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CLASS BOUNDARIES IN ADVANCED CAPITALIST SOCIETIES

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Class Boundaries in Advanced Capitalist Societies

All Marxists agree that manual workers directly engaged in the production of physical commodities for private capital fall into the working class. While there may be disagreement about the political and ideological significance of such workers in advanced capitalism, everyone acknowledges that they are in fact workers. There is no such agreement about any other category of wage-earners. Some Marxists have argued that only productive manual workers should be considered part of the proletariat.[1] Others have argued that the working class includes low-level, routinized white-collar employees as well.[2] Still others have argued that virtually all wage-labourers should be considered part of the working class.[3] If this disagreement were just a question of esoteric academic debates over how best to pigeon-hole different social positions, then it would matter little how these issues were eventually resolved. But classes are not merely analytical abstractions in Marxist theory; they are real social forces and they have real consequences. It matters a great deal for our understanding of class struggle and social change exactly how classes are conceptualized and

which categories of social positions are placed in which classes. Above all, it matters for developing a viable socialist politics how narrow or broad the working class is seen to be and how its relationship to other classes is understood.

This essay will explore the problem of understanding class boundaries in advanced capitalist society. Rather than review the wide range of approaches Marxists have adopted in defining classes, I will focus primarily on the work of Nicos Poulantzas, in particular on his book *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*. This work is, to my knowledge, the most systematic and thorough attempt to understand precisely the Marxist criteria for classes in capitalist society. While there are many points in Poulantzas's argument with which I disagree, his work has the considerable merit of sharply posing the problem of defining classes in advanced capitalism and of providing some stimulating solutions. A critical discussion of Poulantzas's work can, therefore, provide a very useful starting-point for the development of an explicit theory of classes in contemporary capitalism.

The first section below presents an outline exposition of Poulantzas's theory of the structural determination of class. Poulantzas's basic conclusion is that only manual, non-supervisory workers who produce surplus-value directly (productive labour) should be included in the proletariat. Other categories of wage-labourers (unproductive employees, mental labour, supervisory labour) must be placed in a separate class—either the 'new' petty bourgeoisie, or in the case of managers, the bourgeoisie itself. This exposition of Poulantzas will be followed in the second section by a general assessment and critique of his argument. The final section presents the preliminary outlines of an alternative conceptualization of class boundaries, that hinges on the concept of *contradictory locations within class relations*. I will argue that not all positions in the social structure can be seen as firmly rooted in a single class; some positions occupy objectively contradictory locations between classes. The analytical task is to give such positions a precise theoretical meaning and to relate them systematically to questions of class struggle.

Poulantzas's Theory of the Structural Determination of Class

The following presentation of Poulantzas's ideas will necessarily be schematic and incomplete. I will discuss only the essential elements of his views on class boundaries and not deal with a variety of other important issues which he raises (such as class fractions, the relationship of classes to state apparatuses, etc.). While the exposition will lose many of the nuances of Poulantzas's analysis, I hope that the basic contours of his argument will stand out. Critical comments will be kept to a minimum in this section.

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[1] For example, Nicos Poulantzas in 'On Social Classes', NLR 78, and in *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, NLB, London and Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1975.

[2] For example, Al Szymanski, 'Trends in the American Working Class', *Socialist Revolution* No. 10.

[3] For example, Francesca Freedman, 'The Internal Structure of the Proletariat', *Socialist Revolution* No. 26.

General Framework

Poulantzas's analysis of social classes rests on three basic premises. 1. *Classes cannot be defined outside of class struggle.* This is a fundamental point. Classes are not 'things', nor are they pigeon-holes in a static social structure. 'Classes', Poulantzas writes, 'involve in one and the same process both class contradictions and class struggle; social classes do not firstly exist as such and only then enter into class struggle. Social classes coincide with class practices, i.e. the class struggle, and are only defined in their mutual opposition.'[4] Poulantzas does not mean by this proposition that classes can only be understood in terms of class *consciousness*. Class struggle, in Poulantzas's analysis, does not refer to the conscious self-organization of a class as a social force, but rather to the antagonistic, contradictory quality of the social relations which comprise the social division of labour. Class struggle exists even when classes are disorganized. 2. *Classes designate objective positions in the social division of labour.* These objective positions, Poulantzas stresses, 'are independent of the will of these agents'.[5] It is crucial not to confuse the analysis of the structure of these objective class positions with the analysis of the individuals (*agents* in Poulantzas's terminology) who occupy those positions. While both analyses are important, Poulantzas insists that 'the question of who occupies a given position, i.e. who is or becomes a bourgeois, proletarian, petty bourgeois, poor peasant, etc., and how and when he does, *is subordinate to the first aspect*—the reproduction of the actual positions occupied by the social classes'.[6] Poulantzas refers to the reproduction of these objective positions within the social division of labour as the 'structural determination of class'. These first two propositions taken together imply that in order to define classes it is necessary to unravel the objective positions within the antagonistic social relations comprising the social division of labour. 3. *Classes are structurally determined not only at the economic level, but at the political and ideological levels as well.* This is perhaps the most distinctive (and problematic) part of Poulantzas's analysis. While it is true that 'the economic place of the social agents has a principal role in determining social classes',[7] their position in ideological and political relations of domination and subordination may be equally important: 'It must be emphasized that ideological and political relations, i.e. the places of political and ideological domination and subordination, are themselves part of the structural determination of class: there is no question of the objective place being the result only of economic place within the relations of production, while political and ideological ele-

[4] *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, p. 14.

[5] Ibid.

[6] 'On Social Classes', pp. 49–50.

[7] *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, p. 14.

ments belong only to [class struggle].'[8] Political and ideological factors cannot be relegated to the transformation of a 'class-in-itself' into a 'class-for-itself', but lie at the heart of the very determination of class positions.[9] Given these premises, the basic theoretical strategy Poulantzas adopts for analysing class boundaries centres on elaborating the economic, political and ideological criteria which determine objective class positions within the social division of labour. We will first examine how Poulantzas does this for the working class and the new petty bourgeoisie, and then for the bourgeoisie.

Structural Determination of Working Class and New Petty Bourgeoisie

In the course of capitalist development the traditional petty bourgeoisie —independent artisans, small shopkeepers, etc.—has steadily dwindled. In its place there has arisen what Poulantzas calls the 'new petty bourgeoisie', consisting of white-collar employees, technicians, supervisors, civil servants, etc. Under conditions of advanced capitalism, the crucial question for understanding the structural determination of the working class, Poulantzas argues, centres on analysing the boundary between the working class and this new segment of the petty bourgeoisie.

Poulantzas's argument proceeds in two steps. First, he discusses the economic, political and ideological criteria which separate the proletariat from the new petty bourgeoisie. The basic economic criterion he advances is the distinction between productive and unproductive labour. The basic political criterion is the distinction between non-supervisory and supervisory positions. The core ideological criterion is the division between mental and manual labour. Secondly, Poulantzas discusses why this 'new' petty bourgeoisie belongs to the same class as the traditional petty bourgeoisie. He argues that, although they appear quite different at the economic level, both the old and new petty bourgeoisie bear the same ideological relationship to the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, and this common ideological relationship is sufficient to merge them into a single class. The first argument explains why certain categories of wage-labourers should be excluded from the working class; the second explains why they should be considered members of a common class, the petty bourgeoisie. We will examine the first of these arguments in some detail, the second more briefly.

[8] Ibid., p. 16. In this particular passage, Poulantzas uses the expression 'class position' rather than 'class struggle' at the end. By class position in this context, Poulantzas refers to the concrete situation of a class in a specific historical conjuncture. Thus, for example, under certain historical circumstances, the labour aristocracy may assume the class position of the bourgeoisie, without actually changing its objective place in the class structure. This is a confusing use of the word 'position' and Poulantzas himself is not always consistent in the way he uses it (note the quote under proposition 2 above). At any rate, throughout this discussion I will use the expression 'class position' to refer to objective class location.

[9] Poulantzas writes: 'the analyses presented here have nothing in common with the Hegelian schema with its class-in-itself (economic class situation, uniquely objective determination of class by the process of production) and a class-for-itself (class endowed with its own "class consciousness" and an autonomous political organization = class struggle), which in the Marxist tradition is associated with Lukács.' (ibid.)

Economic Criteria

Poulantzas argues that the distinction between productive and unproductive labour defines the boundary between the working class and the new petty bourgeoisie at the economic level. All workers are productive labourers and all unproductive labourers are new petty bourgeois (as we shall see, some productive labourers are also petty bourgeois). Poulantzas thus decisively rejects wage-labour *per se* as an appropriate criterion for the working class: 'it is not wages that define the working class economically: wages are a form of distribution of the social product, corresponding to market relations and the forms of "contract" governing the purchase and sale of labour power. Although every worker is a wage-earner, every wage-earner is certainly not a worker, for not every wage-earner is engaged in productive labour.'[10]

Poulantzas defines productive labour in a somewhat more restrictive way than most Marxist writers: 'productive labour, in the capitalist mode of production, is labour that produces surplus-value *while directly reproducing the material elements that serve as the substratum of the relation of exploitation: labour that is directly involved in material production by producing use-values that increase material wealth.*'[11] The conventional definition of productive labour by Marxists does not explicitly restrict it to labour directly implicated in material production. Poulantzas, however, argues that 'labour producing surplus-value is broadly equivalent to the process of material production in its capitalist form of existence and reproduction'.[12] He insists that this definition is consistent with Marx's usage of the concept of productive labour, since Marx always associated surplus-value creation with commodity production, and commodity production (according to Poulantzas) is always material production.

Given this definition of productive labour under capitalism, Poulantzas argues that unproductive wage-earners must be excluded from the ranks of the proletariat because they lie outside the basic capitalist relation of exploitation. In discussing commercial employees as an example of unproductive labour, Poulantzas writes: 'Of course, these wage-earners are themselves exploited, and their wages correspond to the reproduction of their labour-power. "The commercial worker . . . adds to the capitalist's income by helping him to reduce the cost of realizing surplus-value, inasmuch as he performs partly unpaid labour." Surplus labour is thus extorted from wage-earners in commerce, but these are not directly exploited in the form of the dominant capitalist relation of exploitation, the creation of surplus-value.'[13] The working class is defined by the fundamental class antagonism within capitalism between direct producers, who are separated from the means of production and produce the social surplus product in the form of surplus-value, and the bourgeoisie, who own the means of production and appropriate surplus-value. Unproductive wage-earners, while clearly not members of the bourgeoisie, do not contribute to the production of the surplus product. Thus they are not directly exploited in the form of the

[10] Ibid., p. 20.
[11] Ibid., p. 216. Italics in original.
[12] Ibid., p. 221.
[13] Ibid., p. 212.

dominant capitalist relation of exploitation and so, Poulantzas argues, cannot be included in the working class.

Political Criteria

As Poulantzas stresses time and time again, economic criteria alone are not sufficient to define the structural determination of class. In particular, political and/or ideological criteria exclude certain categories of productive wage-earners from the working class. The use of political criteria is especially important in Poulantzas's analysis of the class position of managerial and supervisory labour. Within the process of material production, supervisory labour is unquestionably productive because of its role in coordinating and integrating the production process. But within the *social* division of labour, supervisory activity represents the political domination of capital over the working class: 'In a word, the despotism of the factory is precisely the form taken by the domination of the technical division of labour by the social, such as this exists under capitalism. The work of management and supervision, under capitalism, is the direct reproduction, within the process of production itself, of the political relations between the capitalist class and the working class.'[14]

How then does Poulantzas reconcile these competing criteria? At the economic level, supervisory labour in commodity production is exploited in the same way that manual labour is exploited; but at the political level, supervisory labour participates in the domination of the working class. Poulantzas solves this problem by turning to the distinction between the *social division of labour* and the *technical division of labour*. While he never explicitly defines the differences between the two, the general sense is that the technical division of labour represents structural positions derived from the particular technologies used in production (or forces of production), whereas the social division of labour is derived from the social organization of production (or relations of production). Now, it is a basic proposition of Marxist theory that 'in the actual organization of the labour process, the social division of labour, directly dependent upon the relations of production, dominates the technical division'.[15] Poulantzas then argues that the position of supervisors as exploited productive labour reflects their role in the purely technical division of labour, whereas their position of political domination of the working class defines their role in the social division of labour. Given this assertion, he concludes that supervisors' 'principal function is that of extracting surplus-value from the workers', and on this basis they must be excluded from the working class altogether.[16]

Supervisors, however, are also excluded from the bourgeoisie, for while they politically dominate the working class, they are also politically dominated by capital itself. This specific position within political relations of domination and subordination—subordinated to capital while dominating the proletariat—defines the political criteria for the new petty bourgeoisie.

[14] Ibid., pp. 227–8.
[15] Ibid., p. 225.
[16] Ibid., p. 228.

Ideological Criteria

The working class is not only exploited economically and dominated politically, it is also dominated ideologically. The central axis of this ideological domination within the social division of labour is the division between *mental* and *manual* labour.[17] Poulantzas argues that the mental/manual division excludes the working class from the 'secret knowledge' of the production process, and that this exclusion is necessary for the reproduction of capitalist social relations. 'Experts' of various sorts at all stages of the production process help to legitimize the subordination of labour to capital, by making it appear natural that workers are incapable of organizing production themselves. The division between mental and manual labour thus represents the ideological prop for the exclusion of workers from the planning and direction of the production process.[18] Experts are the direct carriers of this ideological domination; thus, like supervisors, they are excluded from the working class.

This ideological criterion is especially important in determining the class position of certain categories of engineers and technicians. Engineers and technicians are generally productive wage-earners, and although many of them occupy positions within the supervisory structure (and thus are new petty bourgeois because of political criteria), there are subaltern technicians who do not directly supervise anyone. Nevertheless, Poulantzas argues, because of the primacy of the social division of labour over the technical division, and because within the social division of labour even subaltern technicians (as mental labour) occupy a position of ideological domination over the working class, they must be excluded from the proletariat and considered part of the new petty bourgeoisie. The mental/manual division is central to the determination of the class position of all mental labourers, not just technicians, engineers and the like. White-collar workers in general participate, if only in residual ways, in the elevated status of mental labour, and thus participate in the ideological domination of the working class. Even low-level clerks and secretaries, Poulantzas insists,

[17] In defining the mental/manual labour division, Poulantzas writes: 'We could thus say that every form of work that takes the form of knowledge from which the direct producers are excluded, falls on the mental labour side of the capitalist production process, irrespective of its empirical/natural content, and that this is so whether the direct producers actually do know how to perform this work but do not do so (again not by chance), or whether they in fact do not know how to perform it (since they are systematically kept away from it) or whether again there is simply nothing that needs to be known.' (Ibid., p. 238). Poulantzas is thus very careful not to define mental labour as 'brain work' and manual labour as 'hand work'. While there is a rough correspondence between these two distinctions, the mental/manual division must be considered an aspect of the social division of labour and not a technical fact of whether muscle or brain is primarily engaged in the labour process.

[18] It is important to note that ideological domination, in Poulantzas's framework, has nothing to do with the consciousness of workers. Ideology is a material practice, not a belief system within the heads of workers. To say that the division of labour between mental and manual activities constitutes the ideological domination of the working class means that the material reality of this division excludes workers from the knowledge necessary for the direction of the production process. Of course, such an exclusion has consequences on consciousness—workers may come to believe that they are utterly incapable of gaining the necessary knowledge to organize production—but the ideological dom'nation is real irrespective of the beliefs of workers.

share in the ideological position of mental labour and thus belong to the new petty bourgeoisie rather than the proletariat.[19]

As in the case of political criteria, capital dominates the new petty bourgeoisie ideologically. The division between mental and manual labour simultaneously supports the ideological domination of manual labour by mental labour and the ideological subordination of mental labour to capital. Experts may participate in the 'secret knowledge' of production, but that knowledge is always fragmented and dominated by the requirements of capitalist production and reproduction.

The Class Unity of the New and Traditional Petty Bourgeoisie

Poulantzas admits that it might seem strange to categorize the new and traditional petty bourgeoisie in a single class. He even agrees that the traditional petty bourgeoisie 'does not belong to the capitalist mode of production, but to the simple commodity form which was historically the form of transition from the feudal to the capitalist mode'.[20] How then can two groupings which are rooted in such utterly different economic situations be amalgamated into a single class? Poulantzas argues that this class unity is a consequence of the relationship of both the traditional and the new bourgeoisie to the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat: 'If the traditional and the new petty bourgeoisie can be considered as belonging to the same class, this is because social classes are only determined in the class struggle, and because these groupings are precisely both polarized in relationship to the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.'[21] This common polarization with respect to the bourgeoisie and the proletariat has the consequence of forging a rough ideological unity between the traditional and the new petty bourgeoisie. It is this ideological unity, Poulantzas maintains, which justifies placing both the traditional and the new petty bourgeoisie in the same class: 'The structural determination of the new petty bourgeoisie in the social division of labour has certain effects on the ideology of its agents, which directly influences its class position . . . these ideological effects on the new petty bourgeoisie exhibit a remarkable affinity to those which the specific class determination of the traditional petty bourgeoisie has on the latter, thus justifying their attribution to one and the same class, the petty bourgeoisie.'[22]

[19] This does not mean that Poulantzas regards the mental/manual division as operating uniformly on all categories of wage-labourers within the new petty bourgeoisie. He stresses that the mental/manual division is reproduced within the new petty bourgeoisie itself, and that many new petty bourgeois are themselves subordinated to mental labour within the category of mental labour: 'The mental labour aspect does not affect the new petty bourgeoisie in an undifferentiated manner. Certain sections of it are affected directly. Others, subjected to the reproduction of the mental/manual division within mental labour itself, are only affected indirectly; and while these sections are still affected by the effects of the basic division, they also experience a hierarchy within mental labour itself.' (Ibid., p. 256).

[20] Ibid., pp. 285–6.

[21] Ibid., p. 294.

[22] Ibid., p. 287. Note that here Poulantzas is talking about the ideology *of* a class rather than the position of the class in the social division of labour at the ideological level. While it may be true that the traditional petty bourgeoisie occupies the place of mental labour in the mental/manual division (i.e. the old petty bourgeoisie is not separated from the 'secret knowledge' of production even though many petty-bourgeois artisans would be classified *technically* as manual labourers), Poulantzas is more concerned here with certain features of the ideology of agents within the petty bourgeoisie.

The core elements of this common petty-bourgeois ideology include reformism, individualism, and power fetishism. *Reformism*: Petty-bourgeois ideology tends to be anti-capitalist, but regards the problems of capitalism as solvable through institutional reform rather than revolutionary change. *Individualism*: 'Afraid of proletarianization below, attracted towards the bourgeoisie above, the new petty bourgeoisie often aspires to promotion, a "career", to "upward mobility".'[23] The same individualism characterizes the traditional petty bourgeoisie, but takes the form of mobility through becoming a successful small businessman. *Power Fetishism*: 'As a result of the situation of this petty bourgeoisie as an intermediate class . . . this class has a strong tendency to see the state as an inherently neutral force whose role is that of arbitrating between the various social classes'.[24] While Poulantzas admits that in certain respects the ideologies of the two petty bourgeoisies are different, he insists that the unity is sufficiently strong as to warrant considering them a single class.

The Structural Determination of the Bourgeoisie

Whereas in his discussion of the boundary between the working class and the new petty bourgeoisie Poulantzas focuses on political and ideological criteria, in the discussion of the bourgeoisie he concentrates on the strictly economic level. His basic argument is that the bourgeoisie must be defined not in terms of formal legal categories of property ownership, but in terms of the substantive dimensions which characterize the social relations of production. Two such dimensions are particularly important. *Economic Ownership*: This refers to the 'real economic control of the means of production, i.e. the power to assign the means of production to given uses and so to dispose of the products obtained'.[25] Such economic ownership must not be confused with legal title to productive property: 'this ownership is to be understood as real economic ownership, control of the means of production, to be distinguished from legal ownership, which is sanctioned by law and belongs to the superstructure. The law, of course, generally ratifies economic ownership, but it is possible for the forms of legal ownership not to coincide with real economic ownership.'[26] *Possession*: This is defined as 'the capacity to put the means of production into operation'.[27] This refers to the actual control over the physical operation of production. In feudal society, the peasant generally retained possession of the means of production while the feudal ruling class maintained economic ownership; in capitalist society, on the other hand, the bourgeoisie has both economic ownership and possession of the means of production. The working class is separated from control not only over the product of labour, but over the very process of labour itself.

These two dimensions of social relations of production—economic ownership and possession—are particularly important in analysing the

[23] Ibid., p. 291.

[24] Ibid., p. 292.

[25] Ibid., p. 18.

[26] Ibid., p. 19.

[27] Ibid.

class position of managers.[28] Poulantzas argues that since these agents fulfil the *functions* of capital, they occupy the *place* of capital. Thus they belong to the bourgeoisie, regardless of any legal definitions of ownership: 'It is the place of capital, defined as the articulation of relationships that bear certain powers, that determines the class memberships of the agents who fulfil these "functions". This refers us to two inter-connected aspects of the problem: (a) the powers involving either utilization of resources, allocation of the means of production to this or that use, or the direction of the labour process, are bound up with the relationships of economic ownership and possession, and these relationships define one particular place, the place of capital; (b) the directing agents who directly exercise these powers and who fulfil the "functions of capital" occupy the place of capital and thus belong to the bourgeois class even if they do not hold formal legal ownership. *In all cases, therefore, the managers are an integral section of the bourgeois class.*'[29]

Poulantzas recognizes that the precise relationship between economic ownership and possession is not immutably fixed in capitalism. In particular, the process of centralization and concentration of capital characteristic of the development of monopoly capitalism generates a partial 'dissociation' of economic ownership and possession. Especially in the developed monopoly corporation, where very heterogeneous production units are often united under a single economic ownership, managers of particular units will generally have possession of the means of production of that unit without directly having economic ownership.[30] Nevertheless, Poulantzas insists that the 'dissociations that we have analysed between the relationships of economic ownership and possession (i.e. the direction of the labour process) do not in any way mean that the latter, exercised by the managers, has become separated from the place of capital'.[31] Capital remains a *unitary structural position* within class relations even if the *functions* of capital have become differentiated. It is this structural position which fundamentally determines the class location of managers as part of the bourgeoisie.

Poulantzas has much less to say about the specific ideological and political criteria defining the bourgeoisie, other than to say that they occupy the position of ideological and political domination in the social division of labour. The most important context in which Poulantzas explicitly treats such criteria is in the discussion of the heads of state

[28] When Poulantzas uses the term 'managers', he is explicitly discussing those managerial personnel who directly participate in economic ownership and/or possession. When he discusses lower-level positions within the managerial hierarchy, he uses expressions like 'the work of management and supervision', or simply 'supervisors'.
[29] Ibid., p. 180. Italics added.
[30] Poulantzas provides an extremely interesting discussion of the transformations of the dissociation of economic ownership and possession in the course of the development of monopoly capitalism (ibid., pp. 116–30). He argues that during the initial stages of monopoly concentration, economic ownership became concentrated more rapidly than the labour process actually became centralized (i.e. under unified direction). The result was that during this initial phase of concentration, monopoly capital itself was characterized by economic ownership of the means of production with only partial powers of possession. It was not until what Poulantzas calls the restructuring period of monopoly capitalism that economic ownership and possession were fully reintegrated within monopoly capital itself.
[31] Ibid., p. 181.

apparatuses. Such positions belong in the bourgeoisie, Poulantzas argues, not because they directly occupy the place of capital at the economic level, but because 'in a capitalist state, they manage the state functions in the service of capital'.[32] The class position of such agents is thus not defined directly by their immediate social relations of production, but rather indirectly by the relationship of the state itself to the capitalist class.

Assessment and Critique of Poulantzas's Analysis

The following critique of Poulantzas's analysis will parallel the foregoing exposition.[33] First, the logic of his analysis of the boundary between the working class and the new petty bourgeoisie is examined. The discussion focuses on two criticisms: 1. that there is little basis for regarding the distinction between productive and unproductive labour as determining the boundary of the working class at the economic level; 2. that Poulantzas's use of political and ideological factors effectively undermines the primacy of economic relations in determining class position. Secondly, Poulantzas's claim that the traditional and new petty bourgeoisie are members of the same class is criticized on two grounds: 1. the ideological divisions between the two categories are at least as profound as the commonalities; 2. while ideological relations may play a part in the determination of class position, they cannot neutralize divergent class positions determined at the economic level. Finally, there is a brief examination of Poulantzas's treatment of the boundary of the bourgeoisie. The main criticism made here is that not all managers should be considered an integral part of the bourgeoisie, even if they participate in certain aspects of relations of possession.

The Boundary between Working Class and New Petty Bourgeoisie

It will be helpful in our discussion of Poulantzas's perspective to present schematically the criteria he uses in analysing the structural determination of classes. Chart 1 presents the criteria by which he defines in the most general way the working class, the traditional and new petty bourgeoisie and the capitalist class. Chart 2 examines in greater detail the various combinations of criteria which define different sub-categories within the new petty bourgeoisie. It is important not to interpret the categories in these typologies as constituting discrete, empirical 'groups'. This would certainly be a violation of Poulantzas's view of social classes. The purpose of the typologies is to highlight the relationships among the various criteria, not to turn the analysis of classes and class struggle into a static exercise in categorization.

[32] Ibid., p. 187.
[33] This assessment of Poulantzas's analysis of classes will focus on the actual criteria he uses to understand classes in contemporary capitalism, rather than on the epistemological assumptions which underlie his analysis. I will thus not deal with the problem of his general concept of 'class struggle' and his categorical rejection of 'consciousness' as a useful category in a Marxist analysis. While it is important to deal with these issues (indeed, most reviews of Poulantzas's work are preoccupied with these most abstract questions rather than the substance of his argument), I feel that it is more useful at this point to engage Poulantzas's work at a lower level of abstraction.

CHART 1
General Criteria for Class in Poulantzas's Analysis

	ECONOMIC CRITERIA			POLITICAL CRITERIA		IDEOLOGICAL CRITERIA	
	Exploiter	*Exploited**		*Domination*	*Subordination*	*Domination*	*Subordination*
	Appropriates Surplus-Value	Surplus Labour Extorted	Surplus-Value Extorted				
Bourgeoisie	+	−	−	+	−	+	−
Proletariat	−	+	+	−	+	−	+
New petty bourgeoisie	−	+	−/+	+/−	+	+/−	+
Old petty bourgeoisie	−	−	−	−	+	+	+

\+ criterion present +/− criterion usually present, but sometimes absent
− criterion absent −/+ criterion usually absent, but sometimes present

*To say that 'surplus labour' is extorted from a wage-labourer, but not surplus-value, means that the worker performs unpaid labour for the capitalist, but does not produce actual commodities for exchange on the market. The worker is thus not formally productive, but nevertheless is exploited.

CHART 2
Various Combinations of Criteria for the New Petty Bourgeoisie

	ECONOMIC CRITERIA			POLITICAL CRITERIA		IDEOLOGICAL CRITERIA	
	Exploiter	*Exploited*		*Domination*	*Subordination*	*Domination*	*Subordination*
	Appropriates Surplus-Value	Surplus Labour Extorted	Surplus-Value Extorted				
UNPRODUCTIVE LABOUR							
Supervisors in circulation and realization	−	+	−	+	+	+	+
Subaltern mental labour	−	+	−	−	+	+	+
*Unproductive manual labour**	−	+	−	−	+	−	+
PRODUCTIVE LABOUR							
Supervisors in material production	−	+	+	+	+	+	+
Technicians and engineers in material production (who are not also supervisors)	−	+	+	−	+	+	+

*This category is not explicitly discussed by Poulantzas, but it is clearly a possibility (e.g. a janitor in a bank).

Let us now turn to the question of Poulantzas's use of the productive/unproductive labour distinction in his analysis of the boundary of the working class, and then to the logic of his use of political and ideological factors as criteria for class. Once these two tasks are completed, we will examine some statistical data on the size of the proletariat in the United States using Poulantzas's criteria.

Productive and Unproductive Labour

There are three basic difficulties in Poulantzas's discussion of productive and unproductive labour: 1. problems in his definition of productive labour; 2. the lack of correspondence between the productive/unproductive labour distinction and actual positions in the labour process; 3.—and most significantly—the lack of fundamentally different economic interests between productive and unproductive workers.[34]

Productive labour, to Poulantzas, is restricted to labour which both produces surplus-value and is directly involved in the process of material production. This definition rests on the claim that surplus-value is only generated in the production of physical commodities. This is an arbitrary assumption. If use-values take the form of services, and if those services are produced for the market, then there is no reason why surplus-value cannot be generated in non-material production as well as the production of physical commodities.[35]

The second difficulty with Poulantzas's use of productive/unproductive labour concerns the relationship of this distinction to positions in the social division of labour. If actual positions generally contain a mix of productive and unproductive activities, then the distinction between productive and unproductive labour becomes much less useful as a criterion for the class determination of those positions. Poulantzas does say that some positions involve both productive and unproductive labour. A good example is grocery-store clerks. To the extent that clerks place commodities on shelves (and thus perform the last stage of the transportation of commodities), then they are productive; but to the extent that they operate cash registers, then they are unproductive. This dual quality of social positions as both productive and unproductive is not restricted to the circulation of commodities, but exists directly within the process of material production itself. Consider the case of the material production of the packaging for a commodity. Packaging serves two distinct functions. On the one hand, it is part of the use-value of a commodity. One can hardly drink milk without placing it in a transportable container. But packaging is also part of realization costs under capitalism, since much of the labour embodied in packaging goes into producing advertising. Such labour cannot be considered productive, because it does not produce any use-values (and thus cannot produce surplus-value). This is not a question of any

[34] Many of the ideas for this section on productive and unproductive labour come directly from James O'Connor's very important essay 'Productive and Unproductive Labor', in *Politics and Society*, Vol. 5, No. 2, and from numerous discussions within the San Francisco Bay Area *Kapitalistate* collective.

[35] Marx's famous comparison of teaching factories and sausage factories makes this precise point: 'The only worker who is productive is one who produces surplus-value for the capitalist, or in other words contributes towards the self-valorization of capital. If we may take an example from outside the sphere of material production, a schoolmaster is a productive worker when, in addition to belabouring the heads of his pupils, he works himself into the ground to enrich the owner of the school. That the latter has laid out his capital in a teaching factory, instead of a sausage factory, makes no difference to the relation.' (*Capital*, Vol. I, Penguin/NLR, London 1976. p. 644.) It would be hard to imagine a clearer statement that Marx did not restrict the concept of productive labour to labour directly involved in material production. It is surprising that Poulantzas never discusses this quotation, especially since he does cite Marx heavily to support his own use of the concept of productive labour.

ahistorical normative judgement on the goodness of the labour. Labour which produces the most pointless luxuries can still be productive. But labour which merely serves to facilitate the realization of surplus-value is not, and at least part of the labour-time that is embodied in packaging falls into this category.[36] In effect, most labour in capitalist society has both productive and unproductive aspects. The productive/unproductive labour distinction should thus be thought of as reflecting two dimensions of labour activity rather than two types of wage-earners.

The most fundamental objection, however, to Poulantzas's use of the productive/unproductive distinction goes beyond questions of definition or the conceptual status of the distinction. For two positions within the social division of labour to be placed in different classes on the basis of economic criteria implies that they have fundamentally different class *interests* at the economic level.[37] Let us assume for the moment that the productive/unproductive labour distinction generally does correspond to different actual positions in the social division of labour. The key question then becomes whether this distinction represents a significant division of class interests. If we assume that the fundamental class interest of the proletariat is the destruction of capitalist relations of production and the construction of socialism, then the question becomes whether productive and unproductive workers have a different interest with respect to socialism. More precisely, do unproductive workers in general lack a class interest in socialism? One possible argument could be that many unproductive jobs would disappear in a socialist society and thus unproductive workers would be opposed to socialism. Aside from the problem that this argument confuses occupation with class, many jobs that are quite productive under capitalism would also disappear in a socialist society, while many unproductive jobs in capitalist society—doctors employed by the state for example—would not.

It could also be argued that since unproductive workers produce no surplus-value, they live off the surplus-value produced by productive workers and thus indirectly participate in the exploitation of those workers. Taking the argument one step further, it is sometimes claimed that unproductive workers have a stake in increasing the social rate of

[36] Admittedly, such advertising-packaging labour is socially necessary labour time under capitalism and contributes to the costs of production of commodities. But this can be said about most realization labour, not just realization labour that becomes physically embodied in a material aspect of the commodity. Advertising labour should therefore be categorized as a *faux frais* of capitalist production, along with many other kinds of unproductive labour. For a fuller discussion of how to count unproductive labour in costs of production, see my article 'Alternative Perspectives in the Marxist Theory of Accumulation and Crisis', *The Insurgent Sociologist*, Vol. VI (1975), No. 1. For a discussion of advertising labour, see Baran and Sweezy's analysis of the interpenetration of sales and production in monopoly capitalism: *Monopoly Capital*, New York 1966, chapter 6.

[37] The expression 'fundamental' or 'ultimate' class interests refer to interests involving the very structure of social relations; 'immediate' class interests, on the other hand, refer to interests within a given structure of social relations. Expressed in slightly different terms, immediate class interests are interests defined within a mode of production, whereas ultimate class interests are interests defined between modes of production.

exploitation, since this would make it easier for them to improve their own wages. This kind of argument is perhaps clearest in the case of state workers who are paid directly out of taxes. Since taxation comes at least partially out of surplus-value,[38] it appears that state workers live off the exploitation of productive labour. There is no question that there is some truth in this claim. Certainly in terms of immediate economic interests, state workers are often in conflict with private sector workers over questions of taxation. The bourgeois media have made much of this issue and have clearly used it as a divisive force in the labour movement. However, the question is not whether divisions of immediate interests exist between productive and unproductive workers, but whether such divisions generate different objective interests in socialism. Many divisions of immediate economic interest exist within the working class—between monopoly and competitive sector workers, between black and white workers, between workers in imperialist countries and workers in the third world, etc. But none of these divisions imply that the 'privileged' group of workers has an interest in perpetuating the system of capitalist exploitation. None of these divisions change the fundamental fact that all workers, by virtue of their position within the social relations of production, have a basic interest in socialism. I would argue that this is true for most unproductive workers as well.

Poulantzas agrees that, in general, both productive and unproductive workers are exploited; both have unpaid labour extorted from them. The only difference is that in the case of productive labour, unpaid labour time is appropriated as surplus-value; whereas in the case of unproductive labour, unpaid labour merely reduces the costs to the capitalist of appropriating part of the surplus-value produced elsewhere. In both cases, the capitalist will try to keep the wage bill as low as possible; in both cases, the capitalist will try to increase productivity by getting workers to work harder; in both cases, workers will be dispossessed of control over their labour process. And in both cases, socialism is a prerequisite for ending exploitation. It is hard to see where a fundamental divergence of economic interests emerges from the positions of unproductive and productive labour in capitalist relations of production. Certainly Poulantzas has not demonstrated that such a divergence exists. He has stated that the formal mechanisms of exploitation are different for the two types of workers; but he has not shown why this formal difference generates a difference in basic interests and thus can be considered a determinant of a class boundary.[39]

[38] Wright, op. cit., p. 26.

[39] A concrete example may help to illustrate this argument. By every definition of unproductive labour, a janitor in a bank is unproductive. No surplus-value is produced in a bank and thus the labour of all bank employees is unproductive. A janitor in a factory, however, is productive, since cleaning up a work area is part of the socially necessary labour time in the actual production of commodities. Is it reasonable to say that these two janitors have a different class interest in socialism? Unless this is the case, it is arbitrary to place one janitor in the working class and the other in the new petty bourgeoisie. (See G. Carchedi, 'On the Economic Identification of the New Middle Class', *Economy and Society*, Vol. IV (1975), No. 1, p. 19, for a similar critique of unproductive labour as a criterion for class.)

Another way of looking at this issue is from the point of view of capital. No one has ever suggested that the distinction between productive and unproductive capital represents a class boundary between the capitalist class and some other grouping. Typically, the productive/unproductive capital distinction is treated as one element defining a fractional boundary within the bourgeoisie (such as between banking and industrial capital). However, it could be argued, in much the same fashion as Poulantzas argues for the working class, that unproductive capital lies 'outside the dominant capitalist relation of exploitation' and thus agents occupying the place of unproductive capital should not be considered members of the capitalist class. This argument, of course, would be absurd, because it is obvious that whatever short-run conflicts of interests there might be between productive and unproductive capital, their fundamental class interests are the same. The same can be said for the distinction between productive and unproductive labour.[40]

Political and Ideological Criteria

Poulantzas insists that while ideological and political criteria are important, economic criteria still play the principal role in determining classes.[41] If we look at Charts 1 and 2, this does not appear to be the case. As can be seen from the charts, the working class represents the polar opposite of the bourgeoisie: on every criterion they have opposite signs. *Any* deviation from the criteria which define the working class is enough to exclude an agent from the working class in Poulantzas's analysis. Thus, an agent who was like a worker on the economic and political criteria, but deviated on the ideological criteria, would on this basis alone be excluded from the proletariat (this is the case for subaltern technicians). In practice, therefore, the ideological and political criteria become co-equal with the economic criteria, since they can *always* pre-empt the structural determination of class at the economic level. (This is quite separate from the question of the correctness of the economic criteria themselves as discussed above.) It is difficult to see how, under these circumstances, this perspective maintains the primacy of economic relations in the definition of classes.

The treatment of ideological and political criteria as effectively coequal with economic criteria stems, at least in part, from Poulantzas's usage

[40] This critique of Poulantzas's use of the productive/unproductive labour distinction as a class criterion does not imply that the distinction has no relevance for Marxist theory in general. In particular, the distinction between productive and unproductive labour may play a central part in the analysis of the accumulation process and crisis tendencies in advanced capitalism. (See Wright, op. cit.)

[41] In reading this critique of Poulantzas's use of political and ideological criteria in the definition of classes, it is important to remember the political and ideological context in which Poulantzas has developed his analysis. In a personal communication, Poulantzas writes: 'I think that one of our most serious politico-theoretical adversaries is *economism*, which *always* pretends, as soon as we try (with all the theoretical difficulties we encounter here) to stress the importance of the politico-ideological, that we "abandon the primacy of economics".' Poulantzas is absolutely correct in attacking economism and in attempting to integrate political and ideological considerations into the logic of a Marxist class analysis. The difficulty, as we shall see, is that he does not develop a clear criterion for the use of ideological and political criteria, and thus in practice they assume an almost equal footing with economic relations.

of the notion of the 'technical' division of labour. Poulantzas very correctly stresses that the social division of labour has primacy over the technical division. But he incorrectly identifies the technical division of labour with economic criteria whenever he discusses the role of political and ideological factors. For example, in the discussion of technicians Poulantzas writes: 'We have . . . seen the importance of the mental/manual labour division for the supervisory staff and for engineers and technicians. This played a decisive role in so far as, by way of the primacy of the social division of labour over the technical, it excluded these groupings from the working class despite the fact that they too perform "capitalist productive labour".'[42] Poulantzas in effect equates the performance of productive labour with the technical division of labour. But if the 'dominant capitalist relation of exploitation' constitutes the essential definition of productive labour, then it is unreasonable to treat productive labour as strictly a technical category. More generally, rather than viewing economic criteria as being rooted in the technical division of labour and political-ideological criteria in the social division, both should be considered dimensions of the social division of labour. If this is granted, then it is no longer at all obvious that ideological and political criteria should always pre-empt economic criteria in the structural determination of class. On the contrary: if economic criteria within the social division of labour are to be treated as the principal determinants of class, then they should generally pre-empt the ideological and political criteria.

Aside from undermining the economic basis of the theory of class, Poulantzas's use of political and ideological criteria has other difficulties. Especially in his discussion of political criteria, it is sometimes questionable whether these criteria are really 'political' at all. The core political criterion Poulantzas emphasizes in his discussion of the new petty bourgeoisie is position within the supervisory hierarchy. Now, apart from the issue of supervision as technical coordination, there are two ways in which supervision can be conceptualized. Following Poulantzas, supervision can be conceived as the 'direct reproduction, within the process of production itself, of the political relations between the capitalist class and the working class'.[43] Alternatively, supervision can be seen as one aspect of the structural dissociation between economic ownership and possession at the economic level itself. That is, possession, as an aspect of the ownership of the means of production, involves (to use Poulantzas's own formulation) control over the labour process. In the development of monopoly capitalism, possession has become dissociated from economic ownership. But equally, possession has become internally differentiated, so that control over the entire labour process (top managers) has become separated from the immediate control of labour activity (supervision). Unless possession itself is to be considered an aspect of political relations, there is no reason to consider supervision a reflection of political relations within

[42] *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, p. 251.

[43] Ibid., p. 228.

the social division of labour rather than a differentiated element of economic relations.[44]

In Poulantzas's use of ideological criteria, it is never clear exactly why the mental/manual division should be considered a determinant of an actual class boundary, rather than simply an internal division within the working class. And it is also not clear why this particular ideological dimension was chosen over a variety of others as the essential axis of ideological domination/subordination within the social division of labour. For example, sexism, by identifying certain jobs as 'women's work' and of inferior status to men's work, is also a dimension of ideological domination/subordination within the social division of labour. This puts men as a whole in a position of ideological domination, and yet this hardly makes a male worker not a worker. The same can be said of racism, nationalism and other ideologies of domination. All of these create important divisions within the proletariat; but, unless they correspond to different actual relations of production, they do not constitute criteria for class boundaries in their own right.

The Size of the Proletariat Using Poulantzas's Criteria

The upshot of Poulantzas's use of economic, political and ideological criteria is that the working class in the United States becomes a very small proportion of the total population. Of course, the validity of a conceptualization of class relations can hardly be judged by the number of people that fall into the working class. Nevertheless, since it is of considerable political importance how large or small the working class is seen to be, it is worth attempting to estimate the distribution of the population into classes using different criteria for class position.

While census data are of relatively little use in estimating the size of the working class, since they are not collected in terms of Marxist categories, there are other sources of data which are more useful. In particular, the University of Michigan Survey Research Center conducted a survey in 1969 on working conditions throughout the United States which included a number of questions which make it possible to reach a reasonably good estimate of the size of the working class using a variety of criteria. The survey contains data on: the respondent's occupation and the industry in which he/she works; whether or not the respondent has subordinates on the job who he/she supervises; whether or not the respondent is self-employed, and if so, how many employees, if any, the respondent has.[45] On the basis of these questions, we can estimate the size of the working class according to Poulantzas's criteria if we make some rough assumptions about the relationship of occupational titles to the mental/manual labour division and the relationship of industrial categories to the productive/unproductive labour distinction.

For present purposes, we will use the following definitions: 1. *Mental Labour*: professionals, technicians, managers (by occupational title), clerks and salespeople. 2. *Manual Labour*: craftsmen, operatives, labourers, transportation and services (i.e. janitors, barbers, cooks, etc.). 3. *Unproductive sectors*: wholesale and retail trade, finance, insurance, real-estate, services and government. 4. *Productive sectors*: agriculture, fishing, mining, construction, manufacturing, transportation and communications.

This set of categories is not perfect, both because of limitations of the data and because the complex reality of class relations can only be approximated by statistical data. By Poulantzas's definition of mental labour, there are certainly some craftsmen who should be considered mental labourers (i.e. they are not separated from the 'secret knowledge' of production and use it in their labour process). There are also positions in trade and government which are clearly productive by any definition, and some positions in productive sector industries which are unproductive. Nevertheless, these categories can give us a pretty good idea of the size of the proletariat based on Poulantzas's analysis.

The results appear in Tables 1–3. Table 1 presents the proportion of the total economically active population (i.e. people working twenty hours a week or more) that fall into each combination of the criteria for class. (None of the results differ significantly if the analysis is restricted to full-time workers.) The working class—non-supervisory, manual wage-earners in the productive sector—constitutes less than 20 per cent of the American labour force. The new petty bourgeoisie, on the other hand, swells to a mammoth 70 per cent of the economically active population. Table 2 gives these same results for men and women separately. Less than 15 per cent of the economically active women in the American population are working-class according to Poulantzas's criteria, while among men the figure is still only 23 per cent.[46] Finally,

[44] It is one thing to say that supervision has a political dimension and another to say that supervision is itself political relations within production. The former seems correct and is analogous to saying that possession and even economic ownership have political dimensions. The latter considerably expands the notion of the 'political' and must, of necessity, make possession of the means of production itself part of the 'reproduction of political relations within production'.

[45] See my 'Class Structure and Income Inequality', unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of California, Berkeley (available from University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan), for a detailed discussion of the survey.

[46] A reasonable objection could be raised that the estimate according to Poulantzas's criteria are unrealistically low because I have used such a broad definition of supervision. Undoubtedly, some individuals say that they 'supervise others on the job' when in fact they are simply the chief of a work team and have virtually no actual power within the labour process. As a result of the vagueness of the criterion for supervision, the estimates in Tables 1 and 2 indicate that well over a third of the labour force are supervisors. A second set of data enables us to adopt a more refined criterion for supervision. (However, the data set in question, the ISR Panel Study of Income Dynamics, is much less of a representative sample than the survey used in the above Tables, and thus is less adequate to gain a picture of the overall shape of the class structure.) In this second survey, individuals who said that they were supervisors were also asked if they had 'any say in the pay and promotions of their subordinates'. Approximately 65 per cent of all male blue-collar supervisors said that they did *not* have any say in pay and promotions (the data are not available for female supervisors). If we assume that all of these individuals should be classified as workers by Poulantzas's criteria, then the proportion of males in the working class increases from 23 per cent in Table 2 to about 33 per cent. Undoubtedly, the true proportion is somewhere in between these two estimates. In any event, even using this narrower definition of supervision, the working class remains a decided minority in Poulantzas's framework.

TABLE 1

Distribution of the Active Labour Force by Class Criteria
(United States national random sample taken in 1969)

	Self-Employed		*Wage-Earners*		
	Employers	Petty Bourgeois	Super-visors	Non-supervisors	TOTALS
Mental Labour					
Unproductive Sector	3·3%	1·9%	15·6%	16·5%	37·2%
Productive sector	2·5%	0·4%	4·4%	4·5%	11·9%
Manual Labour					
Unproductive Sector	0·3%	0·3%	5·3%	11·2%	17·2%
Productive Sector	1·3%	1·8%	10·7%	19·7%	33·6%
TOTALS	7·5%	4·5%	36·1%	51·9%	100·0%
Number in Sample	110	65	526	758	1459

SOURCE: 1969 Survey of Working Conditions, Institute of Social Research, University of Michigan (for a detailed discussion of the sample, see my 'Class Structure and Income Inequality', unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of California, Berkeley. Available from University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan).

DEFINITIONS:

Mental Labour: professionals, technicians, managers (by occupational title), clerks, sales
Manual Labour: craftsmen, operatives, labourers, transportation, services (i.e. janitors, etc.)
Unproductive Sectors: wholesale and retail trade, finance, insurance, real estate, services, government
Productive Sectors: agriculture, mining, fishing, construction, manufacturing, transportation, communications

TABLE 2

Distribution of Active Labour Force by Class Criteria for Men and for Women (1969)

MEN	*Self-Employed*		*Wage-Earners*		
	Employers	Petty Bourgeoisie	Super-visors	Non-supervisors	TOTALS
Mental Labour					
Unproductive Sector	4·0%	1·7%	14·3%	9·0%	29·0%
Productive Sector	4·0%	0·6%	5·6%	3·0%	13·2%
Manual Labour					
Unproductive Sector	0·4%	0·2%	5·6%	8·7%	14·9%
Productive Sector	2·1%	2·7%	15·4%	22·7%	42·9%
TOTALS	10·5%	5·3%	40·8%	43·4%	100·0%
Number in Sample	98	49	380	404	931

(See Table 1 for definitions of the categories)

WOMEN	*Self-Employed*		*Wage-Earners*		
	Employers	Petty Bourgeoisie	Super-visors	Non-supervisors	TOTALS
Mental Labour					
Unproductive Sector	2·2%	2·0%	18·1%	30·9%	53·1%
Productive Sector	0·0%	0·2%	2·4%	7·1%	9·6%
Manual Labour					
Unproductive Sector	0·2%	0·4%	5·1%	15·2%	20·9%
Productive Sector	0·0%	0·0%	1·8%	14·6%	16·3%
TOTALS	2·4%	2·6%	27·4%	67·7%	100·0%
Number in Sample	12	13	129	344	508

(See Table 1 for definitions of the categories)

Table 3 gives the proportion of the population which is working-class using a variety of different combinations of Poulantzas's criteria. If the productive/unproductive labour distinction is dropped, but the other criteria kept, the working class increases to over 30 per cent of the population. If the manual/mental labour distinction is dropped, but the supervisory labour criterion kept, the proportion rises to over 50 per cent of the population (67 per cent for women). We will deal more thoroughly below with the question of alternative criteria for class. The important point in the present context is that it makes a tremendous difference which criteria are used to define the proletariat, and that using Poulantzas's criteria reduces the American working class to a small minority. It is hard to imagine a viable socialist movement developing in an advanced capitalist country in which less than one in five people are workers.

TABLE 3

The Size of the American Working Class by Different Criteria, 1969

Criteria for the working class	*Percentage of the economically active population which is working class by given criteria*		
	TOTAL	MEN ONLY	WOMEN ONLY
All wage-earners	88·0%	83·6%	95·1%
All wage-earners who are not supervisors	51·9%	43·4%	67·7%
Blue-collar wage-earners (including blue-collar supervisors)	46·8%	52·4%	36·7%
Blue-collar, non-supervisory wage-earners	31·0%	31·4%	29·8%
Productive, non-supervisory manual labour (the working class in Poulantzas's analysis)	19·7%	22·7%	14·6%

SOURCE: Same as Table 1

The Class Unity of the New and Traditional Petty Bourgeoisie

The relationship of economic to political and ideological criteria is even more important in Poulantzas's argument about the class unity of the old and new petty bourgeoisie than it is in his analysis of who should be excluded from the working class in the first place. At the economic level not only are the old and new petty bourgeoisie characterized by different economic situations, but those situations are in many ways fundamentally opposed to each other. In particular, the old petty bourgeoisie is constantly threatened by the growth of monopoly capitalism, while the new petty bourgeoisie is clearly dependent upon monopoly capital for its reproduction. At the political level their interests are also opposed: the new petty bourgeoisie in general has an interest in the expansion of the state; the old petty bourgeoisie is generally opposed to big government and large state budgets.

In order for these opposing interests of the old and new petty bourgeoisie at the economic and political levels to be neutralized by the ideological level, the ideological bonds between the old and new petty bourgeoisie would have to be very powerful indeed. In fact, Poulantzas provides a partial view of the ideologies of the old and new petty bourgeoisie, and it is equally plausible to characterize them as opposed at this level as well as at the economic and political levels. While it is true that individualism characterizes the ideology of both the new and old petty bourgeoisie, the individualism of the two categories is extremely different. The individualism of the old petty bourgeoisie stresses individual autonomy, be your own boss, control your own destiny, etc. The individualism of the new petty bourgeoisie, on the other hand, is a careerist individualism, an individualism geared towards organizational mobility. The archetypal new petty bourgeois is the 'organization man', whose individualism is structured around the requirements of bureaucratic advancement; the archetypal traditional petty bourgeois is the 'rugged individualist', who makes his/her own way outside of the external demands of organizations. To call both of these 'petty-bourgeois individualism' is to gloss over important distinctions.

The basic problem with Poulantzas's discussion of the old and new petty bourgeoisie, however, does not concern these ideological divisions between them. Even if the two categories could be said to have identical ideologies, it would still be very questionable on this basis to call them a single class. In what sense can the economic level be considered the 'principal' determinant of class relations if two groups of agents with contradictory positions at the economic level—in fact, who exist in different modes of production at the economic level—can, on the basis of ideology alone, be grouped into a single class? In the end, the procedure Poulantzas adopts makes ideology itself the decisive criterion for class.

The Class Boundary of the Bourgeoisie

Chart 3 presents the various combinations of criteria Poulantzas uses to define the bourgeoisie. The most valuable aspects of his discussion are the emphasis on the need to go below legal categories of ownership and

CHART 3
Detailed Criteria for the Bourgeoisie and for Differentiation of Bourgeoisie and Petty Bourgeoisie

	ECONOMIC CRITERIA				POLITICAL CRITERIA		IDEOLOGICAL CRITERIA	
	Legal Ownership	*Economic Ownership*	*Possession*	*Direct Producer*	*Domination*	*Subordination*	*Domination*	*Subordination*
Traditional Entrepreneurial Capitalists	+	+	+	−	+	−	+	−
Top Corporate Executives	−	+	+	−	+	−	+	−
Managers	−	−	+	−	+	−	+	−
Heads of State Apparatuses	−	−	−	−	+	−	+	−
Traditional Petty Bourgeoisie	+	+	+	+	−	+	+	+

the analysis of the historical transformations and dissociations of economic ownership and possession.

Poulantzas's discussion of the class position of managers, however, is inadequate. When a manager occupies a position in the relations of production that is characterized by *both* economic ownership and possession, it is certainly reasonable to categorize the manager as part of the bourgeoisie. The problem arises when a manager occupies a position characterized by possession but not economic ownership. Poulantzas's solution to this situation is to argue that, in spite of the structural differentiation of different functions of capital, the positions remain unitary parts of capital as such. Thus, occupying any such position is sufficient to define the manager as bourgeois. This is an arbitrary solution. It is equally plausible to argue that exclusion from economic ownership defines non-capitalists in capitalist society, and thus managers who are 'mere' possessors of the means of production should be excluded from the bourgeoisie. A third possibility—which will be developed more fully below—is to argue that there are positions in the social division of labour which are *objectively contradictory*. Managers who are excluded from any economic ownership would constitute such a category, even if they retain partial possession of the means of production.

A second problem with Poulantzas's analysis of the bourgeoisie is that he tends to regard economic ownership and possession as all-or-nothing categories. A position either does or does not have real economic control of the means of production (economic ownership), or does or does not have the capacity to put those means of production into operation (possession). In fact, many managerial positions must be characterized as having limited forms of both ownership and possession. Some managers may have substantial control over one small segment of the total production process; others may have fairly limited control over a broader range of the production process. While it is clear that an agent whose control is so attenuated that he/she merely

executes decisions made from above should be excluded from the bourgeoisie, there is considerable ambiguity how middle-level managers of various sorts should be treated. Poulantzas's apparent solution is to argue that 'In all cases, therefore, the managers are an integral section of the bourgeois class'.[47] Again, an alternative solution is to treat contradictory cases as contradictory cases rather than to collapse them artificially into one class category or another.

An Alternative Conceptualization of Class Boundaries

Perhaps the most serious general criticism of Poulantzas's perspective centres on his treatment of ambiguous positions within the class structure. In his analysis of the working class, *any* deviation at all from the pure working-class criteria in Chart 1 is sufficient for exclusion from the proletariat; in his analysis of the bourgeoisie, on the other hand, it is necessary to deviate on *all* criteria in order to be excluded from the capitalist class. In neither case is the possibility allowed that positions within the social division of labour can be objectively contradictory.[48]

Contradictory Locations within Class Relations

An alternative way of dealing with such ambiguities in the class structure is to regard some positions as occupying *objectively contradictory locations within class relations*. Rather than eradicating these contradictions by artificially classifying every position within the social division of labour unambiguously into one class or another, contradictory locations need to be studied in their own right. This will be the primary objective of the rest of this article.[49] (In a sense, of course, all class positions are 'contradictory locations', in that class relations are intrinsically antagonistic, contradictory social relations. The point is that certain positions in the class structure constitute doubly contradictory locations: they represent positions which are torn between the basic contradictory class relations of capitalist society. Rather than refer to these positions with a cumbersome expression such as 'contradictory locations within the basic contradictory class relations', I will for convenience simply refer to them as 'contradictory class locations'.)

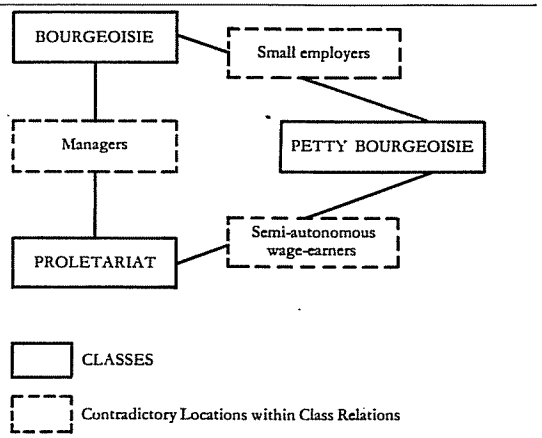
[47] Ibid., p. 180.

[48] Poulantzas at one point does suggest the possibilities of ambiguous cases when he writes: 'The mental/manual labour division is reproduced as a tendency, in the sense that it does not provide a typological classification into rigid compartments for this or that particular agent, and that what matters for us here is its social functioning in the existence and reproduction of social classes.' (Ibid., p. 256). This theme, however, is never developed or given any theoretical specificity in its own right. At most, Poulantzas suggests that there may be some ambiguity in the application of a particular criterion for class position, but not that there may be ambiguities created by contradictions among criteria.

[49] Carchedi's analysis (op. cit. and 'Reproduction of Social Classes at the Level of Production Relations', *Economy and Society*, Vol. IV, No. 4, pp. 362–417) of the new middle classes bears a certain resemblance to the present discussion of contradictory locations within class relations. Carchedi defines the new middle classes as positions which perform both the 'global function of capital' and the 'function of the collective worker' and thus 'are only identifiable in terms of contradiction'. For a discussion and critique of Carchedi's analysis, see Wright, 'Class Structure . . .', op. cit. appendix to chapter 2.

So far, our discussion of class structure has centred around the elaboration of various criteria for class. This has perhaps been somewhat misleading. When the word 'criteria' is used, there is usually an implication that the purpose of the analysis is the construction of formal, abstract typologies. Ambiguities in the class structure then appear as classification problems in the typology, as failures of analytical imagination rather than as objective characteristics of the society itself. The concept of contradictory locations within class relations, however, does not refer to problems of neatly pigeon-holing people within an abstract typology; rather it refers to objective contradictions among the real processes of class relations. To fully grasp the nature of the class structure of capitalist societies, therefore, we need first to understand the various processes which constitute class relations, analyse their historical transformation in the course of capitalist development, and then examine the ways in which the differentiation of these various processes has generated a number of contradictory locations within the class structures of advanced capitalist societies.

CHART 4
The Relationship of Contradictory Class Locations to the Basic Class Forces in Capitalist Society



To anticipate the conclusion of the analysis, three clusters of positions within the social division of labour can be characterized as occupying contradictory locations within class relations (see Chart 4): 1. *managers and supervisors* occupy a contradictory location between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat; 2. certain categories of *semi-autonomous employees* who retain relatively high levels of control over their immediate labour process occupy a contradictory location between the working class and the petty bourgeoisie; 3. *small employers* occupy a contradictory location between the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie. Our first task is to analyse how these contradictory locations emerge out of the dynamics

of class relations in advanced capitalist society. We will then try to decipher the relationship between these contradictory locations and the political and ideological determinants of class. The basic punch-line will be that it is the contradictory determination of class at the economic level which itself determines the extent to which political and ideological relations act as determinants of class position.

The Processes of Class Relations

Three interconnected structural changes in the course of capitalist development can help us to unravel the social processes underlying class relations in advanced capitalism:[50] the progressive loss of control over the labour process on the part of the direct producers; the elaboration of complex authority hierarchies within capitalist enterprises and bureaucracies; and the differentiation of various functions originally embodied in the entrepreneurial capitalist.[51] Since each of these developments has been thoroughly studied elsewhere, I will only briefly review them here in order to give more substance to the social processes used in the rest of the analysis.

Loss of control over the labour process by workers

The saga of the progressive dispossession of the direct producers in the course of capitalist development has been told many times. The point that needs stressing here is that the loss of control over the labour process is not an all-or-nothing phenomenon, but occurred gradually over a long period of time and exists in varying degrees even today. In the earliest capitalist production process, the direct producers generally maintained considerable control over the labour process. Often, especially in cottage industries, they even owned all or part of their immediate means of production. Such a situation made it much easier for the direct producers to control the pace of their labour and the length of their working day, thus making it more difficult for capitalists to raise the rate of exploitation. The net result was that workers' control over their own labour acted as a serious constraint on the accumulation process in early capitalism.[52] Much of the history of class struggle between capitalists and workers, especially in the nineteenth century, can be seen as a struggle over the terms of the control of the labour process.[53] As Steven Marglin has argued, one of the major impulses for the creation of factories was the desire to undermine worker control.[54] At a minimum, factory owners had much greater control over the length of the working day, and generally over other aspects of the

[50] See ibid., chapter 2 for a considerably more elaborate discussion of these processes of class relations.

[51] The point of studying these three historical transformations is less to understand their historical origins as such, than to use structural re-orderings of the capitalist system as a way of gaining insights into the social processes underlying class relations in contemporary capitalism. The epistemological assumption is that a number of distinct social processes are congealed in the class relation between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie and that an analysis of the historical transformations of that class relation is a way of gaining knowledge about the underlying processes themselves.

[52] See Wright, 'Alternative Perspectives . . .', op. cit., p. 31.

[53] See especially Katherine Stone, 'The Origins of Job Structures in the Steel Industry', *Review of Radical Political Economics*, Summer 1974.

[54] 'What do Bosses Do?', *Review of Radical Political Economics*, Summer 1974.

labour process as well. Once workers were gathered within factories, the assault on their remaining control of the labour process continued in the form of technical innovations which fragmented the production process and which progressively 'deskilled' the labour force.[55] The culmination of this process was the mass production assembly line, regulated by principles of Taylorism, in which the worker lost all autonomy and became virtually a human component of machinery itself.[56]

The differentiation of the functions of capital

As the scale of capital-accumulating units expanded in the course of the concentration and centralization of capital, it became impossible for the capitalist to participate directly in all aspects of decision-making. Once the joint-stock company became the dominant institutional form for monopoly capital, it became particularly imperative to develop a responsible managerial hierarchy to conduct the day-to-day operations of capitalist production. The result, as Poulantzas has so effectively described, was the partial dissociation between formal legal ownership and real economic ownership on the one hand, and the dissociation between control over the immediate labour process (possession) and control over investments and resource allocation (real economic ownership) on the other.[57]

The development of complex hierarchies

The same process of concentration and centralization of capital that generates the basic differentiation of economic ownership and possession, also generates various forms of internal differentiation within each of these dimensions of ownership. First let us look at relations of possession. Relations of possession concern the direction and control of the capitalist production process. Such direction involves two analytically separable aspects: first, control of the physical means of production; second, control of labour power. Even in the earliest capitalist enterprise, there was some structural differentiation between

[55] See Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, New York 1974.

[56] The reverse tendencies also exist within capitalism. As technology changes, new skills are needed and new categories of jobs are created in which the worker may have greater immediate control over the labour process. Furthermore, in the past few decades, the crude scientific management advocated by Taylor has been at least partially replaced in some monopoly corporations by 'human relations' approaches to the problem of worker productivity. One part of such new approaches is, at least in principle, the 'enrichment' of jobs and the enlargement of the sphere of decisions formally under the control of the worker. Both of these counter-tendencies to the general process of de-skilling and erosion of worker autonomy in the labour process, however, still illustrate the salience of control over the labour process as a dimension of class relations. While new skills are constantly being created, it is also true that there is constant pressure to reduce the skill levels needed to perform given tasks. And while it is undoubtedly true that in certain situations experiments in worker participation have occurred, such enlarged autonomy is almost always confined within very narrow limits and is always seen as a way of getting workers to work harder. That is, control is relinquished—and generally nominal control at that—only when it is more than compensated by increased production. When, because of class struggle, the sphere of workers' participation extends beyond such narrow limits and impinges on 'management prerogatives', one can be sure that the capitalist class will attempt to regain full control of the labour process.

[57] See also Michael De Vroey, 'The Separation of Ownership and Control', *Review of Radical Political Economics*, Fall 1975.

these two aspects. Foremen were typically excluded from any real control of the physical means of production, yet played an important role in the supervision of workers. As the capitalist enterprise expanded, additional layers of supervision were added, leading eventually to the complex hierarchy of social control within the monopoly corporation. Capitalist development has also produced an elaborate hierarchy within the other aspect of possession, control over the physical means of production. At the highest levels of the hierarchy, top managers control the entire apparatus of production.[58] Below them, various middle levels of management participate in the control of segments of the production process. At the bottom, certain categories of workers maintain some marginal control over their immediate production process. A similar line of reasoning can be developed for economic ownership. In the earliest capitalist enterprise, economic ownership was not organized hierarchically. A single figure was essentially responsible for the entire accumulation process. In the modern corporation, however, different levels of economic ownership can be distinguished. Full economic ownership refers to participation in the control of the overall investment and accumulation process. Typically, the highest executives in the corporation and certain members of the board of directors would occupy this position. Below this level there are executives and managers who participate in decisions concerning investments in either sub-units of the total production process (e.g. branches) or partial aspects of the entire investment process (e.g. marketing). Finally, there are managers who marginally participate in ownership relations by being involved in decision-making over narrow aspects of sub-units of production. These various hierarchical levels within the relations of economic ownership and relations of possession are summarized in Chart 5.

On the basis of this brief sketch of historical developments within capitalist relations of production, it is possible to isolate three central processes underlying the basic capital-labour relationship: control over the physical means of production; control over labour power; control over investments and resource allocation. The first two of these comprise what Poulantzas has called possession; the third is essentially the same as economic ownership. Again, it must be stressed that these three processes are the real stuff of class relations in capitalist society; they are not merely analytic dimensions derived from *a priori* reasoning.

When we speak of the fundamental class antagonism between workers and capitalists, what we mean is that these two classes are polarized on each of these three underlying processes: the capitalist class has control

[58] 'Level' refers principally to the scope of control attached to a particular position, rather than the formal location within an organizational hierarchy (although the two would generally tend to coincide). The word 'control' in this context should not be taken to imply that the *individual* who occupies a particular social position controls the means of production as an individual. Rather the word designates a social relationship between the position and the means of production. To say that top managers 'control the entire apparatus of production' does not mean that any one individual by him/herself controls the entire apparatus, but rather that the individual occupies a position which participates in the control of the entire apparatus of production.

CHART 5
Levels within Ownership Relations

	RELATIONS OF ECONOMIC OWNERSHIP	RELATIONS OF POSSESSION	
		Control of means of production	*Control of labour power*
Full control	Control over the overall investment and accumulation process	Control over the entire apparatus of production	Control over the entire supervisory hierarchy
Partial control	Participation in decisions concerning either sub-units of the total production process or partial aspects of the entire investment process	Control over one segment of the total production process	Control over one segment of the supervisory hierarchy
Minimal control	Participation in decisions concerning narrow aspects of sub-units of production	Control over one's immediate instruments of production; some autonomy in the immediate labour process	Control over the direct producers, over immediate subordinates but not part of the hierarchy as such
No control	Complete exclusion from participation in investment and accumulation decisions	Negligible control over any aspect of the means of production	No ability to invoke sanctions on other workers

over the entire apparatus of production, over the authority structure as a whole and over the overall investment process; the proletariat is excluded from each of these. These two particular combinations of the three processes of class relations thus constitute the two unambiguous locations within class relations in the capitalist mode of production. The petty bourgeoisie, on the other hand, constitutes the unambiguous location within simple commodity production: they have full economic ownership and full control over the physical means of production, but control no labour power. The relationship of these three classes to the underlying processes of class relations in capitalist society is presented in Chart 6.

The Analysis of Contradictory Locations within Class Relations

We can now turn to the question of defining the contradictory locations within class relations. We will explore two different kinds of contradictory locations: 1. contradictory locations between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, i.e. locations defined by contradictory combinations of the three processes underlying class relations within the capitalist mode of production; 2. contradictory locations between the petty bourgeoisie and both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, i.e. locations

situated between the capitalist mode of production and simple commodity production.[59] Chart 7 presents the basic relationship between the unambiguous locations illustrated in Chart 6 and the contradictory locations. In addition to the three social processes discussed above, this chart also contains three juridical categories: legal ownership of property, legal status as the employer of labour power, and legal status as a seller of labour power. These three juridical processes have

CHART 6
Unambiguous Locations within Class Relations

	PROCESSES UNDERLYING CLASS RELATIONS		
	Economic Ownership	*Possession*	
	Control over investments and the accumulation process	Control over the physical means of production	Control over the labour power of others
Bourgeoisie	+	+	+
Proletariat	−	−	−
Petty bourgeoisie	+	+	−

+ Full Control − No Control (See Chart 5 for precise definitions)

been included because they so often are treated as the determinants of class position. It must be kept in mind in referring to Chart 7 that the juridical criteria are of strictly secondary importance; the fundamental issue remains the patterns of contradictory locations defined by the three substantive processes of class relations.

Contradictory Locations Between the Proletariat and the Bourgeoisie

One thing is immediately obvious from Chart 7. The contradictory quality of a particular location within class relations is a variable rather than all-or-nothing characteristic. Certain positions can be thought of as occupying a contradictory location around the boundary of the proletariat; others as occupying a contradictory location around the boundary of the bourgeoisie.

The contradictory location closest to the working class is that of foremen and line supervisors. Foremen typically have little real control over the physical means of production, and while they do exercise control over labour power, this frequently does not extend much beyond being the formal transmission belt for orders from above. It is difficult to say whether during the course of capitalist development over the past century, the class location of foremen has moved closer to or further from the working class. On the one hand, the early foreman often participated directly in the production process alongside workers and even defended workers against arbitrary treatment by the boss. On

[59] We will not discuss contradictory locations that occur because an individual simultaneously occupies two class positions within social relations of production. For example, a craftsman who works in a factory on weekdays may operate as a self-employed petty-bourgeois artisan on weekends and evenings. While such dual class membership may be important in certain historical circumstances, it does not pose the same kind of analytical problem as positions which are themselves located in a contradictory way within class relations.

the other hand, the foreman in the nineteenth-century factory often had much greater personal discretion and personal power than today. In the nineteenth century, authority within the capitalist factory was typically organized in much the same way as an army. There was a simple chain of command and the authority at each level was absolute with respect to the level below. Such a system Marx aptly termed 'factory despotism', and foremen in such a factory had at least the potential of being petty despots. As the capitalist enterprise grew in scale and com-

CHART 7
Contradictory Locations Within Class Relations

	SUBSTANTIVE SOCIAL PROCESSES COMPRISING CLASS RELATIONS			JURIDICAL CATEGORIES OF CLASS RELATIONS		
	Economic Ownership	*Possession*		*Legal Ownership*		*Wage Labour*
	Control over investments, resources	Control over the physical means of production	Control over the labour power of others	Legal ownership of property (capital, stocks, real estate, etc.)	Legal status of being the employer of labour power	Sale of one's own labour power
Bourgeoisie						
Traditional capitalist	+	+	+	+	+	−
Top corporate executive	+	+	+	Partial	−	Minimal
Contradictory location between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie						
Top managers	Partial/minimal	+	+	Minimal	−	Partial
Middle managers	Minimal/−	Partial	Partial	−	−	+
Technocrats	−	Minimal	Minimal	−	−	+
Foremen/line supervisors	−	−	Minimal	−	−	+
Proletariat	−	−	−	−	−	+
Contradictory location between the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie						
Semi-autonomous employees	−	Minimal	−	−	−	+
Petty bourgeoisie	+	+	−	+	−	−
Contradictory location between the petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie						
Small employers	+	+	Minimal	+	Minimal	−

+ Full control Minimal Residual control
Partial Attenuated control − No control
(See Chart 5 for precise definitions)

plexity, the authority structure gradually became more bureaucratized. As Weber would put it, foremen increasingly became the administrators of impersonal rules rather than the dispensers of personal fiats.

Richard Edwards, in a study of work norms in bureaucratically structured capitalist organizations, describes this shift in authority relations as follows: 'What distinguishes modern enterprises from their earlier and cruder prototypes—and in particular, what distinguishes bureaucratic organization from simple hierarchy—is that in bureaucratically organized enterprises, the exercise of power becomes *institutionalized*. External, arbitrary, personal commands from the boss are replaced by established rules and procedures: "rule of law" replaces "rule of personal command". Work activities become directed by rules. Supervisors at all levels, no longer directing the worker's activities by personal instruction, merely enforce the rules and evaluate (reward or penalize) their subordinates according to pre-established criteria for adequate work performance. More and more, the work structure is designed so that administrative control can replace executive control.'[60] The development of the capitalist enterprise has thus pushed foremen in two opposing directions: they have moved further from workers by becoming less involved in direct production, and they have moved closer to workers by gradually having their personal power bureaucratized. Superficially at least, it would seem that the first of these tendencies probably dominated during the first part of this century, while the second tendency probably dominates today. In any event, when the control of supervisors over labour power becomes so attenuated that the supervisor lacks even the capacity to invoke negative sanctions, then the position really merges with the working class proper and should no longer be thought of as a contradictory location. This would be the case, for example, of the chief of a work team who has certain special responsibilities for coordinating activities of others in the team, but lacks any real power over them.

At the other end of the contradictory location between workers and capitalists, top managers occupy a contradictory location at the boundary of the bourgeoisie. While top managers are generally characterized by limited participation in economic ownership, they differ little from the bourgeoisie in terms of relations of possession. Again, at the very top of the managerial hierarchy, corporate executives essentially merge with the capitalist class itself.

The most contradictory locations between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are occupied by middle managers and what can loosely be termed 'technocrats'. Technocrat in this context refers to technicians and professionals of various sorts within the corporate hierarchy who tend to have a limited degree of autonomy over their own work (*minimal* control of the physical means of production) and a limited control over subordinates, but who are not in command of pieces of the productive apparatus. Middle managers, on the other hand, control various pieces of the labour process; they have control not only over

[60] 'Alienation and Inequality: Capitalist Relations of Production in Business Enterprises', Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of Economics, Harvard, p. 102.

immediate subordinates but over part of the authority hierarchy itself. They may even have some residual participation in actual investment decisions. Both middle managers and technocrats have, in Harry Braverman's words, one foot in the bourgeoisie and one foot in the proletariat. In discussing new technical occupations and middle management, Braverman writes: 'If we are to call this a "new middle class", however, as many have done, we must do so with certain reservations. The old middle class occupied that position by virtue of its place outside the polar class structure; it possessed the attributes of neither capitalist nor worker; it played no direct role in the capital accumulation process, whether on one side or the other. This "new middle class", by contrast, occupies its intermediate position not because it is outside the process of increasing capital, but because, as part of this process, it takes its characteristics from *both sides*. Not only does it receive its petty share of the prerogatives and rewards of capital, but it also bears the mark of the proletarian condition.'[61] Unlike line supervisors and foremen on the one hand, and top managers on the other, middle managers and technocrats do not have a clear class pole to which they are attached. The contradictory quality of their class location is much more intense than in the other cases we have discussed, and as a result it is much more difficult to assess the general stance they will take within class struggle. As we shall see below, political and ideological forces play a particularly important role in determining class location of individuals occupying these positions.

Contradictory Locations between the Petty Bourgeoisie and Other Classes

The analysis of the contradictory locations between the petty bourgeoisie and other classes poses a somewhat different problem from the contradictory locations between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, since it involves locations between different modes of production rather than within a single mode of production.

The contradictory location between the petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie is conceptually simpler than between the petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The distinctive feature of capitalist production is the appropriation of surplus-value through the exploitation of workers in the labour process. In simple commodity production, on the other hand, there is no exploitation; whatever surplus is produced is generated by the petty-bourgeois producer him/herself. In general, of course, the surplus is likely to be very small and thus little if any accumulation is likely to occur. When a petty-bourgeois producer employs a single helper, there is an immediate change in the social relations of production, for the labour of a worker can now be exploited. Still, the surplus-value appropriated from a single employee is likely to be very small; most importantly, it is likely to be less than the surplus product generated by the petty-bourgeois producer him/herself. This is especially likely since frequently in petty-bourgeois production a considerable amount of labour is contributed by unpaid family members. As additional employees are added, the proportion of the total surplus product that is generated by the petty-bourgeois family declines. At some point it becomes less than half of the total

[61] Braverman, op. cit. p. 467.

surplus product, and eventually becomes a small fraction of the total surplus. At that point, the petty-bourgeois producer becomes firmly a small capitalist. There is no *a priori* basis for deciding how many employees are necessary to become a small capitalist. This number would vary considerably for different technologies employed in production and for different historical periods. In any event, between such a small capitalist and the pure petty-bourgeois producer lies the contradictory location between the capitalist class and the petty bourgeoisie.

The contradictory location between the petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat can perhaps best be understood by returning to the historic process of proletarianization of the petty bourgeoisie. The central dynamic underlying this transformation was the need by capital to increase its control over the labour process. Each step of the transformation involved a deeper penetration of capitalist domination into the heart of the labouring activity of direct producers, until in the classic form of scientific management, the direct producer has no control whatsoever over his/her work. This process is constantly being re-enacted within capitalism; it is not a process which was somehow completed at the beginning of this century.

Today there are still categories of employees who have a certain degree of control over their own immediate conditions of work, over their immediate labour process. In such instances, the labour process has not been completely proletarianized. Thus, even though such employees work for the self-expansion of capital and even though they have lost the legal status of being self-employed, they can still be viewed as occupying residual islands of petty-bourgeois relations of production within the capitalist mode of production itself. In their immediate work environment, they maintain the work process of the independent artisan while still being employed by capital as a wage labourer. A good example of this is a researcher in a laboratory or a professor in an élite university. Such positions may not really involve control over other people's labour power, yet have considerable immediate control over conditions of work (i.e. research). More generally, many white-collar technical employees and certain highly skilled craftsmen have at least a limited form of this autonomy in their immediate labour process. Such minimal control over the physical means of production by employees outside of the authority hierarchy constitutes the basic contradictory location between the petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

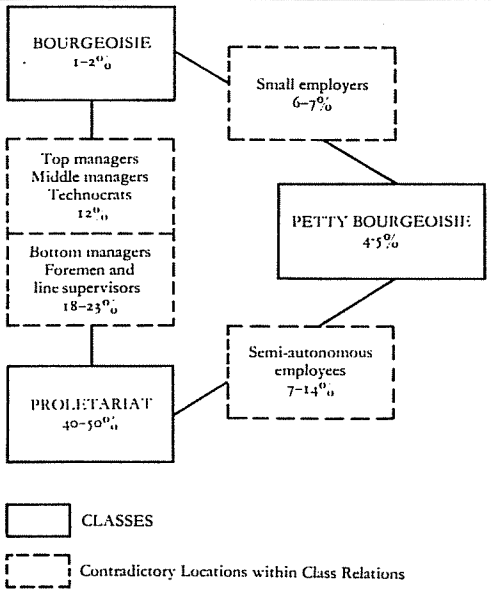
While there is some debate on the question, it seems likely that in the course of capitalist development over the past fifty years, this particular kind of contradictory location has been somewhat reduced. It is certainly true that white-collar employees have increased as a proportion of the labour force, but as Braverman has forcefully shown, this expansion of white-collar employment has been combined with a constant proletarianization of the working conditions of white-collar labour. It remains to be shown whether the net effect of these two tendencies—the expansion of white-collar employment and the proletarianization of white-collar work—has increased or decreased the contradictory locations between the working class and the petty bourgeoisie. At any rate, it seems almost certain that the large majority of

white-collar employees, especially clerical and secretarial employees, have—at most—trivial autonomy on the job and thus should be placed within the working class itself.

Several other contradictory locations could be discussed. For example, the owners of fast food and gas station franchises could be seen as

CHART 8

Distribution of the Economically Active Population into Contradictory Class Locations (1969)



Categories included in various high and low estimates:

	HIGH ESTIMATE	LOW ESTIMATE
Managers		
Top managers, etc.	Professionals, technicians and managers (by occupational title) in the authority structure	
Bottom managers, etc.	All supervisors not classified as top managers	Excludes operatives and labourers
Semi-autonomous Employees	Includes all professionals, technicians, teachers, managers (by occupation) and craftsmen not in supervisory structure	Excludes craftsmen
Small Employers	Less than 50 employees	Less than 10 employees

occupying a contradictory location between the petty bourgeoisie or small employers and managers. While they maintain some of the characteristics of self-employed independent producers, they also become much more like functionaries for large capitalist corporations. Professors with large research grants which enable them to directly hire research assistants, secretaries, etc., could be thought of as occupying a contradictory location between the semi-autonomous employees and small employers. Other special cases could be given, but the most important contradictory locations are the ones discussed above.

The Size of Contradictory Locations

On the basis of the same data that we used to analyse the size of the working class using Poulantzas's criteria, we can make some rough estimates of the size of the various contradictory locations within class relations. The results are presented in Chart 8. Unfortunately, the survey that was available did not contain any direct information on the autonomy of workers on their jobs. The estimate of the proportion of the population in the contradictory location between the petty bourgeoisie and the working class is thus quite approximate. It is based on the assumption that all workers in certain occupational categories belong in this contradictory position. The high estimate of 14 per cent assumes that *all* professionals, teachers, technicians, managers (by formal occupational title, not position within the supervisory structure) and craftsmen have sufficient residual control over their immediate means of production to be placed in this contradictory position. This is undoubtedly too high an estimate. The low estimate of 7 per cent excludes craftsmen. This is probably closer to the actual proportion.

The figures for the contradictory location between the working class and the bourgeoisie are also only rough estimates. Since all we know is whether or not the respondent supervises people, we have certainly included some positions which involve virtually no real control over labour power and thus should belong to the working class proper. We have also included some top executives in the contradictory location who should really have been placed in the bourgeoisie. In any event, this latter problem involves a very small proportion of the total population, perhaps 1–2 per cent of all managers. No questions were asked in the survey which enable us to accurately distinguish between top managers, middle managers and technocrats, and line supervisors and foremen. Again, we can use occupational titles to make some crude estimates. We will assume that all supervisors who say that they are professionals, managers or technicians are probably technocrats, middle managers or top managers. All the rest we will assume are line supervisors or foremen. The high estimate for this bottom category includes all supervisors who are not classified in the top-middle management position; the low estimate excludes operatives and labourers, most of whom are probably heads of work teams rather than actual foremen. On the basis of these estimates, approximately 12 per cent of the economically active population falls into the middle manager/top manager contradictory location between the working class and the bourgeoisie, while somewhere between 18 per cent and 23 per cent occupy the contradictory location at the boundary of the working class. If we take ten employees as the cut-off point for small capitalists,

then the contradictory location between the petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie consists of about 6 per cent of the population. It we take fifty employees as the cut-off, then this increases to 7 per cent.

Overall, on the basis of these statistics, the working class in the United States consists of between 40 and 50 per cent of the economically active population. At the boundaries of the working class are another 25–35 per cent of the population, depending upon which estimates are used. The total potential class basis for a socialist movement, consisting of the working class and those contradictory locations closest to the working class, is thus probably somewhere between 60 per cent and 70 per cent of the population.

Contradictory Class Locations and Political and Ideological Relations

To briefly recapitulate the argument so far, we have analysed the class relations of capitalist society in terms of three processes underlying social relations of production: control of labour power, control of the physical means of production and control of investments and resources. The central class forces of capitalist society—the bourgeoisie and the proletariat—can be understood as representing polar class positions within each of these three processes. The petty bourgeoisie, on the other hand, is defined by the second and the third of these processes within simple commodity production. We then defined contradictory locations within class relations as situations in which these three processes did not perfectly correspond to the basic class forces within the capitalist mode of production or to the petty bourgeoisie in simple commodity production. This led to the analysis of three contradictory locations: managers and supervisors occupy a contradictory location between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat; small employers occupy such a position between the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie; and semi-autonomous employees occupy a contradictory location between the petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

Thus far, no mention has been made of the role of political and ideological forces in determining class relations. One of Poulantzas's most important contributions is his insistence that class relations cannot be understood solely in terms of economic relations; political and ideological relations must be brought into the understanding of objective class position itself. The weakness of his analysis, as discussed earlier, is that he has developed this principle in such a way that ideological and political criteria have effectively become coequal with economic relations themselves. For political and ideological relations to be integrated into a theory of the structural determination of class, it is necessary that this be done in a way that maintains the primacy of economic relations. We need, in other words, a criterion for the use of political and ideological relations which is itself determined by economic relations.

Our analysis of contradictory class locations provides us with such a criterion: *the extent to which political and ideological relations enter into the determination of class position is itself determined by the degree to which those*

positions occupy a contradictory location at the level of social relations of production. The more contradictory is a position within social relations of production, the more political and ideological relations can influence its objective position within class relations. The more a position coincides with the basic antagonistic class relations at the level of social relations of production, the less weight political and ideological forces can have in determining its class position. In a sense it is the indeterminacy of class determination at the economic level which allows political and ideological relations to become effective determinants of class position.

Political and ideological relations can either tend to heighten or to counteract the contradictory quality of locations that are not completely determined at the economic level. For example, the ideological division between mental and manual labour, on which Poulantzas places such stress, would tend to deepen the contradictory class location of certain semi-autonomous employees. Many technicians with only minimal control over their immediate labour process would be located close to the boundary of the working class in terms of the three dimensions of class relations at the economic level, but would be pushed further from the working class by the status division between mental and manual labour. A strong union movement among white-collar employees, on the other hand, could constitute a political factor which pushed them closer to the working class. In this way, political and ideological class struggle become determinants of the objective class positions of contradictory locations at the economic level.

Certain contradictory locations are especially affected by their relationship to the political and ideological apparatuses of the state. For example, it is impossible to understand the class position of the administrative personnel in the state repressive apparatuses—the police, the courts, the prison system, etc.—simply in terms of social relations at the economic level. Their role in reproducing bourgeois domination through the capitalist state is of basic importance and pushes their class position towards the bourgeoisie. In general, however, it would be a mistake to argue that the role of such positions within the state apparatus actually merges them into the capital class. Policemen, for example, are not in any meaningful sense part of the bourgeoisie, even though they enforce the interests of the capitalist class through the repressive apparatus. Their dependence on the capitalist class may make them in practice 'enemies' of the working class in most class struggles, but nevertheless they should be seen as occupying a contradictory class location. At the level of economic relations alone, police are wage-labourers. Most of them have no control over labour power of others, and relatively little control over their own labour power. Their role in the state, however, places them closer to the bourgeoisie at the level of social relations of political domination. They thus occupy a contradictory class location defined principally by a non-correspondence of economic and political relations.[62]

[62] This contradictory quality of the class determination of police is in fact reflected in their role in class struggles. There have been specific historical circumstances in which the police have sided with workers against the capitalist class. In a personal communication, Margaret Levy reports that in early union struggles in the steel industry the national guard was used to repress strikes because the police were seen as unreliable due to their close ties to workers. The current unionization drives within police departments and police strikes in a number of large cities also reflect the contradictory quality of their class position. While it would be somewhat fanciful to suppose that the growth of a trade-union consciousness among police would fundamentally shift their role in class struggle, it is possible that certain police departments may become less reliable instruments in controlling strikes.

Only at the top levels of the state apparatus is it plausible to argue that ideological and political factors are sufficiently strong to neutralize the contradictory quality of class locations. In terms of economic relations alone it would be hard to characterize the heads of various state apparatuses as being unambiguously bourgeois. Top bureaucratic positions do not in any real sense involve economic ownership, although they might be said to involve control of the physical means of production. What defines these positions as part of the bourgeoisie is their location within the state apparatus as such and the role played by that apparatus in the perpetuation of bourgeois political and ideological domination.

Conclusion

Where does all of this leave us in terms of a general analysis of the class structure of advanced capitalist societies? We began this essay by saying that it mattered both for theory and for politics how the boundary of the working class was defined. In the end what really determines whether or not a particular social position belongs in the working class is whether or not it shares the fundamental class interests of the working class. And ultimately, this means whether or not it has an interest in socialism.

The concept of contradictory locations within class relations can help us to understand the relationship of certain positions within the social division of labour to socialist movements. The contradictory locations around the boundary of the working class represent social positions which do have a real interest in socialism, yet simultaneously gain certain privileges from capitalist social relations of production (this is in fact another way of defining them as occupying contradictory locations). Somewhere between a quarter and third of the American labour force falls into these locations near the boundary of the proletariat.

In the end, class struggle will determine the extent to which people in these contradictory locations join forces with the working class in a socialist movement. At the economic level, class struggle is the essential determinant of contradictory locations in the first place; at the political and ideological levels, class struggle pushes contradictory locations closer to or further from the working class. Class struggle thus shapes the very contours of the class structure itself, which in turn influences the development of class struggle. An analysis of contradictory class locations is critical for an understanding of this dialectical relationship. 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.

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