of large standing armies, of ten million college students. It may assume the form of impediments to productive employment of women, it may assume the form of three-day weekends, and so on. The form of organization of surplus labor is not determined by the relations of production. It is directly an effect of class struggles.

What then are the forms that surplus labor may assume? The first is *underemployment*, particularly by the state. By this is meant the situation in which the surplus labor power is purchased for a wage but is not expended for any labor that is necessary either for material production or for reproduction of social relations. Secondly, the surplus labor power may assume the form of a *reserve army* in Marx's sense, that is, the regulator of wage levels. Thirdly, surplus labor may assume the form of a permanent exclusion from employment during the entire lifetime of an individual. Fourthly, it may assume forms *distributed over the life span* of particular individuals, mainly education and retirement. Finally, it may be distributed over the *work span* of an individual in terms of shorter work hours, long weekends, and so on.

Clearly, this list is to some extent arbitrary and its justification would require an extensive discussion. Let me just make a few comments that relate to Marx's own view. Although Marx argued that surplus labor may "exist in any form," including the time when the laborer is not expending his or her labor power, he tended to emphasize the regulatory impact of surplus labor with regard to wages. Marx viewed surplus labor as an undifferentiated quantity of labor power having the function of maintaining wages at the level of subsistence, albeit culturally determined. This model is no longer accurate, if it ever was, since as a result of class struggles a number of institutional barriers has been erected that regulate the access of persons to the system of production. Compulsory education and compulsory retirement are the most important mechanisms of this nature. The quantity of surplus labor that can enter the labor market and hence perform the wage-regulating function has been significantly

reduced by such institutional mechanisms. This is not to say that such barriers are irrevocable: the recent attempt to extend the age of retirement in the United States demonstrates that they are not. Nevertheless, surplus labor does not appear in an undifferentiated form. Indeed, the regulatory function of surplus labor has been significantly reduced. Only the first two of the above five categories play this role, and we know empirically that the second category is to a great extent sectorally limited to services and commerce and to women. A varying quantity of surplus labor is in different capitalist societies more or less permanently separated from the system of production, particularly in the United States where it coincides to a great extent with racial lines. Some of the surplus labor is distributed over the life span, as we have shown above. Finally, some is rationally distributed over the work time of particular individuals. Indeed, there have been recent attempts in various countries to "distribute work" along these lines.

The mere existence of surplus labor implies that class analysis of contemporary capitalist societies must not be limited to those places that are structured by the system of production. The argument may bear restatement. I argued that (1) the capitalist system of production structures the places of immediate producers, of the organizers of the process of labor, and perhaps of those who are neither immediate producers nor organizers but who are nevertheless necessary for capitalist reproduction; (2) this system of production in the course of development and under the indirect impact of class struggles generates a certain quantity of surplus labor, but it does not structure the forms of social organization of this surplus labor; and, (3) surplus labor assumes forms that are a direct effect of struggles.

XIII

Thus finally we must abandon even the title. It is not the proletariat that is being formed into a class: it is a variety of persons some of whom are separated from the system of production. Processes of forming workers into a class do not take place in a vacuum; rather, they are inextricably tied to the totality of processes through which collectivities appear in struggle at particular moments of history. And the outcomes of these processes, while not arbitrary, are not determined uniquely by the structure of social relations. More than one outcome lies within the limits set by those relations.

The immediate experience of social relations, the experience based on income, the character of the work, the place in the market, the prestige of occupations, and so on, does not of itself become

transformed into collective identification since this experience is mediated by the ideological and political practices of the movements engaged in the process of class formation. But as Gough points out, neither does the distribution of carriers into categories of places in the capitalist relations.¹⁰⁹ Even the relations of exploitation do not of themselves determine a unique pattern of class formation. In an indirect sense, the proletariat is exploited by all other categories with the exception of the petite bourgeoisie. Workers and the petite bourgeois are the only producers of all that is consumed. The surplus produced by workers is directly and indirectly (through the state) transferred as revenue to all other categories. In this sense even the poorest of the lumpenproletariat lives off the workers: given capitalist relations of production there are objective bases to the antagonism of workers to the "welfare class." Moreover, it is indeed in the interest of the workers, given again capitalist organization of social relations, that the largest possible share of surplus be retained by capitalists and allocated to accumulation, since in this way future total product is increased. Hence, there exist objective bases for a political alliance between the narrowly defined industrial proletariat and the modern, expansionist fraction of the bourgeoisie. This was true most likely for the 1924-28 alliance between the SPD and the dynamic sector of the German industry, not improbably for the Roosevelt "New Deal" coalition, and perhaps for the current alliance between the Communist Party and the Christian Democrats in Italy. This would also have been the nature of the often rumored agreements between the Communist party and the Christian Democrats in Chile. Note that these are all principally political alliances in which the working class is defined narrowly.

Yet at the same time all categories other than the capitalists and the petite bourgeoisie are separated from the ownership of the means of production and forced to sell their labor power for a wage, unless they can subsist on so-called welfare. Moreover, in Marx's analysis the labor of commercial employees, while not creating surplus value, enables the merchant capitalist to appropriate surplus value without paying the employees the full equivalent of their labor.¹¹⁰ In this sense, both the reproductive and the service categories, while living off the surplus produced by workers, are separated from the means of production, forced to sell their labor power, and in a particular sense exploited by the capitalist. This produces a commonality of interests defined in terms of a number of secondary characteris-

109. Gough, "Marx's Theory of Productive and Unproductive Labour."

110. *Capital*, 3: 17; see also Yaffe, "Marxian Theory."

tics, particularly of a distributional nature, and leads to the notion of the working people, the modern equivalent of *les classes labourieuses*. Thus defined, the working class is sufficiently broad to constitute the "working-class majority."

Finally, the strategy can be extended to the formation of the working class defined as "the masses" or "the people," all those exploited and oppressed, poor and miserable. This strategy focuses on prices, taxes, and employment rather than on wages and conditions of work; and it incorporates under the umbrella of "the people" the petite bourgeoisie and the unemployed.

Each of these strategies of class formation, as well as other strategies that would emerge from a more systematic analysis, has consequences not only for the form of class structuring of surplus labor but also directly upon the manner of formation of the working class. The consequences were discussed above. In particular, strategies based on broad definitions of the working class, decrease the salience of class and bring forth other cleavages as bases for collective identification and organization.

The limits of these strategies are constituted by the internal conflicts characteristic of each block, what Mao has called the "contradictions among the people." Recent histories of Chile and Italy are veritable laboratories of such practical experiments. Their feasibility can be examined only through political practice and only in terms of a concrete conjuncture. None of the above should be treated as an evaluation of such strategies. I have merely attempted to demonstrate that the multiplicity of strategies has objective bases in the conditions under which the processes of class formation develop under advanced capitalism. At the same time, I attempted to demonstrate the perpetual and discontinuous nature of the processes of class formation. Concrete analysis is incompatible with the view of classes as economically determined, spontaneously emerging subjects that simply march on to transform history. Classes are formed as effects of struggles; as classes struggle, they transform the conditions under which classes are formed.