

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." 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." (Ibid.: 36) 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 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." (Ibid.: 38–9) 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 (Ibid.: 167). 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." (Ibid.: 85) 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*<sup>21</sup> about those places in the system of production that nowadays constitute perhaps more than a half of the labor force.<sup>22</sup> 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?

### And Where to Fit the "Middle Class"?

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

<sup>21</sup> 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 issue see Wiatr (1965: 200ff.)

<sup>22</sup> 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 Toutain (1963, Tables 75–7).

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 Courtheoux of the 1962 French census. But the critical influence was Weber's.

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 positions 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 (1959) examined systematically the consequences of the Weberian orientation for Marx's theory of class without rejecting it *tout court*. 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 *New Left Review* article (1976) 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 production, labor power, and the degrees of legal ownership (1976: 33). 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." (1976: 41) 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. (1976: 44)

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." (1971: 217)

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 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.

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). Capitalism 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. 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 chapter 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.

### The Process of Class Formation

The great contribution of Gramsci (1971), a contribution developed by Poulantzas (1973), was to recognize that ideological and political relations are objective with regard to class struggles. 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' 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 (Cardoso, 1973).

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 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' 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 (1964: 252) 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.'" (1909: 3) So did Plekhanov (Carr, 1966: 29).

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 is prevalent among many students of political behavior, who then discover a large "residuum" of cleavages other than class, sometimes larger than class cleavage. 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 (Gramsci, 1971: 192). 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.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> 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." (1963: 9–10)

In turn, Sartre's 1952 discussion is more problematic, in terms of both 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 relationships with others: it does not determine his belonging to a class." (1968: 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 chapter, 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 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.” (1971: 186) Political struggles concern the form of the state – of capitalist political relations – because the form of the state structures the form of class struggles (Poulantzas, 1973). 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,” rather than capitalists, workers, and so on.<sup>24</sup> But this

<sup>24</sup> Since Poulantzas’ argument to this effect in *Political Power and Social Classes* (1973) 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]

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 collectivities defined in other terms, sometimes simply as members of “the society.”<sup>25</sup>

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.” (1963: 11) “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.

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. . . .” (Lukacs, 1971: 65–6)

<sup>25</sup> 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 has 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. . . .” (1971: 151)

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. (1970a: 202)

"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 superseding precisely 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.

### Democratic Capitalism and the Organization of Workers as a Class

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" 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. Political predictions are always relative to a purpose, yet they are nonarbitrary in the anticipation of effects of political practices. "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." (1971: 214)

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.<sup>26</sup> Yet unless one adopts the

<sup>26</sup> This seems to be the implication of Lukacs' view (1971) in which the party becomes the organizational

vision in which science develops in the laboratory, 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 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. 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.

This necessity of organizing workers on the terrain of electoral institutions has profound consequences for the political practice of socialist parties. They become the electoral parties of the working class. And practical consequences

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 also Colletti (1972: 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." (1975: 156; italics supplied)

are sufficiently direct: elections are contests of numbers, electoral success requires recruiting the maximal number of supporters, whoever they may be.<sup>27</sup>

Thus electoral parties of workers face the choice whether to act as a class organization or to seek electoral success. 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.<sup>28</sup>

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 organizations 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: at the expense both of the labor aristocracy and of the disorganized mob. What emerges is a wage-earning industrial proletariat, 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." (1971: 183)

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 Erfurt 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." (Ibid.: 159) 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." (Ibid.: 211) It is becoming a *national* party; "It tends to become the representative, not only of

<sup>27</sup> 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.

<sup>28</sup> Thus elections, contrary to Maclver'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 Maclver (1974) and Lipset (1960).

the industrial wage-earners, but of all laboring and exploited classes, or in other words, of the great majority of the population." (Ibid.: 210) The Socialist Party, the Erfurt 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." (Ibid.: 160)

But how do socialists appeal to workers, to carriers of capitalist relations of production? 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 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.<sup>29</sup> 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.

<sup>29</sup> 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

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 to the organization of the working class in the form of mass electoral parties. As a result, the process or 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."<sup>30</sup>

This fusion of the process of formation of the working class with supra-class 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

can appropriate the labor of another because of their different positions in a given economic system." (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.

<sup>30</sup> 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 Bottomore (1966) 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."



the proletariat, distinct from and opposed to all other parties. But the dissociation 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.

### Conflicts About Class

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 (Dogan, 1967).

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

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