
Symposium on *Classes**

NEW DIRECTIONS IN CLASS ANALYSIS

Val Burris

Among Marxist theorists, the class position of salaried managers and professionals has been the focus of long and heated controversy. The reasons for this preoccupation are not hard to identify. As salaried professionals, most theorists are themselves members of this group. Their concern has thus been motivated by an interest in self-understanding, if not by an inflated sense of their own importance. Apart from this is the genuine ambiguity of these positions. Given their heterogeneous composition, salaried managers and professionals pose some of the most difficult problems for the classification of persons according to their place within the social relations of capitalist production. Disagreements over the nature of the class structure have therefore focused on this stratum. Finally, because of their increasing numbers relative to other occupational groups, salaried managers and professionals have figured prominently in speculation regarding the transformation of the class structure. Critiques of earlier theories of class and projections of the future of class society have therefore placed salaried managers and professionals at the center of attention.¹

*This was originally held as a panel, coordinated by Rhonda Levine, at the 1987 annual meeting of the American Sociological Association.

1. M. Oppenheimer, *White Collar Politics* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1985), pp. 45-84; V. Burris, "The Discovery of the New Middle Class," *Theory and Society*, vol. 15, no. 3 (1986), pp. 317-49.

Recent attempts to clarify the class location of salaried managers and professionals have generally found the traditional Marxist definition of class (ownership versus nonownership of the means of production) an insufficient criterion for the assignment of class positions. By this criterion, wage and salary workers at all levels would be defined as proletarians—a view that does not square easily with the distinctive social characteristics and political behavior of the more privileged strata of salaried employees. Contemporary Marxists have therefore proposed alternative criteria by which to locate these positions within the class structure and clarify their relationship to both the capitalist and working classes.

One of the most provocative and far-reaching of such attempts to reformulate the Marxist conception of class is that presented by Erik Olin Wright in his book *Classes*.² In this brief presentation, I wish to comment upon what I see as the strengths and weaknesses of this new formulation and to situate it in relation to a variety of alternative perspectives. At the outset I should say that this is an impressive book. Wright tackles the most complex issues and presents them in a fashion that is unequalled for its clarity and precision. He is not afraid to alter his previously stated positions, and he openly acknowledges and explores the problematic aspects of his own arguments. While I am generally critical of Wright's new perspective, these positive qualities should not be forgotten during the comments that follow.

The Theory of Contradictory Class Locations

To understand the reasoning behind Wright's new conception of class structure, we must begin with his earlier theory of contradictory class locations—the theory which guided his work prior to the publication of *Classes*. Wright's theory of contradictory class locations is one variant of a more general strategy for the analysis of intermediate classes in capitalist society. I shall refer to this as the "Marxist-structuralist" approach to class analysis. What is common to the different variants of this approach is the notion that the capital-labor relation—the basic class relation of capitalist society—is not a unitary relation, but the articulation of several component relations. As the correspondence between these component relations is less than perfect, the possibility exists for class locations which simultaneously occupy a *superordinate* position on one dimension of the capital-labor relation and a *subordinate* position

2. E.O. Wright, *Classes* (London: Verso, 1985).

on others. These locations, combining characteristics of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, are interpreted as an intermediate class or stratum within capitalist society.

Carchedi, Poulantzas, and Wright present three variants of this approach. Carchedi distinguishes between the ownership and functional aspects of the capital-labor relation.³ Positions which are subordinate from the standpoint of ownership, but nevertheless participate in the function of capital (which Carchedi defines as the control and surveillance of the labor process) are classified as belonging to the "new middle class." Poulantzas decomposes the capital-labor relation into three components: its economic aspect (productive versus unproductive labor), its political aspect (supervision versus nonsupervision), and its ideological aspect (mental versus manual labor).⁴ He argues that wage- and salary earners who occupy a superordinate position on any of these three dimensions should be excluded from the proletariat and classified as part of what he calls the "new petty bourgeoisie." Wright in his earlier theory, decomposed the rights and functions of capital into their ownership aspect (control over investments and resource allocation) and what he referred to as the relations of "possession"—that is, day-to-day control over the physical means of production and the labor process.⁵ Salaried employees who do not own the means of production, but nevertheless retain significant powers of possession (either as managers or as semiautonomous experts), were classified by Wright as occupants of "contradictory class locations." Such positions, Wright argued, belong neither to the proletariat nor the bourgeoisie, but are objectively torn between opposing class positions. What was distinctive about Wright's contribution to this debate was (1) his coining of the felicitous term "contradictory class locations" to capture the nature of these positions, and (2) his claim that these positions did not constitute a discrete class as much as a heterogeneous stratum, of which two main clusters (managers and experts) could be distinguished.

Various criticisms have been raised against this approach to the analysis of intermediate class positions. First, we may note a number of objections to the specific criteria of class position given by different theorists. Generally speaking, most critics have found Poulantzas's definition of the nonproletarian pole of class relations to be too broad, resulting in an overly restricted notion of the working class. Conversely, Carchedi has been criticized for defining the functions of capital too

3. G. Carchedi, *The Economic Definition of Social Classes* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977).

4. N. Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1975).

5. E.O. Wright, *Class, Crisis and the State* (London: Verso, 1978).

narrowly, ignoring the nonsupervisory aspects of capitalists' domination over workers, and thereby underestimating the dimensions of the new middle class. Wright's model has been better received, although some critics have questioned the emphasis it places upon abstract class structures as opposed to concrete class subjects, and the appropriateness of the autonomy criterion by which Wright defines the class location of salaried experts.

At a more general level, two kinds of criticisms have been leveled. First, questions have been raised about the importance that these models attach to *authority* relations in the identification and analysis of intermediate class locations. Weberians like Parkin have interpreted this as a tacit acceptance of the Weberian premisses of the independent importance of power and domination as bases of social cleavage, in contrast to the traditional Marxist emphasis on relations of property and exploitation.⁶ Wright, in his new book, takes this criticism to heart, arguing that relations of property and exploitation have indeed been pushed to the background in recent Marxist analyses of the class structure. In a self-criticism of his own former position, he now maintains that it was an error to attempt to solve the problem of intermediate classes by incorporating relations of domination into the Marxist definition of class. From a Marxist standpoint, Wright argues, the introduction of such class criteria as the exercise of supervisory authority or autonomy from supervision creates two types of problems. First, such relations do not, in and of themselves, imply any necessary asymmetry of class interests. Second, incorporating relations of domination and subordination into the definition of class obscures the distinctiveness of class oppression by placing it on the same plane as numerous other forms of domination—sexual, racial, national, etc. This renders problematic the basic Marxist claim of the explanatory primacy of class relations in the analysis of social conflict and change.

A second general criticism of this approach is that it is focused too narrowly on the immediate production process and ignores other important dimensions of class relations. Weberians have been especially critical of the tendency of Marxists like Wright to treat market relations and distributive conflicts as mere epiphenomena. Theorists like Giddens, Parkin, and Collins have argued that the class position of salaried managers and professionals can be better understood from the standpoint of distributive relations and have proposed a variety of

6. F. Parkin, *Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979).

models in which skills and credentials are seen as the defining characteristics of intermediate classes.⁷

Wright's New Model of Class Structure

The new conception of class structure proposed by Wright in *Classes* can be seen as a response to these two general lines of criticism. His objective, in a nutshell, is to reconceptualize both authority and market relations and incorporate them in the definition of class in a manner which preserves the centrality of the Marxist concept of exploitation. To this end, Wright now argues that class must be conceived exclusively as an ownership relationship, rather than a complex unity of ownership and domination relations. Building on the work of Roemer, he maintains that exploitation is essentially a product of the unequal distribution of property rights in the means of production.⁸ Relations of domination and subordination may enhance or reinforce such exploitation, but they are basically incidental to its operation.

As far as salaried managers and professionals are concerned, the key conceptual shift in Wright's new model can be described as follows. Whereas previously he conceptualized capitalist relations of exploitation as a complex articulation of ownership and domination (control) relations and identified intermediate strata by their contradictory position on different aspects of this mode of exploitation, he now dispenses with domination relations, reduces exploitation to a property relation, and argues that intermediate strata are distinguished by their contradictory positions on different modes of exploitation. The dominant form of exploitation in capitalist society, Wright argues, is that based on the private ownership of the material means of production, but there are also subsidiary forms of exploitation which derive from the unequal distribution of other productive assets. One such asset is skills—especially those whose supply is artificially restricted by credentials. A second is what Wright calls "organization assets," by which he means control over the conditions for the coordination of labor. Within this framework, salaried intermediaries are distinguished from the proletariat by their ownership of one or the other (or both) of these subsidiary

7. A. Giddens, *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973); Parkin, *Marxism and Class Theory*; R. Collins, *The Credential Society* (New York: Academic Press, 1979).

8. J. Roemer, *A General Theory of Exploitation and Class* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982).

assets. Such differentials in skill and organization assets, Wright argues, enable them to exploit the labor of other workers, even as they themselves are exploited by capitalists.

This new theory of class structure has obvious continuities with Wright's earlier theory of contradictory class locations. The class location of salaried intermediaries can still be viewed as "contradictory" in the sense that they occupy both dominant and subordinate positions on different criteria of class position. What is different is the claim that these criteria represent different modes of exploitation, not just different aspects of a single, complex mode of exploitation. Descriptively the new theory also yields roughly equivalent class groupings. On the boundaries of the working class stand two kinds of contradictory class locations. The first are salaried managers, which Wright now distinguishes by their ownership of organization assets rather than by their control over the physical means of production and the labor of others. Second are non-supervisory experts, which Wright once distinguished by their autonomy, but now argues are distinguished by their ownership of skill assets.

At first glance, this reformulation would seem to answer the two main criticisms outlined earlier. First, it dispenses with the problematic (allegedly Weberian) notion of domination as a criterion of class position. This reaffirms the distinctiveness of the Marxist concept of class and, according to Wright, enables him to specify the interests of intermediate classes more clearly. Their interests both within capitalism and with respect to various noncapitalist alternatives can now be analyzed, he says, in terms of their "material optimizing strategies given the specific kinds of assets they own/control".⁹ Second, it broadens the Marxist definition of class beyond the narrow confines of the production process to encompass those market relations, such as skill differentials and credential-based privilege, that were previously the exclusive purview of Weberian theory.

Should we then accept this new formulation of the Marxist concept of class? I think not. As I shall argue shortly, Wright's resolution of the twin problems of his previous model of class is accomplished mainly by definitional fiat, and his reassertion of the primacy of exploitation is achieved only by embracing a manifestly untenable notion of the nature of exploitation in capitalist society.

Consider first Wright's concept of "organization assets" as a basis of exploitation. Wright argues that the coordination of the technical division of labor is itself a source of productivity. This is plausible. He

9. Wright, *Classes*, p. 91.

further argues that organization can therefore be viewed as a productive asset which is controlled by managers and which enables them to exploit the labor of those who are without such assets. This claim is much more dubious. In what sense can organization be treated as an "asset" akin to property or skills? Wright admits that the asset of organization cannot be owned in the same way as property or skills; it has no existence apart from the positions within which it is exercised and cannot be transferred by its owner from one use to another. The ownership of organization assets is therefore indistinguishable from the exercise of hierarchical authority. Operationally, the two concepts identify identical class groupings. What then is gained by redefining the exercise of hierarchical authority as the ownership of organizational assets?

The crucial difference, it seems to me, is that the first view treats authority over the production process as a relation of domination which is ultimately *subordinate* to capitalist property ownership, while the latter defines it as a *separate* kind of property relation. From the standpoint of class interests, the first view interprets the privileges of managers as a dividend which they reap because of their strategic importance to the process of capitalist exploitation, while the latter treats them as the fruits of a form of exploitation which is independent of (and potentially *antagonistic* to) capitalist exploitation. The latter perspective, in my opinion, is problematic for at least two reasons. First, it posits a degree of conflict between capitalists and managers, which is in striking contrast to their actual political behavior. Second, it assumes that the economic returns to managerial status exist mainly because of the contribution of managers to productivity—a one-sided view which downplays the unproductive role of managers in enforcing the extraction of surplus.

Wright's concept of skill-based exploitation poses similar problems. As with exploitation based on organization assets, Wright maintains that the rewards accruing to credentialed employees reflect the greater contribution of more skilled employees to the total social product. This is similar to the argument of "human capital" theory, and there is unquestionably a partial truth to this proposition. But Wright's wholesale acceptance of this view ignores a wealth of empirical evidence demonstrating the tenuousness of the relationship between credentials and productivity or between productivity and market rewards.¹⁰ On this question, the more cynical outlook of those Weberians like Parkin and Collins, who see credentials as an essentially arbitrary political/ideological mechanism for restricting market opportunities, while one-

10. S. Bowles and H. Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

sided in its own way, nevertheless captures a truth that is missing in Wright's analysis.¹¹

Wright's claim that credential exploitation can be viewed as *independent* of capitalist exploitation is also questionable. Credentials (or the lack thereof) are certainly important as a mechanism mediating between class positions as "empty places" within the social division of labor and social classes as concrete collectivities with a degree of intergenerational continuity. They may also serve as a barrier that reduces the exploitation of certain salaried occupations below what it would be otherwise, although I think this can easily be exaggerated. But, as any Ph D who has driven a cab for a living can attest, credentials are basically valueless unless they provide entry into occupational positions that entail strategic responsibilities, are not easily rationalized, and therefore command special compensation. The nature and distribution of such positions is certainly influenced by the structure of labor markets, but is it also and more fundamentally conditioned by the powers and interests invested in the private ownership of the means of production. The precariousness and dependent status of skill-based privilege is demonstrated nowhere more clearly than when the interests of capital dictate the deskilling of once privileged occupations as a means of increasing the rate of exploitation.

Like his redefinition of hierarchical authority as the ownership of organization assets, Wright's concept of skill-based exploitation is intended to appropriate for Marxism the conceptual terrain of Weberian theory, without abandoning the fundamental principles (as he understands them) of a Marxist perspective. Once again, however, this is achieved mainly by definitional fiat. Concerned to establish the Marxist pedigree of his new perspective, Wright argues that Weberians treat skills and credentials from a "culturalist" standpoint (that is, in terms of the meaning systems that shape social action), whereas he conceptualizes them from a "materialist" standpoint (that is, in terms of objective patterns of exploitation that exist independently of the subjective states of actors). This, I believe, is both a caricature of the Weberian perspective and an undue restriction on the kinds of analysis that can properly be called "Marxist." As Marxists themselves have shown, what passes for skill in a given society or what is certified by credentials is very much a social construction and therefore dependent upon the subjective states of actors.¹²

11. Parkin, *Marxism and Class Theory*; Collins, *The Credential Society*.

12. Bowles and Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America*; M.S. Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

Conclusion

As these comments are intended to be of an exploratory character, I shall not attempt to present a full-blown alternative theory of class that addresses all of the problems touched upon above.¹³ I would, however, like to offer some suggestions about what I think might be some more promising directions for theoretical development. First, let me say that I think that Wright's attempt to refocus our attention on the concept of exploitation is entirely appropriate, and indeed is the most important theoretical contribution of the book. If the Marxist concept of class has anything distinctive to offer to the analysis of social cleavage in capitalist society it is certainly the notion that material interests rooted in relations of exploitation define the fault lines along which epochal struggles for social transformation take place. Moreover, it must be admitted that continuing controversies over Marx's labor theory of value raise numerous questions regarding the traditional Marxist concept of exploitation and call for renewed theoretical work in this area.¹⁴ I would strongly reject the proposition, however, that Roemer's game-theoretical concept of exploitation offers a fruitful starting point for such efforts. More promising, I would argue, is an open and unashamed attempt to explore the possibilities for rapprochement between Marxist class analysis and the more materialist versions of Weberian theory.¹⁵ This, I believe, is what Wright is surreptitiously doing in his new book, despite his best efforts to cover his tracks with strained redefinitions of familiar Weberian concepts.

In my opinion, Roemer's concept of exploitation is deficient for at least two reasons. First, it is based on a wholly inappropriate form of abstraction—inappropriate in the sense that it abstracts away from not merely contingent, but absolutely *fundamental*, aspects of exploitation as it actually occurs in capitalist society. Like the deductive models of neoclassical economics, Roemer's method disregards what is historically specific about capitalist society and focuses on formal, ahistorical similarities. Second, his method of conceptualizing exploitation is entirely arbitrary in that it is possible to posit the existence of diverse forms of exploitation on the basis of thought experiments that are constrained only by the imagination of the theorist (for an elaboration of

13. See V. Burris, "Class Structure and Political Ideology," *The Insurgent Sociologist*, vol. 14, no. 2 (1987), pp. 5-46.

14. See I. Steedman *et al.*, *The Value Controversy* (London: Verso, 1981).

15. See V. Burris, "The Neo-Marxist Synthesis of Marx and Weber on Class," in N. Wiley (ed.), *The Marx-Weber Debate* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1987).

these criticisms, see Kieve and Carchedi).¹⁶

In opposition to Roemer and Wright, I would insist that capitalist relations of exploitation cannot be specified independently of the relations of domination through which they are maintained and reproduced. Neither can they be specified independently of certain market relations that are essential to the appropriation of surplus, but which are not entirely given by the structure of ownership and production relations. Most basically, for capitalist exploitation to take place, workers must be subjected to competition from a reserve army of labor to drive down the value of their labor power, and jobs must be rationalized and/or subjected to surveillance in order to ensure that the labor expended exceeds the value of the wage. Whatever one might hypothesize as possible in the Robinson Crusoe world of Roemer's thought experiments, neither of these conditions are incidental to the process of exploitation as it actually occurs in capitalist society.

If class positions are to be defined according to their place within the process of exploitation, then it follows that they must be specified by a *combination* of ownership, authority, and market relations. I think one is justified to treat the ownership element as the dominant relation within this ensemble and the one which gives coherence to the overall process of exploitation. This I take to be the basic premiss of a Marxist theory of class. The difficult task is to bring these elements together in a manner which recognizes the specificity of authority and market relations, while also grasping their dependence upon the relations governing the allocation of the material means of production—that is, capitalist property ownership. The more one-sided versions of Marxist theory err by ignoring this specificity and treating authority and market relations as epiphenomena. Weberians, on the other hand, grasp the distinctiveness and practical importance of authority and market relations, but theorize these in a manner that exaggerates their autonomy from ownership relations. Wright's error, I believe, is that while sensing the importance of authority and market relations for class analysis, but still wishing to be loyal to what he considers to be the fundamentals of Marxist theory, he has attempted to force these relations into the conceptual straitjacket of property ownership which seriously distorts his understanding of their operation. In a perverse way, he rejects what is most valuable in Weberian theory (the specificity of authority and market relations and their importance for the concrete

16. R.A. Kieve, "From Necessary Illusion to Rational Choice?," *Theory and Society*, vol. 15 (1986), pp. 557–82; G. Carchedi, "Classes and Class Analysis," Chapter 3 above.

experience and behavior of class subjects) in order to embrace what is most problematic (a multidimensional model of separate and independent bases of exploitation).

If space allowed, I believe I could demonstrate an exactly parallel tendency on the part of certain Weberian theorists to force Marxist concepts into a restricted Weberian framework—for example in Dahrendorf's attempt to reduce all class relations to authority relations or Parkin's claim that capitalist property ownership can be reconceptualized as merely another form of market closure.¹⁷ But that will have to be the subject of another paper.

I recognize that these arguments leave some of the problems that motivated Wright's new theory unresolved. Seeking to incorporate authority and market relations within the Marxist concept of class does indeed complicate the analysis of class interests and undermine some of the traditional arguments for the primacy of class. Nevertheless, I believe that it is better to confront these problems at an empirical level than to sweep them under a theoretical rug. If the perspective I have advanced means that the material interests of intermediate classes are less clear-cut than they might appear if classes were defined exclusively by property ownership, then I say that this is but a reflection of the complexity of the contemporary class structure. And, if it means that the Marxist concept of class is less radically distinct from other bases of privilege, such as race or nation, then I say that this is to be welcomed, for it may help to overcome the persistent difficulties Marxists have had in applying their conceptual framework to these important issues.

17. R. Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1959); Parkin, *Marxism and Class Theory*.

EDUCATION, EXPLOITATION, AND CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

Arthur Stinchcombe

By p. 135 in Erik Wright's book *Classes*, we have not yet confronted any data, nor any particular societies, socialist or capitalist, any subgroups of workers known by common names like "plumbers" rather than by a series of minuses and pluses in a conceptual table.¹ Even then, the first table is twenty-nine pages later, p. 164. For an old-fashioned positivist like me, that's a long time without contact with the world, with a flow of facts of some kind. So I will start my comments at the wrong end of the book, with the first big results in the empirical chapters.

The big result in Chapters 5-7, is, I believe, the direct complement of the first big finding that established Wright's reputation. That finding was that class position (relations of ownership of the means of production or authority over labor power), added explanatory power to education and occupation that were the staple of the status attainment literature. The principal result of the tables in Chapters 5-7 is that education adds explanatory power to all sorts of class position definitions.

It might seem, if Wright did not write 164 pages first, that this means that the correct position is a little of this, a little of that: a little Marxism, a little "social stratification." So what Wright has to show in the first part of the book is that there is a good argument that the superior returns to education in various kinds of societies are exploitative. He ends up doing that by claiming that the main returns are to credentials, not to any difference in competence that education makes.

Although Wright relies on Roemer for an extended definition of exploitation, this is not the position that Roemer took in his work.² Even if there were truly superior productivity of people with increased education, Roemer would regard their having to work less for a given standard of living, or to work the same for a higher living standard, as exploitation. Further, if education is only a certification system which functions as a gigantic IQ test, and if IQ increases productivity, then Roemer would still regard the resulting greater income of people with college degrees as exploitation. So agreeing that higher education of,

say, college professors are exploitative does not depend on the argument that the returns to education or IQ are pure monopoly earnings, earned only by keeping other people out of the job.

It seems to me to be a good socialist position that people should not be able to live better than others because they are smarter, or just because we as a society create positions in which they can live the life required to learn to be truly productive. Roemer argues that one can (and should) construct a definition of exploitation in which income or leisure advantages both of brightness, and of the opportunity to learn to be more highly productive than others, is exploitative. This distinguishes Roemer, and perhaps Marxism, from the position of the Fabian socialist George Bernard Shaw who argues that it is acceptable even under socialism for talent to earn exceptional rewards. Wright, while not agreeing with Shaw's position, also seems to want not to take Roemer's position. For Wright, the exploitative position of educated people is a position of credential monopoly. I am not willing to allow him that rhetorical advantage for this book, because I would like to take away the economic privileges that go with the genetic advantages in productivity as well.

But to return to those 135 to 164 pages before letting us look at the data. It takes a lot of talk to get us to forget that the relation of education to economic success and even class consciousness was a big finding of bourgeois sociology. If you are given a table on p. 4, with no complicated theoretical introduction, in which the independent variables are an index of education, authority, and property relations (p. 150), the first thing that will pop into your head is W. Lloyd Warner or August Hollingshead and their index of socioeconomic status. So we have all those pages to convince us that having many years of education is essentially the same sort of thing as owning the means of production, rather than the same as having high SES or the same as contributing to status attainment.

How does it come about that education is as closely related to working-class consciousness as ownership of the means of production or authority in the workplace, in both the United States and Sweden? This does seem to me to be a central thing we need to explain. We might possibly explain the higher incomes of people with higher education by their higher productivities. But here we have a general scale of attitudes that clearly poses a series of questions about working class invasion of managerial and ownership prerogatives (the six attitude questions are given in notes on p. 263), and we find that even controlling for managerial and ownership position, educated people are a lot more conservative, less working-class conscious, than uneducated people.

1. E.O. Wright, *Classes* (London: Verso, 1985).

2. J. Roemer, *A General Theory of Exploitation and Class* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982).

It seems to me that showing that one can form a definition of exploitation in which earning more money because of education is exploitative does not really answer this question. It does seem to me however that the fact that the educated who are otherwise equal in authority and ownership do earn more money is likely to be crucial in explaining their attitudes (and of course their behavior in strikes, their bargaining strategies in the civil service, and so on).

The first explanation I would suggest is that the class conflict in modern societies is no longer about capitalism but about income distribution. What is distinctive about Swedish social democracy is not that capitalists earn a lot less than they do elsewhere, but that all the rich earn much less (especially after taxes, but actually before taxes as well) than they do elsewhere. The argument then is that, wherever class conflict was to be found in Marx's day, it is now to be found in the field of exchange, not relations of production, and that it now has to do with income tax rates and social security and health service tax rates and the sizes of social security pensions for people who earned different amounts before retirement, and the like.

The reason income does not predict class consciousness as well as class position is because lifetime earnings are better predicted from class position than from evanescent variations in last year's paychecks. To put it another way, the first explanation is that class conflict today is over governmental redistribution from the rich to the poor, rather than from capitalists to workers. Consequently class positions which give people the notion of where, in the long run, their taxation and pension interests lie are good predictors of class consciousness. It is not because we teach experts to be conservative in college, or because they hold precarious monopolies, that their consciousness is not favorable to the working class. It is because the working class is today trying to get their incomes, not their profits.

A second possible explanation I will call "technocratic anti-anarchism." Some of the questions by which class consciousness is measured ask about one's reaction to workers throwing a wrench in the works. Managers want things to run well because that is their job, and capitalists want things to run well because that gives them higher profits and because disruption is a powerful device for extracting higher wages and benefits. But perhaps technocrats are natural adherents of what used to be called in France the "parties of order." Their higher status is based on their usefulness in planning things, not on their superiority at collective bargaining, nor at functioning flexibly in times of disruption and anarchy.

A third possibility departs from class analysis altogether, at least as I understand Wright's use of class. Bourdieu analyzes the behavior of

highly educated people, controlling for money capital holdings.³ He finds a great many matters of taste on which the educated differ markedly from the rich and from the workers. He argues that these matters of taste are essentially status claims. These status claims are often fairly unsuccessful in the income market, so I suppose they are oriented toward prestige in consumption. The educated go for Andy Warhol and Bertholt Brecht rather than boulevard theatre, for Braque and Goya rather than Renoir or Watteau, left bank galleries rather than right bank galleries, all of which distinguish them from the rich. Theatre rather than TV, opera rather than Tchaikovsky or Bizet, the "Well Tempered Clavier" rather than "Rhapsody in Blue," galleries rather than photography, distinguish the educated from workers. I'm sure the dimensions will sound familiar everywhere in the Western world. The question is, what do they have to do with Wright's measure of class consciousness?

One possibility is that attitude toward trade unions, especially their seamier, conflict-oriented side, is simply a cultural symbol. I have been in several countries during times when all the newspapers carried on as if there were serious class conflict going on, and as far as I could see daily life was not disturbed except that sometimes business executives and higher bureaucrats couldn't get a plane to go to a conference. Nobody really went cold or without electricity because of the long coal strike in England, for example—at least nobody I am likely to know when I go there. So what trade unions may be in the life of an educated person is merely a particularly interesting actor in the drama that we read on the front pages, a cultural object.

I am reminded of Bernard Beck's comment when asked why Colonel North was a hero in the United States: he said it had to do with the script that was played out on TV. Most Americans disapprove of many of the things he did, just as they would disapprove of most of the things John Wayne did on the screen if he did them in real life. But like John Wayne, Colonel North was cast as a hero in the script, whether or not you really believe in standing tall and shooting things up. Similarly, the trade unions and working-class conflict groups in Wright's questions may be simply cast as the representatives of low culture in the scripts we read in the newspaper, even though their low culture in economic conflict doesn't win any more economic advantages than, as college professors, our dignified proof to the dean that our salary is lower than the average of people of our distinction. So collective bargaining and class conflict is perhaps a symbol like the "Rhapsody in Blue," which educated people reject as "without distinction."

3. P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).

To turn to a more minor matter, I do not think that it was necessary for Wright to bring up heavy guns of not being able to predict class consciousness very well to dismiss the silly distinction between "productive-unproductive" labor. Consider the bank clerk as an "unproductive" worker. Almost all of us pay a bank clerk to make up the monthly summary of our checking account, by agreeing to take a lower rate of interest on checking account money than we could get if we put what we weren't going to spend in savings (and carried cash for expenditures), or else simply by paying a fee. If those clerks aren't being productive, why are we willing to pay them to do it for us?

In this case, it is not because we need to have them help us exploit others. It's when we don't use much bank clerk labor, in the money market account, that we are exploiting labor in the classical Marxist sense.

Similarly, a big share of the advertising expense of the beer industry goes to pay the salaries of baseball or soccer stars. One can doubt whether baseball stars really communicate a lot to us about the true qualities of Budweiser without going so far as to argue that they are unproductive of the amenity of civilized life that we would want to have in a socialist society.

Of course we may think of buying nationally advertised beers rather than good old local beers that we used to buy, before TV modernized baseball, as an *inefficient* way of taxing us for paying baseball stars' salaries. But a good part of advertising revenue goes to people who produce values, on the diamond or pitch, that workers want, and would want under socialism. So it seems to me that they can't be considered "unproductive."

Baseball stars may not be very working-class conscious (though their unions have sure done them a lot of good), but that would not be sufficient to show that it is our business to define them as non-productive because they facilitate the economic concentration of brewers by making up an attractive background for a beer ad.

A CRITIQUE OF WRIGHT'S THEORY OF CONTRADICTIONARY CLASS LOCATIONS

Peter F. Meiksins

Erik Olin Wright's *Classes* is an ambitious book which raises a wide range of questions for Marxist theory.¹ The rational-choice model of exploitation which he adapts from John Roemer's work has become the center of a burgeoning controversy.² Wright's work also is an intervention in the growing debate regarding the relationship between Marxist and Weberian theories of class.³ It will not be possible here to do justice to the many questions this complex book raises. Instead, this paper will focus on an aspect of *Classes* that has, thus far, received relatively little critical discussion: the class "map" which results from Wright's new analytical framework.

Like most neo-Marxist class theories, Wright is particularly concerned to make theoretical sense out of the growing "middle class" of nonmanual labor in contemporary capitalist societies. In his earlier work, he argued that many of these strata occupy "contradictory class locations" that straddle the major classes in capitalist society.⁴ Wright now rejects the theoretical framework on which this argument was based. Because it focused on relations of domination rather than exploitation, his earlier approach tended, in his view, to weaken the link between the analysis of "class locations" and the analysis of objective interests (p. 56). It also tended to slide into the "multiple oppressions" approach to society, in which class appears as merely one among a variety of social cleavages, none of which is particularly central to the

1. E.O. Wright, *Classes* (London: Verso, 1985).

2. See A. Carling, "Exploitation, Extortion and Oppression," *Political Studies*, vol. 35 (1987), pp. 173-88; G. Carchedi, "Classes and Class Analysis," chapter 3 above; E.M. Wood, "Rational Choice Marxism: Is the Game Worth the Candle?," *New Left Review*, no. 177; P. Meiksins, "New Classes and Old Theories: The Impasse of Contemporary Class Analysis," in R. Levine and J. Lembcke (eds), *Recapturing Marxism: An Appraisal of Recent Trends in Sociological Theory* (New York: Praeger, 1987).

3. See V. Burris, "The Neo-Marxist Synthesis of Marx and Weber on Class," in N. Wiley (ed.), *The Marx-Weber Debate* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1987); F. Parkin, *Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); P. Meiksins, "Beyond the Boundary Question," *New Left Review*, no. 157 (1986), pp. 101-20; Meiksins, "New Classes and Old Theories."

4. E.O. Wright, *Class, Crisis and the State* (London: Verso, 1978).

process of historical development (p. 57). In his new work, he seeks to overcome these problems by placing the concept of exploitation squarely in the middle of his analysis.

However, Wright contends that simply "parroting" the basic Marxist notion that capitalism is built on the exploitation of wage-labor by capital leaves unanswered many questions about contemporary class structure. The simple polarization that would seem to be implicit in the classical Marxist notion of exploitation has not developed. Consequently, "it has become more difficult to sidestep the theoretical problem of the gap between the abstract polarized concept of class relations and the complex concrete patterns of class formation and class struggle" (p. 9). He therefore rejects a "two-class" model of capitalist society, returning instead to his earlier notion that there is a range of "contradictory class locations" between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

Two theoretical arguments are central to Wright's new analysis of class. First, he argues that it is the dynamics of exploitation that make certain locations contradictory. Replacing the traditional Marxist analysis of exploitation with a modified version of John Roemer's "rational-choice" model,⁵ he argues that contemporary capitalist societies embody three distinct modes of exploitation—traditional capitalist exploitation, rooted in the control of alienable assets; skill exploitation, rooted in the differential distribution of skills and credentials; and organization assets, rooted in unequal control over the structuring of the process of production. These coexisting forms of exploitation produce a far more complex class structure than Marx anticipated. In addition to a number of intermediate "class locations" for each type of exploitation (for instance, petty bourgeois property owners who are neither exploiters nor exploited), there exists a range of "locations" which are exploiting along one dimension of exploitation while exploited along others. For example, managers and supervisors, although they lack control over alienable assets and may, thus, be said to be exploited by capitalists, also exploit in the sense that they benefit from their control over skills and/or organization assets (pp. 86–7). Wright places particular emphasis on this last type of "contradictory class location"; just as the bourgeoisie emerged as a contradictory class location within feudalism, so has the class of managers and bureaucrats emerged within capitalism as "a principle of class organization which is quite distinct from capitalism and which potentially poses an alternative

5. J. Roemer, *A General Theory of Exploitation and Class* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982).

to capitalist relations" (p. 87).

Second, he insists that a Marxist class analysis which discussed only class locations would be incomplete. Citing Adam Przeworski and other neo-Marxist theorists, Wright contends that there is no simple correspondence between class location and actual patterns of class formation: "The class structure may define the terrain of material interests upon which attempts at class formation occur, but it does not uniquely determine the outcomes of those attempts" (p. 123). This is particularly true of "contradictory class locations," given the highly complex pattern of class interests their location in capitalist social structure produces (p. 124).

Wright's new analysis of contradictory class locations may be criticized on at least three grounds. First, questions can be raised about the redefinition of exploitation on which he bases his argument that contradictory class locations are contradictory. Second, his contention that contradictory class locations such as bureaucrats and officials represent a possible non-proletarian challenge to capitalism may be criticized on both theoretical and historical grounds. Finally, Wright is unable to put into practice the notion that there is no simple correspondence between what he calls "class location" and "class formation." Indeed, one can argue that his own analysis of class conflict places him very close to the position which he is trying to criticize. Ironically, a more thoroughgoing analysis of the relationship between "class formation" and "class location" might have led Wright to question the need for a theory of contradictory class locations. It may well be that a subtle, historical approach to the development of class conflict, coupled with the *traditional* Marxist analysis of exploitation may provide more insights into the nature of class in contemporary capitalist society.

Exploitation

In referring to various types of non-manual labor as "contradictory class locations," Wright is going beyond the mere proposition that certain types of labor are privileged, or that the category of non-capitalists is differentiated and disunited. He is asserting that these "locations" are qualitatively different, in class terms, from the proletariat as it has been traditionally defined. This assertion is rooted in his insistence that these groups are, in some sense, exploiters.

The theory of exploitation on which Wright bases this new theory of "contradictory class locations" represents a fundamental departure from the traditional Marxist analysis of exploitation.

Wright rejects the traditional Marxist view that exploitation should be

defined as the appropriation of surplus labor. In its place, he develops a definition of exploitation in terms of per capita shares of the total social pie. If an individual or group receives less than their per capita share of the available social assets, they are economically oppressed. Exploitation requires that the oppressing class benefit at the expense of the oppressed, that the welfare of the exploiting class depend upon the work of the exploited class (p. 75). He goes on to suggest that exploitation really means appropriation of the fruits of someone else's labor, or its equivalent, consuming more than one produces (pp. 75–6). It is the antagonism inherent in this interdependency that is the foundation of class and class struggle.

On the basis of this definition, Wright suggests that there is more than one type of exploitation in capitalist society, as we have already seen. It is the existence of these multiple exploitations that is the key to “contradictory class locations”, since one can be an exploiter along one dimension and exploited along another. Wright's argument, therefore, stands or falls on whether he can establish that these multiple exploitations exist.

There are a number of theoretical problems with Wright's analysis of multiple exploitations, especially his discussion of skill exploitation and organization asset exploitation. In his discussion of the former, Wright suggests that credentialed workers benefit at the expense of those who lack them. Those who possess credentials have artificially restricted the availability of certain skills, thereby obliging employers to pay them wages that exceed the value of their “marginal product.” It follows, therefore, that they are appropriating the labor of someone else (p. 76). But, is this the case? Wright offers no proof that the holders of credentials are, in fact, receiving wages in excess of their “value.” He is dismissive, for example, of the possibility that the skills possessed by those who have credentials make them more productive, so that they are entitled to higher wages (p. 77). Nor does he demonstrate that credentials always regulate the supply of labor in such a way as to ensure that wages are “too high.” Is it not possible that credentials may, at least at times, keep the market for certain skills from being flooded, preventing the cheapening of labor below its actual “value”? In other words, it is not at all clear that credentialed workers are necessarily exploiters of the uncredentialed. Had Wright attempted to analyze the distribution of the social product in capitalist society, this would have become immediately obvious. And, if some (or all) of the credentialed are not exploiters, then their class location may *not* be different from that of those who lack such credentials.

Furthermore, and more fundamentally, Wright's discussion of skill passes rather lightly over an important aspect of Marx's analysis of the

capitalist labor process. As Marx pointed out, capitalism tends to create collective labor processes within which *groups* of workers, not individuals, are engaged in the production of value and surplus-value.⁶ Different individuals within the labor process may be more or less highly rewarded; but, it is the group, not the individual that is exploited. From Wright's point of view, the more highly paid portions of the collective laborer would be viewed as exploiters of those with whom they “cooperate” in producing surplus-value. Yet, their relationship is a fundamentally cooperative one whose primary beneficiary is a third party—the *capitalist* exploiter. This is obscured by Wright's willingness to equate distinctions of skill with the capitalist exploitation of wage-labor.

Wright's discussion of organization assets is unsatisfactory in a different way. He explicitly includes this concept in his analysis of exploitation in order to deal with Soviet-type economies (pp. 78–9). Yet, he also asserts that, under capitalism, one may distinguish organization asset exploitation from capitalist exploitation. Certain “class locations” may be exploiters in one sense but not in the other; hence, organization assets may also be the basis for contradictory class locations.

Most Marxists would concede that those who determine the organization of the labor process are probably in the position of being exploiters of other people's labor. However, as Carchedi has pointed out, it is not at all clear that this is in any way distinct, at least under capitalism, from traditional capitalist exploitation.⁷ Wright is not talking here about the classical problem of ownership vs control over the means of production. Rather, he is talking about the structuring of production itself. But, if someone controls the means of production, as capitalists do, they *automatically* control organization assets. As innumerable examples from history will show it is rare indeed to find a situation where those who *did not* control the means of production could successfully structure production in ways opposed by those who did.⁸ And, if control over organization assets is not distinct from capitalist property, why does Wright postulate it as a distinct form of exploitation under capitalism?

These are only a few of the possible objections to Wright's analysis of multiple exploitations. The central point, however, is that he is not able to ground his theory of contradictory class locations in a coherent

6. K. Marx, *Capital* (Harmondsworth: Penguin/NLR, 1976).

7. Carchedi, “Classes and Class Analysis”, above.

8. For example, in the case of the scientific management movement, see P. Meiksins, “Scientific Management and Class Relations: A Dissenting View,” *Theory and Society*, vol. 13 (1984), pp. 177–209, and M. Calvert, *The Mechanical Engineer in America, 1830–1910* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967).

analysis of exploitation. Consequently, his view that these locations are qualitatively different in class terms is called into question. He is certainly correct to point to differences of rank and skill and to note that these inequalities may become the basis for various forms of social conflict. But, he gives us no theoretical justification for seeing these distinctions and conflicts as more than forms of differentiation and disunity within the polar classes of capitalist society.

New Classes?

In *Classes* and in his recent collaboration with Bill Martin, Wright adds a new political wrinkle to his analysis of contradictory class locations.⁹ In his original argument, the political significance of contradictory locations lay in their ambiguity, in their being "torn" between the two warring camps of bourgeoisie and proletariat. This point is retained in Wright's new formulation; but he adds to it the suggestion that the development of multiple exploitations, especially organization asset exploitation, may signal the rise within capitalism of post-capitalist class relations. In other words, those contradictory class locations which are exploiters in organization asset terms may be seen as a kind of proto-class that may develop into a ruling class in a post-capitalist society (Wright is less sure that skill exploitation can be seen as the basis for future *class* relations (p. 85)). The proletariat, then, may not be the only "gravedigger" of capitalism, from Wright's point of view. It will not be possible to consider all of the implications of this argument, which clearly bear on the class nature of Soviet-type societies. However, it is important to ask whether this makes sense as an analysis of *capitalist* class structure.

Wright's primary theoretical justification for his argument lies in his contention that skill exploitation and organization asset exploitation are not forms of capitalist exploitation. Each mode of production, according to Wright, is constituted by one primary mode of exploitation. Thus, capitalist exploitation is the basis of one mode of production, while organization asset exploitation is the basis of another. Modes of production, however, are abstract constructs—these "pure" types of exploitation do not exist as separate entities in actual societies, or social formations, to use Wright's term. When one descends to a lower level of theoretical abstraction and examines actual societies, one finds combinations of different modes of production, and, therefore, exploitation

9. E.O. Wright and B. Martin, "The Transformation of the American Class Structure, 1960-1980," *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 93, no. 1 (1987), pp. 1-29.

(pp. 109-14). By arguing in this way, Wright is able to suggest that each form of exploitation is distinct and that each represents an alternative exploitative logic, by definition. It follows, therefore, that different types of exploiters may come into conflict when they encounter one another within hybrid social formations (hence the parallel he draws between the bourgeoisie under feudalism and experts and bureaucrats under capitalism).

Thus, Wright implies that, just as feudal social relations produced the capitalist, capitalist social relations created new, potentially contradictory exploiting classes. Yet, it is unclear in what sense the development of skill distinctions or the organization of the process of production contradicts capitalism—or creates groups who, by themselves, pose a substantial threat to capitalism. This is particularly true of organization asset exploitation. Clearly, the creation of hierarchically organized production process, the detailed division of labor, etc. is no threat to capitalism. Rather, they are the historical *product* of capitalism, very much a part of the development of large-scale, organized capitalism. And, as has already been suggested, it is virtually impossible to distinguish between capitalist exploitation and organization asset exploitation under capitalism. Under the circumstances, it is indeed hard to imagine, as Wright himself notes, conditions under which cadres of high managers and bureaucrats, who hold significant organization assets, might be led to reject the capitalist system which they control and from which they clearly benefit. For these groups, at least, the organization of the production process creates no contradictory dynamics.

One suspects, however, that Wright has in mind lower and middle managers and experts when he makes this argument. He suggests that a weakened capitalism, one that is no longer able to deliver the goods to such middling types, might spawn opposition—he speculates that managers and bureaucrats might be attracted to anticapitalist forms of statism in cases when capitalism seemed to be failing. This might become the basis for a new type of society in which organization asset and skill exploitation superseded capitalist exploitation as the dominant form of exploitation (pp. 90-91). Leaving aside the question of whether their modest control over organization assets makes them exploiters, let us ask how middle managers, bureaucrats, and experts would be likely to react if capitalism were to founder in this way. It is quite possible that they might be attracted to the idea of *modifying* capitalism in the direction of greater state planning and coordination, perhaps a kind of "managed capitalism" à la Felix Rohatyn. But, this hardly makes them anticapitalist, nor does it distinguish them from the large numbers of capitalists and even proletarians who have favored such ideas in times of crisis. On the other hand, the idea of an *anticapitalist* movement of

intellectuals, managers, and bureaucrats is hard to imagine. What would such a movement advocate? Either it would have to be a democratic socialist movement, in which case both the working class and "middle-class" experts would be potential constituencies. Or, it would have to call for the creation of Soviet-type economies in which public ownership is combined with strong, centralized, undemocratic control over the economy. The idea that a manager or intellectual in an advanced capitalist society would find this an attractive way to "cash in" their organization assets strains the imagination to the breaking point.

Skill exploitation does, at first glance, appear to be contradictory to capitalist exploitation. Thus, it has frequently been noted that capitalism has leveling tendencies and seeks to destroy skill barriers and bottlenecks because they tend to raise the price of labor. And, it has frequently been the case that employees have resisted the worst consequences of capitalist exploitation by establishing skill and credential barriers.

It does not follow from this, however, that skill is a fundamental threat to capitalism. To begin with, we must remember that capitalists have also fostered skill distinctions at times. And, it may be that this is actually useful to the capitalist order. As Richard Edwards reminds us, a labor force divided by skill, rank, and credentials is in certain ways easier to control than a mass of undifferentiated labor.¹⁰ Moreover, as Larson has pointed out in her analysis of professionalism, the logic of "credentialism" may also help to support the basic ideals of capitalist ideology, especially its individualism and its justification of inequality.¹¹

Even if this were not true, it needs to be added that it is hard to imagine a conflict between the pretensions of skill and the logic of capitalist exploitation that would pose a fundamental threat to the capitalist system. Conflicts over skill tend to divide rather than to unite. And, the politics of skill is not incompatible with capitalism—all it requires is that merit be rewarded better. Capitalists have generally been able either to accommodate such demands (as with the organizational professions¹² and certain types of skilled labor) or to defeat those demands it was unwilling or unable to meet.

Under the circumstances, it should not surprise us that the historical record holds very few examples of significant middle-class technocratic or statist movements. Despite a large literature which has treated the

10. R. Edwards, *Contested Terrain* (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

11. M.S. Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

12. See P. Whalley, *The Social Production of Technical Work* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1986).

intermediate strata as naturally technocratic, managers, engineers, professionals and others have been notably unenthusiastic about such ideas.¹³ On the contrary, they have either supported capitalism resolutely, hoping to better themselves within the system. Or, when opposition to the status quo has developed, it has tended to take forms reminiscent of certain kinds of working class resistance (for example, quasi-craft unions in the case of American engineers, or various forms of social-democratic politics in the case of British white collar and public sector workers).

In sum, there is little evidence that contradictory class locations spawn distinctive anticapitalist ideologies, nor is there strong theoretical justification for supposing that they will do so in the future. There are real conflicts and divisions set up by the hierarchical organization of production and the dynamics of skill. But, unhistorical arguments which imply that managers under capitalism want to, or may at some point want to, become Soviet-style managers do not advance our understanding of these social relations.

Class Location and Class Formation

Finally, we come to Wright's discussion of the contingent relationship between "class location" and "class formation." He insists that there is no immediate correspondence between class location and the actual patterns of class conflict that develop in real historical situations. This is particularly true of contradictory class locations, where material interests are complex and variable. But, it is also true of unambiguous class locations—it is always an open question how people will react to and perceive their material interests in concrete situations.

There is nothing fundamentally wrong with this theoretical view of class and class conflict. However, in practice, Wright's analysis of class has much more in common with the view of which he is critical than with his own theoretical framework. Consider his analysis, with which he attempts to justify his theoretical argument about class locations, of the differences in class sentiment between Sweden and the United States.

Wright hypothesizes that class consciousness should vary monotonically along the dimensions of his exploitation matrix (p. 251). That is, one would expect to find that levels of pro-working-class sentiment

13. See, for example, P. Meiksins, "The Myth of Technocracy: The Social Philosophy of American Engineers in the 1930s," paper presented to SHOT Conference, Pittsburgh, 1986.

should increase as one moves from unambiguously exploiting locations to contradictory class locations to unambiguously proletarian locations. And, his results appear to bear him out—working-class sentiment is stronger in working-class locations in both Sweden and the United States.

However, Wright also notes that this association was much stronger for the United States. In Sweden, pro-working-class sentiment had a broader base, extending into segments of the workforce with significant skills and/or organization assets. Indeed he presents evidence that many Swedish contradictory class locations identify with the working class more than do American proletarians. However, he explicitly rejects any suggestion that this undermines his analysis of class locations: "This does not imply that the objective basis of conflicts of interests among wage-earners in different classes has disappeared, but simply that their common interests as capitalistically exploited wage-earners have assumed greater weight relative to their differential interests with respect to organizational and credential exploitation" (p. 279). In effect, we are asked to conclude that procapitalist sentiment among proletarians is the result of the contingency of the process of class formation, while procapitalist sentiment among contradictory class locations is the result of objectively complex class interests. Similarly, pro-working-class sentiment among proletarians is the result of their unambiguous working-class interests, while pro-working-class sentiment among contradictory class locations develops only under certain highly contingent historical circumstances.

It should be obvious that there is a theoretical inconsistency in this form of argument. Moreover, there is more than a hint here of the mechanical "mirror-image" model of class consciousness of which Wright is so critical. That is, Wright *expects* to find more proletarian sentiment in proletarian locations than in contradictory class locations. When the results are more complex, for instance, when Swedish contradictory class locations are more pro-working class than American proletarians, he is forced to bend one part of his theoretical framework in order to retain the rest.

Ironically, had Wright stuck to his theoretical guns, he might have been able to interpret his data more consistently. Thus, had he employed a really *developmental* approach to class consciousness, in which "class locations" only established pressures and limits to which their "occupants" react, Wright's data would make more sense.¹⁴ Thus, we could argue that class consciousness starts in a relatively undeveloped form for

all employees. Occupational solidarity, the effort to protect skill, even individual forms of resistance contain a *germ* of class consciousness which may develop into something broader. The fact that a type of employee does not identify with the broader working-class movement, thus, does not necessarily mean that they are structurally different. It may only mean that the "germ" of class consciousness has not developed, or has developed differently, for historical reasons—state policy, ideological counterpressures, divisions and conflicts within the working class, etc. It thus becomes possible to explain the greater working-class orientation of the Swedish "contradictory class locations" as evidence of their having *developed* the germ of a class consciousness inherent in occupational consciousness into a larger sense of class. Similarly, the lower level of working-class identification among American "proletarians" is the result of the different history of class conflict in the United States. In sum, such an approach allows us to understand the ambiguous attitudes of *all* kinds of employees without ignoring the element of working-class consciousness inherent in them.

Conclusion

We are thus returned to the question of whether a theory of contradictory class locations is needed at all. Erik Olin Wright, and other influential new left theorists, have relied on this and similar formulations, arguing that there is no other way to make sense, within a Marxist framework, of the large numbers of non-manual workers in contemporary capitalist societies. The arguments outlined here, while in no sense meant as a complete analysis of contemporary capitalist social structure, are intended to call this assumption into question. Undoubtedly, the complexities of contemporary class structure pose many problems for Marxist theory; many questions do remain unresolved. However, it is not at all clear that the theory of contradictory class locations helps us to understand these complexities. Indeed, it may very well be that the answers lie in the *other* issue Wright raises—that is, the complex and contingent historical process through which capitalist relations of production shape actual patterns of class conflict. Perhaps it is in this direction that future theoretical and historical analysis should move.

14. R. Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

WORK RELATIONS AND THE FORMATION OF CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

Johanna Brenner

Careful, rigorous and honest struggle with theoretical issues is the hallmark of Erik Olin Wright's work. *Classes* is no exception.¹ In its clarity of exposition, in its provocative ideas, in its comparative analysis of Sweden and the United States, this book makes a substantial contribution.

Wright consistently emphasizes the "probabilistic" relationship between class location on the one hand, class affiliation and action according to class interests on the other. Still, he contends that class consciousness systematically connects to objective interests arising from locations in a class structure. Managerial/supervisory workers and expert/semicredentialed workers will tend to have different world views because their interests differ from those of proletarians on two counts: (1) they enjoy higher incomes as a result of an exploitative transfer from other workers within capitalism, and (2) they have the potential to become a dominant class in alternative societies: statism or socialism.

Wright is right to look for underlying structural determinants of different world views, but, I think, wrong in how he has defined them. First, I think it important to recognize that even the most proletarianized workers still have short-run interests within capitalism that divide them from each other. Unskilled workers, just like skilled workers, can improve or maintain their position within the system by using strategies which put them in antagonistic relationships with other workers. Whatever their long-run interests, any given group of workers will have a set of short-run interests that do not lead to class-based world views. So, for example, private sector workers, experiencing a real decline in their standard of living and unable to take on their own employers, have supported tax decreases and cuts in public spending as a strategy to improve their own incomes, even at the expense of public sector workers and recipients of public services.

It is true that certain conditions, the militant organization of important sections of the working class, economic crisis, etc., help to

change this set of interests by making particularistic and narrow strategies less possible and by making broader and more political forms of organization more possible. Thus, where public sector workers are well organized and there is a strong anti-racist movement, private sector workers might come to see that they have more to gain by affiliating with public sector workers to demand shifts in spending from the military to social services, corporate tax increases, control on the export of capital and so forth. The strength of trade union organization and the breadth of working-class political organization mediate experience and consciousness, but not only, as Wright says, because they provide different interpretations of experience. They also change the character of experience itself. Workers who fail to act in class conscious ways are not failing to understand their "real" interests, but are rather acting in terms of one set of interests, their immediate interests under given historical conditions, rather than in terms of another set of interests, the long-run benefit of an alternative.

However, short-run conflicts of interests among workers get constructed in different ways. And some conflicts are more enduring and difficult to overcome than others. This, it seems to me, was useful about Wright's earlier conceptualization of contradictory class locations which utilized two dimensions of actual work relationships: whether or not individual workers controlled the conditions of their work and whether or not their work put them in domination relations with other workers. This approach, whatever its weaknesses (and I think Wright has laid them out rather well), focused on how social relationships within production might define different experiences which in turn would produce different world views. There was a dynamic and social/historical element that is missing in Wright's current framework.

Attention to social relationships seems to me not only useful but very much in line with the classic Marxist argument that day-to-day experiences of conflict and cooperation at work could lead workers to take up kinds of affiliation, organization, action, militance that would in turn provide the experiential basis for the development of broader revolutionary vision. Marx argued that the proletariat is the historical bearer of a socialist revolutionary project not only because workers would benefit from ending their exploitation under capitalism (that is, it is in their "interest" to end capitalism), but because their experiences within capitalist production might allow them to imagine a society based on collective, democratic control over production as an alternative to capitalism.

Wright argues against his earlier conceptualization of contradictory class location on the ground that neither worker autonomy nor domination relations specify particular antagonistic economic interests. To take the example of managers: he says that unless we can show that

1. E.O. Wright, *Classes* (London: Verso, 1985).

managers dominate labor in their own interests and not only in the interest of capitalist owners, there is no reason to distinguish managerial employees from other workers. As an alternative, Wright argues that managers exploit other workers through their effective control of what he calls organization assets. Managers have a claim on the surplus because they control the coordinated cooperation among producers in a complex division of labor.

Yet, it is not at all clear to me how managers are able to appropriate a piece of the surplus for themselves through control over the coordination and planning of production separate from capitalist property structures. Indeed, I find convincing Wright's earlier argument that managers' relatively higher wages are a "loyalty dividend" paid out of the surplus in order to insure that they carry out their control functions. (Of course, managers in the upper tier may acquire large amounts of capital, in which case they are no different from capitalist employers proper and so present no analytic difficulty for traditional Marxist class theory.)

I would argue that it is more reasonable and useful, in differentiating managers from workers within capitalism, to say that they have a different relationship to the capitalist surplus extraction process. Managers and supervisors do not exercise authority simply to coordinate production but do so within a context in which the goal of production is profit and the means to that goal is the extraction of surplus labor. Managerial direction of other workers therefore has a two-sided character: on the one side, in coordinating production managers and supervisors may be performing tasks that are socially necessary labor; on the other side, since production is being coordinated within constraints set by the need to make an average rate of profit, managers also have to control and discipline the workforce. Managers may exercise authority in order to coordinate the labor process or they may exercise authority in order to control workers—and often they do both at once. But these are two distinct kinds of authority (and a failure to distinguish them underlies Weberian claims about the inevitable connection between a complex division of labor and bureaucratic hierarchy). Positions within the labor process that synthesize information or coordinate different aspects of production may exist without coercion, resting on the consent of those receiving direction. On the other hand, a manager's capacity to set the pace of work faster than what the workers themselves desire, requires the right to discipline and rests on capitalist class relations. (In making this point and in the following argument I'm relying very much on Bob Carter's *Capitalism, Class Conflict, and the New Middle Class*.²

2. B. Carter, *Capitalism, Class Conflict, and the New Middle Class* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985).

However, he should not be held responsible for my formulations.)

Wright's definition of modes of production in terms of dominant forms of exploitation and exploitation in terms of effective control of productive assets leads him to separate the organization of the production process from the distribution of the product. On this basis, he can argue that managers exploit labor not as agents of capital but in their own interest and through their control of the labor process. However, this separation between structures of production and appropriation is unwarranted, since the organization of technology and the division of labor are always limited by the structures through which a surplus is appropriated. Even in feudalism, where the peasant household/community organizes production without interference from the landlord, feudal institutions affect the way that production is organized. For example, the inalienable character of both land and labor power limit concentration and centralization of the means of production, investment in technological innovation, and so forth.

The division of labor within production is only in part determined by a given level of technological development—presumably the same under socialism, capitalism, or statism. Much of the technology of production in both capitalist and statist society, including the particular division of tasks, the way that expertise is developed and practiced, the way that productive activities are coordinated, reflects the given social relations of production and would be different in a socialist society. In capitalism, the drive toward accumulation socializes production, including the evolution of a complex division of labor, but only in ways appropriate for the continued extraction of surplus labor.

Managerial tasks that involve giving direction in order to integrate and coordinate the labor process and to provide specialized knowledge are usefully distinguished from the authority exercised to discipline and control. But coordination tasks in themselves cannot be a base for exploitation, for the extraction of surplus labor. Exploitation does require discipline and control. However, under capitalism, the managerial tasks of discipline and control must be exercised toward the end of producing an average rate of profit. (I would also argue that the requirements of capitalist accumulation constrain the organization of production within the state in similar, although not as direct ways, but that point will have to be left aside here.)

By the same argument, I think that Wright's definition of the statist mode of production is less satisfactory than his earlier approach. In *Classes* he defines statism as the extension to the whole society of managerial control over coordinating production. In his article, "Capitalism's Futures", Wright asserted that in both statist and capitalist societies managers are in similar positions: they direct production but under

constraints, in particular decisions about the allocation of investment, over which they have no control.³ In capitalism, the allocation of investment is determined by the market, capital flowing to the most profitable areas. In statism, as Wright previously argued, the allocation of investment is determined directly in a process of political negotiation among bureaucratic sectors adjudicated by the highest decision-making bodies of the state. "The ruling class in a statist society is thus defined by those positions within the relations of bureaucratic domination that control the basic allocation of means of production and distribution of the social surplus. This implies that vast numbers of positions within the bureaucratic structure of the state economic apparatuses are *not* in the ruling class" (p. 98).

This argument suggests that managers might not have an objective interest in the statist alternative to capitalism and do not exploit other workers independently of capitalist exploitation. Yet, whatever their long-run interest in a democratic socialist alternative to capitalism, within capitalism, that is outside of a revolutionary transformation of the system, managers and supervisors must carry out, to a greater or lesser extent, control functions which do place them in an antagonistic relationship to other workers. The degree to which the jobs of lower-level supervisors involve them in control functions varies according to both management policies (the greater or less centralization of control/supervision) and the level of organization and combativity of the workers they are supposed to supervise. Thus, both their experience in work, their relationships with other workers, and their actual interests (for example, whether they have more to gain than to lose from cooperating with those they supervise) will also vary. None the less, most supervisors and managers, most of the time, however pressed by capital, will find themselves to one degree or another in an antagonistic relation to other workers. These real relationships within production can lead them to organize, when they do, separately from other unions and can open them up to technocratic/statist ideologies.

An analogous argument can be made in regard to the work of many professional and technical workers who do not exercise direct managerial authority. I think Wright is correct not to try to find a single dimension that differentiates both these workers and managers/supervisors from other occupational groups. (This is a problem with the work of other new middle-class theorists such as Poulantzas and Carchedi.) Still, I'm not convinced by his argument that these workers exploit others through a credential monopoly which raises their pay

3. E.O. Wright, "Capitalism's Futures," *Socialist Review*, no. 68 (1983).

above what it would be in a free market. Unskilled unionized workers make more money than nonunionized workers, but none of us I think would want to argue that they are exploiting nonunionized workers. Wright rejects his earlier emphasis on work autonomy as defining the contradictory location of these employees. He argues that, unlike the (petty bourgeois) self-employed professional or artisan, the autonomy of salaried professional/technical workers or skilled workers is generally highly contingent and therefore a weak criterion for class locations, as these ought to designate fairly stable and structurally determinate properties of positions within the social relations of production. I agree with Wright's critique of his former definition of these workers as in a contradictory location between the petty bourgeoisie and the working class.

However, I think that there are characteristics of their work that do distinguish them from other nonmanagerial employees. They possess knowledge that other workers don't have and that often supplies the conditions and *direction* for the work that other workers do. This may be in part a necessary aspect of the technical division of labor—that is, of the need for specialized knowledge. But it is also the result of their own actions aiming to monopolize knowledge as a labor market strategy and the result of management actions aiming to reduce management's dependence on its employees. As members of a collective labor process, workers with expertise have no reason to differentiate themselves from other workers, to refuse to share their knowledge, or to be hostile to having the goals of their work set by the associated producers rather than by an employer. As possessors of knowledge, knowledge workers have no particular interest in organizing themselves apart from other workers. Nor do they have a reason to resist identifying with the class of producers whose collective labor is exploited by capital. On the other hand, as competitors on a labor market, these workers can improve their standard of living by excluding others from access to their knowledge. But this labor market strategy will itself have implications for the social relationships these workers enter into at work. Insofar as this set of workers judge that their own higher salaries depend on their monopolization of knowledge, they have a consistent interest, within capitalism, in maintaining their exclusive control over knowledge and in adopting an elitist ideology which justifies that control. This interest in protecting their position within the labor market encourages their commitment to defending their exclusive control over certain kinds of decisions, reinforces the hierarchical character of their relations with other workers, and can therefore lead them to resist attempts by other workers to expand and democratize decision-making. It will encourage them to insist on their distance from other workers and discourage their identification

with the trade union movement. It will also tend to attract them to a technocratic/statist alternative to capitalism. I would argue that analogous sets of pressures characterize many service professionals' relationship to other workers and to their clients, most of whom will be working class.

Workers with specialized skills are also subject to tendencies toward proletarianization. However, the impact of proletarianization on consciousness has historically varied. Sometimes, proletarianized workers have been in the forefront of militant class confrontations (for instance, the shop stewards' movement in early twentieth-century England). But many times proletarianization has led them to organize primarily to restore old prerogatives, thus to a kind of trade unionism that is in a very uneasy alliance with the rest of the trade union movement.

Defining class location in terms of exploitation interests and measuring exploitation by income, Wright is forced to assert an overly abstract connection between objective interests and consciousness. There is nothing in his definition of class location that theorizes the process through which workers develop their world views. Work relationships are not the only determinant of consciousness. However, it seems to me that they are a significant structural dimension differentiating experience and thus leading to different ways of understanding the world. Attending to them can provide one point of entry for analyzing changing consciousness.

EXPLOITATION, IDENTITY, AND CLASS STRUCTURE: A REPLY TO MY CRITICS*

Erik Olin Wright

Most of the criticisms raised in this symposium on *Classes*¹ can be grouped under two general headings: (1) criticisms which question various aspects of my analysis of exploitation, although not necessarily rejecting the general claim that class structures should be defined with respect to mechanisms of exploitation; (2) criticisms which question the definition of class structure exclusively in terms of exploitation and argue that the concept of class must also capture the idea of common lived experiences. Both of these clusters of criticisms touch on fundamental issues in class analysis. In what follows I will try to respond to these criticisms in the spirit of clarifying and advancing the conceptual issues at stake rather than simply defending the arguments I have made in the past.

Class and Exploitation

It will be helpful to recapitulate briefly the core argument in my analysis of class structures. Classical Marxism contains a well-developed concept of the fundamental classes of the capitalist mode of production—capitalists and workers—but does not provide a satisfactory way of conceptualizing what in common language is called the “middle class.” I proposed the following solution: actual capitalist societies should be understood as containing a variety of forms of exploitation, not simply capitalist exploitation as such. While these noncapitalist forms of exploitation may be structurally subordinated to capitalism—indeed, this is what is entailed by calling the society “capitalist”—nevertheless, they can still provide the material basis for secondary forms of class relations. The “middle classes” can then be understood as locations in the class structure which are *exploited* in terms of capitalist mechanisms of exploitation, but *exploiters* in terms of one or more of these secondary mechanisms of exploitation.

*I would like to express my gratitude to Michael Burawoy for refusing to let me sidestep certain crucial theoretical problems in an earlier draft of this paper.

1. E.O. Wright, *Classes* (London: Verso, 1985).

More concretely, I argued that "actually existing capitalism" contains two secondary forms of exploitation: exploitation based on the control over organizational assets and exploitation based on the ownership of monopolized skills, most notably where these are legally certified through "credentials".² The middle class, therefore, consists of wage-earners who are organization and/or skill exploiters.

Three general objections to this formulation have been advanced in the papers commenting on *Classes*: first, while the ownership of skills or credentials may reduce the rate of capitalist exploitation, they should not be thought of as a distinctive mechanism of exploitation in their own right; second, organization assets cannot be distinguished from capitalist property itself, and thus cannot be the basis for a distinctive mechanism of exploitation; and third, regardless of the issue of whether or not managers and professionals are exploiters, their class interests are so deeply linked to those of the bourgeoisie that it makes no sense to regard them as in a distinct class with latently anticapitalist tendencies at all. They may be junior partners of the bourgeoisie, but they are not part of some "contradictory class location" as I suggest. Let us look at each of these issues.

Skill Exploitation

Arthur Stinchcombe questions the claim that the higher incomes that go to people with high levels of skills or talents can be considered "exploitation." As an alternative he suggests that such higher income basically reflects the higher levels of productivity of wage-earners with high levels of skills. For various reasons one might want to criticize inequalities in income based on differential productivity, but this should not be conflated with exploitation—the unjust transfer of labor from one economic agent to another.³

2. It is important to note that the argument is not that the possession of skills *per se* constitutes a basis for exploitation. Skill exploitation is based on the restriction of the *supply* of particular skills, through one mechanism or another, so that the price of those skills (that is, the wage of the skilled labor power) is above its costs of production. Credentialing is the most important institutionalized mechanism of such monopolization, and thus I generally identify skill exploitation with credentialism.

3. This is obviously a highly truncated general definition of "exploitation." The use of the adjective "unjust" is intended to distinguish exploitations from gifts (since gifts also involve the transfer of labor from one agent to another), but this obviously simply displaces the problem to establishing appropriate criteria for the unjustness of a transfer. Throughout *Classes* I adopt a modified version of John Roemer's concept of exploitation; J. Roemer, *A General Theory of Exploitation and Class* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982. The core idea is that exploitation involves two critical elements: (1) the material welfare of exploiters are at the expense of the material welfare of the exploited; and (2) the material welfare of the exploiter depends upon the labor or effort of the exploited. Criterion 1 alone defines economic oppression. The two criteria together define exploitation.

The issue, then, is whether an income differential which reflects productivity differences can still constitute exploitation. I think that it can. Consider the following imaginary world: every person is allocated an equal amount of land, but different land has different degrees of fertility and is suitable for growing different crops. Also imagine, for simplicity, that everyone in this imaginary world wants to consume the same bundle of crops (the only things produced in the world). I happen to have a parcel of land that can grow a crop that few other parcels can grow and which also turns out to be very desirable. Everyone else is willing to trade large quantities of their produce for mine. What happens in this world? I discover that, *given my private ownership of this land*, I can obtain the commodities I wish to consume by working many fewer hours than people on other land. Everyone ends up with the same consumption (by the assumption of the story), but I have to work fewer hours to get it. This, I would argue, is appropriately described as a situation in which I am able to exploit other producers by virtue of my ownership of the special land.⁴

The story I have just told could, of course, also be described by saying that my land is more productive than other land since the products from it will have a higher equilibrium price (or, equivalently, that the land itself would have a higher market value if it were traded). The higher income I receive (in the form of less work for the same consumption) is simply a return to the higher productivity of the land, but is exploitative none the less.

Now let us change the example a bit: instead of land of differential fertility, let us say that everyone is given one "unit" of labor power (themselves), but this labor power has differential *talents*, where we consider talents to be innate attributes of individuals acquired through the "genetic lottery." Talent in this sense is analogous to the natural fertility of land: it allows particular skills to "grow" with the expenditure of less effort (and other inputs). Because of the unequal distribution of talents, some people are able to obtain a given level of consumption by expending less labor than others (or, equivalently, to obtain higher levels of consumption by expending the same amount of labor). This seems to me to be parallel to the case of the differential fertility of the land: the private ownership of talents enables the talented to potentially appropriate the labor of the untalented. This is not to deny the claim that people with talents are more productive—indeed, if they were not, their talents could not be cashed in for exploitative appropriations of the

4. This story is a slight variant of a model from Roemer, *A General Theory*.

labor of others.⁵ This higher productivity may help to legitimate and mask the exploitation, but it does not render the transfer of labor, if it occurs, nonexploitative.⁶

Talents, as defined here, are genetic endowments. In the analysis of the middle class, however, I have talked of skill or credential exploitation, not "talent exploitation." Credentials, in these terms, can be viewed as a socially institutionalized mechanism of artificially creating talents. A "talent" is a scarce genetic endowment that enables people to acquire valued skills. A credentialing institution is a mechanism that allows some people to acquire a valued skill and not others. The result is that the acquired skill is scarce just as it would have been if it was strictly the result of differential talents. To be sure, the owner of that skill may be "more productive" in the sense that they have a skill that is valued in market.⁷ But the inequalities that are generated by that ownership, as in the earlier case of land, should still be treated as potentially exploitative.

Now, this does not imply that all income inequalities linked to skill differentials necessarily reflect exploitation. It takes time and effort to acquire skills, and part of the income of a skill owner is simply a reflection of the costs of producing the skill itself. Furthermore, in many instances, people have to accept lower incomes during the training period in which skills are acquired and, again, part of the higher income of a skilled wage-earner reflects the "discounted" value of such foregone earnings. The exploitative element in the wage of a skilled wage-earner, then, is that part of the wage which directly reflects the monopoly control of the supply of the skill. One form of such monopolization is

5. Throughout this discussion I will ignore the problem of what is sometimes called unproductive labor—labor that is expended in capitalist production but which does not produce anything of value. I am assuming that all labor power is deployed productively, but that different units of labor power are more or less productive. I do not think that the issues under discussion here are affected in any interesting way by the problem of unproductive labor, since unskilled, fully proletarianized labor power can also be unproductive in the sense defined above. The unproductive/productive distinction, therefore, does not bear on the problem of the status of skilled labor power with respect to exploitation.

6. A talented person who makes things for his or her own consumption much more productively than others is not exploiting anyone. The exploitation comes when this production is used to appropriate the labor of others through exchange.

7. It is important to stress that contrary to Burris's construal of my argument (see p. 163) I am not suggesting that skill or credential holders are actually more productive physically in the sense of contributing more to the total social product. The activities of a lawyer involved in corporate mergers may actually reduce the total social product and thus be negatively productive in social terms, and yet highly valued in the market because of their "productivity" for the capitalist. All that is entailed by the argument is that their labor power is more valued on the market and that this greater valuation results in exploitative transfers.

rooted in "natural" talents; another—and I believe more important—form is based on credentials. The result is a monopoly *rent* component of the wage. This rent component is potentially a form of exploitation.⁸

Why do I say simply "potentially"? This is an important wrinkle in the argument: the existence of monopoly rents in the wages of skilled/credentialed labor power is a *necessary* condition for such wage-earners to be exploiters, but it is not a *sufficient* condition. The monopoly rent indicates (by definition) that skilled wage-earners are able to appropriate part of the social surplus in their wage. But since the laboring activity of the skilled wage-earner is also contributing to that surplus, this need not imply that the skilled wage-earner is appropriating the labor of anyone else. The privileged position of skilled wage-earners in the labor market, in short, may simply give them the "privilege" of appropriating their own surplus.⁹

It is not an easy matter to establish whether or not this rent component of the wage is sufficiently large to constitute a genuine transfer of surplus to skill owners, and thus to constitute exploitation. To sort this out we would need a way of measuring the contribution of a given wage-earner to the social surplus and then compare this to the amount of surplus embodied in that person's wage. If all labor power was completely homogeneous, this would not be such a difficult matter—contribution to the surplus would be measured directly by the labor time expended by workers in the production of the surplus. But how should the value of the surplus be measured under conditions of heterogeneous labor?

8. To say that skills/credentials constitute a distinct mechanism of exploitation in capitalist societies does not imply that the empirical effects of skill exploitation in capitalism occur independently of the capitalist context in which they occur. Burris seems to believe that to postulate a distinct mechanism one must also be committed to the view that this mechanism produces empirical effects autonomously from the effects of capitalist institutions (see p. 163). This is simply not the case. Burris is entirely correct when he writes: "The nature and distribution of such positions [positions in which credentialed labor power is employed] is certainly influenced by the nature of labor markets, but it is also and more fundamentally conditioned by the powers and interests invested in the private ownership of the means of production" (p. 164). This is, indeed, what it means to describe the society as "capitalist"—that capitalist interests, powers and imperatives structure the opportunities for all economic agents in the society. But this does not imply that what I have termed skill exploitation has no effects of its own. In late feudalism, for example, one could have said the same thing about the powers and interests of feudal lords with respect to the opportunities for capitalist investment, and yet this would not have implied that the capitalist mechanisms did not exist. Skill exploitation in capitalism is deeply structured and constrained by capitalism, but this does not demonstrate that it is no more than an effect or reflection of capitalist exploitation.

9. This description of the logic of exploitation mechanisms for credential owners is consistent with the theoretical position that they are "petty bourgeois"; the petty bourgeoisie consists of those producers who are neither exploiters nor exploited—that is, they are able to appropriate the surplus which they produce.

There is no simple answer to this question. If a type of labor power is in permanent short supply because of scarce talents or institutionalized credentials, and thus is highly valued in the market, does this mean that it creates more "value" in an hour of labor time than a type of labor power in abundant supply? From the point of view of "subjective theories of value" the answer is obvious: a scarce input into production of whatever sort creates more value precisely because it is subjectively more valued (that is, in greater demand and thus commands a higher price). In such a perspective, the problem under discussion disappears: highly valued labor produces additional value exactly equivalent to the wage it commands in the market, and thus it is meaningless to say that the wages of such labor power are exploitative.

Marxists, however, generally reject such subjectivist views.¹⁰ A change in the effective market demand for a particular kind of labor power should not, in and of itself, change the amount of labor value it produces per unit time, even if it will affect the prices of the commodities produced by that labor power. Imagine the following situation: a particular kind of highly trained credentialed labor power capable of producing ten units of commodity X per day is very scarce and in high demand. It therefore commands a very high wage and, accordingly the commodity X commands a high price. Now the monopoly control of the training is broken, the supply increases and the wage drops to the point that it simply covers the costs of reimbursing the costs of training. But nothing else changes: the physical productivity of the trained labor power is the same and thus still produces ten units of X per day. Only now, X is much cheaper. In a subjectivist theory of value, this labor power is now less productive—it produces less value than before—whereas in an objective theory of value, the amount of objective value remains unchanged since the real inputs into production remain unchanged. If one rejects a subjectivist theory of value, therefore, the only reason why trained labor power might produce more labor value per hour of current work is that part of the past labor of training is embodied in the value of the products currently produced by skilled labor power.¹¹

10. Even Marxists who reject the labor theory of value are hesitant to accept a full-fledged subjectivist view of value. They reject the labor theory of value because, once the assumptions of homogeneous labor and homogeneous capital are relaxed, it is no longer internally coherent, but in general Marxists still argue for some sort of objective, real-cost based theory of value.

11. In traditional Marxist language this means, in effect, that part of the "socially necessary labor time" of producing a particular commodity is the socially necessary labor time of training the labor power itself. Training time is thus amortized over the useful life of the skill in question by being "transferred" to the commodities produced using the skill.

Because highly trained labor power does contribute more to the social surplus than unskilled labor power, it is entirely possible that the higher incomes of many credentialed wage-earners do not embody any genuine exploitation of others. They would still be a *privileged* social category, and thus it might be appropriate to call them a distinctive *stratum* within the working class, but they would not be properly described as exploiters and thus would not have a distinctive class character. This is basically the theoretical position advocated by Meiksins and Burris.

Classical Marxist accounts of exploitation in capitalism finessed this problem by assuming homogeneous labor. Possible labor transfers among wage-earners were thus ignored; the only issue was the transfers of surplus labor (or surplus value) from wage-earners to capitalists. But in the world in which we live labor power is not homogeneous and massive income differentials exist among wage-earners. One way or another this has to be accommodated within the general discourse of Marxist theory, and how it is accommodated affects the way in which the class structure of capitalism is viewed.

We thus have two broadly different theoretical solutions to the problem of the class character of highly skilled/credentialed labor power: in one, such wage-earners are at least potentially exploiters, potentially appropriating the labor of others through their monopolization of a particular scarce social resource, and thus occupying a contradictory location within class relations; in the other, they are a privileged stratum of the working class, able to reduce their rate of capitalist exploitation by appropriating part of the surplus which they produce. How can we choose between these alternative theoretical solutions? There are good arguments that can be brought to bear on both approaches, and I certainly do not think that there is an unambiguous case for the solution I have proposed. There are, however, several lines of reasoning which might support the concept of skill exploitation.

First, the main upshot of the above discussion is that in many cases it is difficult to decide in practice whether or not a given position involves skill exploitation. As Roemer has demonstrated, however, the same ambiguity exists for capital-based exploitation as well: there is a grey area of self-employed small owners for whom it is ambiguous whether or not they are exploiters.¹² The difference between the skill case and the

12. In Roemer's analysis, such small owners are potentially exploiters through unequal exchange in the market, even if they hire no labor power. Petty bourgeois self-employed producers with relatively large amounts of capital are able to appropriate the surplus of others by exchanging their products for those produced under less capital-intensive technologies. Once they own sufficient capital to become employers, however, there is no ambiguity in their exploitation status: all capitalist employers are necessarily exploiters.

capital case in Roemer's analysis is that for the latter there is a clear criterion for when this ambiguity disappears: once a capital-owner owns sufficient capital to employ wage-earners, that owner becomes an exploiter. This is the basis of Roemer's important Class-Exploitation-Correspondence-Principle: under conditions of homogeneous labor, all wage-earners are exploited and all employers are exploiters. There is no corresponding transparent criterion for when a skill owner becomes a skill exploiter. The "grey area" in which it is ambiguous whether or not a skill owner is an exploiter is thus not only potentially quite large for skill exploitation but there is no direct indicator of its boundaries. This does not, however, imply that unambiguous skill exploiters cannot be identified. In particular, no matter how one counts the training time of high-paid professionals it is hard to see how they would fail the test of being net appropriators of the surplus labor of workers.¹³ These conceptual problems, however, may undermine the usefulness of the concept of skill exploitation for the empirical specification of class structures.¹⁴

Second, it can be argued that the social surplus is a jointly produced surplus of a collectively organized process of production. While individuals contribute their time and energy to this process, it is impossible to meaningfully define individual contributions to that surplus, and thus any individual, private appropriation of the social surplus is a form of exploitation. Wage differences that reflect different costs of producing and reproducing different kinds of labor power, therefore, would not be exploitative, but any other differential would be.¹⁵

13. Take, for example, a doctor whose work life is forty years and, let's assume, that the training time embodies forty years of training—surely a large overestimate. Assuming that the training does not have declining value over time (and thus it is evenly amortized over the work life of the doctor), this would mean that in every hour of current labor the doctor contributes two hours of labor value to the total social product. Further, imagine that the doctor works ten hours a day, thus contributing a total of twenty hours of labor values to the social product a day. If the income of this doctor was the equivalent of only twenty hours of abstract labor value a day, then he would not be an exploiter. Even with these exceptionally liberal assumptions, however, most doctors will be consuming more labor values than they contribute.

14. Skill assets, like capital assets, are essentially a continuous variable: in both cases an individual can own incrementally increasing amounts of the resource. The critical difference is that in the case of capital, once this quantity surpasses a certain threshold, the owner is in a position to hire others: the quantitative variation thus constitutes the basis for a qualitative shift in the nature of the social relations. There is no corresponding qualitative shift in the social relations in which owners of skills enter the production process that could provide the basis for an unambiguous demarcation between skill privileges and skill exploitation. As I have argued in *Classes*, this lack of a qualitative relational criterion corresponding to skill exploitation may undermine the claim that skill exploitation is a dimension of class structures.

15. If one accepts these arguments, then the normative principle "equal income returns to equal effort" is the nonexploitative income distribution among wage-earners, rather than "equal income returns to equal contribution," since contribution is no longer, in general, identifiable with isolated individual labor.

Third, following the work of John Roemer, one can argue that the surplus-transfer notion of exploitation should be abandoned altogether since the concept of surplus-transfer becomes so ill-defined under conditions of heterogeneous labor. The test for exploitation, then, is basically whether or not the welfare of one group is *at the expense* of another; the issue of whether or not there are actual labor transfers between the groups does not enter the analysis.¹⁶

Organization Exploitation

Some of the same issues raised around the problem of skill exploitation could be raised for organization exploitation as well. One might argue that managers are not the beneficiaries of exploitative transfers of surplus at all; they occupy strategic jobs within firms, positions within which their decisions can have a massive impact on the overall productivity of the enterprise. Their higher incomes, therefore, could simply reflect the size of their "productive contribution."

Most radical class analysts would reject this kind of neoclassical economic defense of high managerial incomes. While it is undeniable that actions of a top manager might result in massive increases (or decreases) in the surplus produced within a capitalist firm, most radical theorists would still insist that the surplus is actually produced by the laborers who make the products. Managerial labor is, at most, a small component of the total labor embodied in those products. Radical class analysts, therefore, in general accept the idea that the income of managers, particularly higher level managers, is exploitative. The issue in dispute is whether managers should be seen as participating indirectly in capitalist exploitation itself or, alternatively, whether they should be seen as exploiters based on their control of organizational resources.

In the treatment of managers as beneficiaries of capitalist exploitation,

16. Roemer adds a number of other conditions to his formal definition of exploitation which I will not review here. The important point is that he tries to maintain the notion of exploitation as a condition which produces inherently antagonistic material interests without insisting that the antagonism is based on actual surplus transfer. It should be noted that in more recent work Roemer has seriously questioned whether Marxists should worry about exploitation at all; J. Roemer, "Should Marxists Be Interested in Exploitation?" in J. Roemer (ed.), *Analytical Marxism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). He now argues that the fundamental arguments against exploitation by Marxists ultimately amount to arguments against inequalities of resources as such, and that the rhetoric of exploitation simply confuses the matter. Marxists, in his view, should defend their normative commitments directly on egalitarian principles rather than indirectly via the problematic concept of exploitation. I believe that such a conceptual move undermines one of the core explanatory concepts in Marxism. Exploitation is explanatory not just because it reflects inequalities, but because of the ways in which it attempts to map interdependencies of antagonistic interests.

they are viewed as simply holders of powers delegated to them by their employers. If they are loyal lieutenants, then they will receive some of the spoils of capitalist exploitation. But as lieutenants they control no autonomous mechanisms of exploitation at all. In the alternative approach, on the other hand, capitalists are seen as being forced by the level of development of the forces of production and the social character of production in advanced capitalism to create managerial hierarchies. The powers of managers, however, should not be viewed as simply nominally "delegated," as if they were revokable at will by capitalist owners. Rather, these powers are built into the social organization of production in such a way that they give managers some measure of real autonomy and power. This constitutes the basis for their organizational exploitation.

As in the case of skill exploitation, I do not think that the case for organization exploitation is unambiguous. It may well be that the privileges of managers should be viewed entirely as derivative from capitalist exploitation. The essential opposing argument is that the exploitative transfers to managers can exist even in the absence of capitalist exploitation. In a society within which private ownership of the means of production has been eliminated—that is, means of production could not be sold on a market and individuals could not accumulate capital—managers could still occupy positions within which they were able to extract surplus labor from workers. And this could be true even if managers did not monopolize any particular scarce skills and were thus not skill exploiters in the sense discussed above.

How is this possible? Basically the argument is this: people who control organizational resources—the basic planning, coordinating and integration of productive activities—occupy what I have called "strategic jobs." These are jobs in which it matters a great deal for the overall productivity or profitability of the organization how responsibly and conscientiously the job is performed.¹⁷ Because of managerial control over information flows and the extreme interdependence of managerial actions, these are also jobs in which it is very difficult for anyone outside of the managerial hierarchy itself to effectively monitor the performance of individual managers. The combination of the strategic importance of these jobs and the ineffectiveness of external surveillance means that

17. As in the case of skills and productivity, there is no assumption here that managerial activity actually contributes to physical productivity. All that matters is that this labor is strategically important for the economic performance of the organization. Such activity can be, of course, profoundly "unproductive" in material terms (for example, where managerial activity is directed towards speculation or simply increasing the capitalist exploitation of workers).

managers are in an excellent position to extort wages out of proportion to the costs of producing managerial labor power. Of course, such higher wages are legitimated as "incentives," but this is simply the ideological mask for exploitation, much as the need for profit incentives is an ideological mask for capitalist exploitation.¹⁸ The abolition of private ownership of the means of production does not in and of itself eradicate this strategic power of managerial labor, and thus in state socialist societies managers and bureaucrats are still able to exploit.

Now, in spite of this argument, it remains the case that in capitalist societies there is a sense in which capitalists, not managers, "own" the organizational assets of production. The capitalist hires at least the very top managers and the capitalist—not the manager—can decide to destroy the organization assets by eliminating the organization as a whole. In the same sense, capitalists "own" the jobs occupied by credentialed wage-earners. A credential as such does not generate exploitation; the credential owner must be hired into a job which requires that credential in order for the credentialed employee to acquire the wage within which skill exploitation occurs. It is thus true, as Burris and Meiksins have argued in different ways, that in capitalism the wages of both managers and credentialed wage-earners are "derived" from capitalist revenues.

However, even though the exploitation from which managers and credentialed wage-earners benefit is systematically tied to capitalist exploitation, it does not follow from this that these exploitations are reducible to capitalist exploitation. They can have real effects of their own even if, in a capitalist society, they invariably take the form of payments out of capitalist profits. The fact that such exploitations can exist in the absence of private ownership of the means of production at least lends some support to the claim that they should be treated as distinct exploitations in capitalism as well.

18. Incentives are not inherently indicators of hidden exploitation. It may take the expectation of higher incomes, for example, to induce people to undergo a long and unpleasant process of training to acquire a skill. If this is fundamentally reimbursement for the effort and foregone earnings of training, the "incentive" would not constitute exploitation. Or, it may take incentives to get people to do unpleasant work—to pay them for the "disutility" of particularly toilsome labor. If in these cases there are no barriers to entry into either training or unpleasant work—anyone is able to accept the bribe if they want—then the incentives are not exploitative. But when a person says, "I will not act responsibly unless you pay me more," and you pay the person more because they have the power to harm you if you don't, the "incentive" is simply a mask for the use of power to extort income.

Class Interests

Ultimately the most serious objection to the concept of skill and organization exploitation as the basis of particular kinds of class locations is not based on technical arguments concerning the existence of strategic rents or monopoly rents in wages, but rather concerns the question of the basic class interests of managers and professionals-technocrats. Peter Meiksins has expressed this problem most forcefully when he argues that it is basically unthinkable that managers or intellectuals in advanced capitalism could ever adopt an autonomous class project.¹⁹ Either they would support some version of capitalism, perhaps reformed and rationalized in various ways, or under extreme conditions they might support some kind of democratic socialism embodying a working-class project. In neither case would they have their own project for the reconstruction of society. Similar themes are raised by Burris and Brenner.

Again, I take these criticisms seriously and I do not feel that I can offer a decisive defense of the theoretical position I am advocating. I do not, however, think that the arguments I have made "strain the imagination to the breaking point."²⁰ To clarify my position, I would like to discuss two issues: first, the mechanisms within capitalism that tie the interests of the middle class to the bourgeoisie; and second, the sense in which "middle classes" in capitalism potentially could support an anti-capitalist, antiproletarian class project.

Within capitalist societies there are two central mechanisms which systematically link the material interests of the middle classes to the bourgeoisie. First, one of the distinctive features of middle-class jobs is their location within orderly career structures, either as part of managerial hierarchies, or as part of professional hierarchies. To a significant extent, the reproduction and enrichment of such career structures depends upon the profitability and vitality of capital accumulation. This is most obviously the case when such career structures are directly located within capitalist corporations, but it is also true for career structures in the state since the funding of state employment through taxation is at least in part contingent upon accumulation.

This interest in capitalist profits and accumulation, of course, is not unique to middle-class wage-earners; as Adam Przeworski has argued, so long as workers have to live in a capitalist society, they also have an interest in profitability and accumulation.²¹ While the middle classes

19. See pp. 179-81.

20. See p. 180.

may disproportionately benefit from capital accumulation, all wage-earners have such a material interest.

The second mechanism which ties the middle class to capitalist interests, on the other hand, is much more specific to their class situation. The argument that the middle classes are exploiters through secondary mechanisms of exploitation implies that their incomes will tend to be much higher than the costs of producing and reproducing their labor power. This means that, compared to the working class, they will have relatively high levels of discretionary income, income left over after they have provided for their basic expenses of living. The existence of such discretionary income opens the possibility that middle-class wage-earners are able to save and, more importantly, invest their surplus income. In other words, they are able to capitalize the income they receive through exploitation. In the course of a middle-class career this can result in the accumulation of a quite considerable portfolio of capitalist assets which, in effect, directly integrates the middle class into the bourgeoisie. While the unearned income generated by such capital assets will rarely equal the wage income of a professional or manager at the peak of their careers, it nevertheless links them to the capitalist class in a direct and systematic way that rarely exists in the working class itself.

So long as people in the middle class are able to capitalize their surplus income and count on a career trajectory firmly underwritten by capitalist accumulation, it is hardly surprising that in general they support capitalism. This is in part what it means to say that capitalism is a *hegemonic* system: it is able to effectively tie the class interests of various subaltern classes, in this case the middle classes, to the interests of the capitalist class. This is similar to the situation of merchant capitalists in feudal society: so long as they were able to "feudalize" their capitalist exploitation (that is, buy into the feudal class in various ways) they generally supported feudalism. It was only in the period of the long crisis of late feudalism, in part perhaps stimulated by the expansion of capitalism itself, that the bourgeoisie became stridently antifeudal. Similarly, in the case of the middle classes of advanced capitalism: their procapitalist orientation is likely to be eroded only under conditions where a long-term stagnation occurs which seriously erodes the ability of people in the middle class to capitalize their surplus income and which threatens the reproduction of middle-class employment in the state and private sectors. It is even possible to imagine corporate managers

21. The argument is not that workers have an interest in capitalism over socialism, but rather, given the continuation of capitalism they have an interest in capital accumulation rather than stagnation. See A. Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

supporting various kinds of statist alternatives to corporate capitalism if capital was rapidly disinvesting, managers were losing their jobs, etc.

Meiksins argues that under such long-term crisis conditions, the only plausible political reform program of intellectuals, managers and bureaucrats would be some modification of capitalism involving greater state planning and coordination, but not anything genuinely anti-capitalist. The only alternatives to such "managed capitalism" that he entertains would be democratic socialism (in which case they would be basically supporting a working-class project, not a middle-class project) or "Soviet-type economies in which public ownership is combined with strong, centralized, undemocratic control over the economy." This latter alternative is so unattractive to all actors that it is impossible to imagine a mass-based movement in the middle class adopting it as a political goal. In Meiksins's view, therefore, the middle class would either put its political support behind a basically bourgeois-class project of reformed capitalism or a working-class project of democratic socialism. In either case it would not have its own class project, and therefore should not be considered a "class."

I do not think that Meiksins has correctly posed the alternatives. Under the specified conditions of long-term stagnation and crisis of capitalist hegemony, it is possible that the working class and the various segments of the middle class might form a coalition to struggle for something people would call "democratic socialism," as Meiksins suggests, but this common discourse is likely to mask rather different—and deeply conflicting—visions of an alternative society. In one vision of democratic socialism, it is a society which is deeply antimeritocratic and antihierarchical. Not only would the principal means of production be under "democratic control" rather than privately owned, but hierarchies within production would be severely curtailed in favor of radical participatory democracy at the point of production, and meritocracies would be dramatically eroded in favor of popular control over and access to training and certification of specialized skills. In the second vision, "democratic socialism" would be democratic in the familiar bourgeois sense—civil liberties, elected officials, due process—and it would be socialist in the sense of the state owning the principal means of production, but would retain hierarchies and meritocracies in production. These would, undoubtedly, be legitimated on the grounds of rewarding people for their contribution to society (meritocracy) and the responsibility and importance of their work (hierarchy), but would nevertheless protect the exploitative inequalities that define the material interests of the middle class.

The kind of society that would actually emerge if a democratic socialist project of a coalition of the working class and the "middle class" were successful would probably embody in significant ways the distinc-

tive class interests of skill exploiters and organization exploiters. Even under conditions of sustained capitalist crisis, antimeritocratic, anti-elitist, radical democratic socialism is unlikely to have a broad base in the middle class. What is more plausible, therefore, is that under these hypothetical conditions, the middle class would be mobilized behind the more statist, hierarchical and meritocratic vision of socialism. Struggles over these hierarchies and meritocracies would be at the center of class struggles in such a society.

These claims on my part are highly speculative. Meiksins is correct that "the historical record holds very few examples of significant middle-class technocratic or statist movements." The response that this simply reflects the long-standing hegemonic strength of capitalism in the advanced industrial societies sounds like special pleading. However, one could equally well point to the weakness of revolutionary democratic socialist movements in the working class as proof that the working class in advanced capitalism is also not properly a class in fundamental opposition to the bourgeoisie. Working-class anticapitalism, when it occurs at all in developed capitalist countries, tends to take social democratic and statist forms, forms which embody much of what I have characterized as middle-class anti-capitalism (that is, they do not challenge exploitation based on hierarchy and meritocracy). What the historical record of advanced capitalism really demonstrates is the profound difficulty of any social category consistently defining a political project radically opposed to capitalism. When such projects do become articulated, they tend to embody in complex ways the specific class interests of a variety of subordinated classes within capitalism.

Class and Identity

I would now like to turn to an entirely different set of issues. Throughout the development of my work on class I have resolutely insisted that class should be understood fundamentally as a concept revolving around the problem of antagonistic material interests based on exploitation.²² While I have devoted considerable energy to trying to figure out how those interests are constituted, what kinds of relations are most central

22. "Material interests," as I will use the term, are interests with respect to toil, leisure, and consumption. I have generally argued that material interests should also be thought of as "objective" interests, that is, that it makes sense to say that people have objective interests in improving their material well being (in the above sense). This does not mean that people have an inherent or objective interest in maximizing consumption (or income) *per se*, but simply that if given the choice between two different trade-offs between toil, leisure, and consumption, people have an objective interest in the more favorable trade-off.

to determining class interests, how different aspects of class interests are combined, and so on, I have always taken it as axiomatic that the most crucial thing which all members of a given class share in common is common material interests.²³

It is because of this preoccupation with class and material interests that I sought to reconstruct the concept of the "middle class" around the problem of exploitation. Exploitation is a preeminently interest-centered concept and is certainly at the heart of Marxist conceptions of class. It therefore made intuitive sense to try to understand the middle class as occupying a distinctive kind of position within processes of exploitation, for this would define them as having a distinctive commonality of material interests.

Johanna Brenner's critique of my approach to class structure rests, in part, upon the view that classes should not simply be defined with respect to interests, however those interests are conceptualized. She concludes her essay by writing:

Defining class locations in terms of exploitation interests and measuring exploitation by income, Wright is forced to assert an overly abstract connection between objective interests and consciousness. There is nothing in his definition of class location that theorizes the process through which workers develop their world views. Work relationships are not the only determinant of consciousness. However, it seems to me that they are a significant structural dimension differentiating experience and thus leading to different ways of understanding the world.²⁴

In my approach, the crucial thing which all members of a class share in common is fundamental objective material interests. The theory of exploitation, then, provides the basis for understanding the mechanisms which generate that commonality of interests in opposition to the interests of other classes. In Brenner's argument, in contrast, members of a class also share in common a pattern of *lived experiences* and the theory of workplace relations and practices provides the basic understanding of the mechanisms which generate that commonality of experience:

Attention to social relationships seems to me not only useful but very much in line with the classic Marxist argument that day to day experiences of conflict

23. To talk about "common" material interests implies being situated in a common manner to the underlying mechanisms which generate material welfare. Two people with the same actual income may not be in the same class since to be in the same class they would have to share a common relation to basic income-producing mechanisms.

24. See p. 190.

and cooperation at work could lead workers to take up kinds of affiliation, organization, action, militance that would in turn provide the experiential basis for the development of a broader revolutionary vision. Marx argued that the proletariat is the historical bearer of a socialist revolutionary project not only because they would benefit from ending their exploitation under capitalism (i.e. it is in their "interest" to end capitalism), but because their experiences within capitalist production might allow them to imagine a society based on collective, democratic control over production as an alternative to capitalism.²⁵

Class structures, in Brenner's argument, are characterized both by a particular distribution of exploitation-generated material interests and of labor process-generated lived experiences. An account of both interests and experience is essential for class structural analysis: the commonality of material interests within a class helps to explain the inherent tendency towards conflict between classes; the commonality of lived experience is essential for explaining why members of class tend to develop common *identities*, without which there would be no inherent tendency for solidary action and class struggle.²⁶ Exploitation is central to explaining what classes struggle over; common experiences are central to explaining their collective capacity to struggle at all. The category "workplace relations and practices" is therefore analytically parallel to "exploitation": both are meant to designate an underlying mechanism which generates particular effects—objective material interests and lived experiences—which, in turn, are constitutive of the concept of class. Both exploitation and workplace relations/practices are themselves structured by the social relations of production characteristic of capitalism, but they need not correspond to each other perfectly.

One possible implication of Brenner's comments is a new general way of specifying the theoretical status of the "middle-class."²⁷ The category "middle class" could be seen as representing a particular disjunction between interest-mechanisms and experience-mechanisms: they share with all wage-earners a common set of exploitation-generated interests opposed to capitalism, but they have a distinctive set of workplace experiences which produce a systematically nonproletarian form of

25. See p. 185.

26. I am using the term "identity" in a very broad sense to encompass the self-understanding of people of who they are and how they fit into the social world.

27. Brenner does not explicitly play out these implications for the analysis of the middle class in the class structure, and I am not sure that she would in fact endorse them as I have elaborated them here. Nevertheless, I think that the analysis I propose is a logical extension of her comments.

identity.²⁸ More specifically, Brenner suggests that this is the best way of understanding the division between workers on the one side and managers and professionals on the other. Managers and supervisors, she writes,

must carry out, to a greater or lesser extent, control functions which do place them in an antagonistic relationship to other workers. The degree to which the jobs of lower level supervisors involve them in control functions varies according to both management policies . . . and the level of organization and combativity of the workers they are supposed to supervise. Thus, both their experience in work, their relationships with other workers and their actual interests . . . will also vary . . . These real relationships within production can lead them to organize, when they do, separately from other unions and can open them up to technocratic/statist ideologies.²⁹

She makes an analogous argument for professionals: their immediate conditions and practices of self-direction and control of knowledge within the workplace generate lived experiences and corresponding identities which set them apart from other workers. For both managers and professionals, then, the decisive feature of their structural location which differentiates them from the working class is not their material interests *vis-à-vis* capitalist exploitation, but the nature of the daily experiences generated within the process of production that shapes their identity.

One way of situating this alternative strategy of specifying class structures within the classical Marxist tradition is in terms of the contrast between alienation and exploitation as foundational concepts for class analysis. The different immediate lived experiences that Brenner emphasizes can be thought of as generated by different locations with respect to the process of alienation. The control over knowledge and self-direction within work characteristic of professional labor processes could be understood as involving incomplete alienation. The managerial work of domination, control, surveillance, on the other hand, can be thought of as labor that produces and reproduces alienation in workers in the

28. This formulation is similar to my earlier conception of the middle class as a contradictory location within class relations in which there was a noncorrespondence between the relations of domination and the relations of exploitation; *Class, Crisis and the State* (London: Verso, 1978). Capitalists were considered exploiters and dominators, workers as exploited and dominated, and managers as dominators and exploited. In Brenner's formulation, the emphasis is less on domination *per se* than on the workplace experiences generated by the totality of workplace relations and practices. Domination would constitute one aspect of these relations, but not necessarily the decisive one.

29. See p. 188.

labor process. More generally, then, the middle class could be defined as individuals who are proletarianized with respect to exploitation but nonproletarianized (or only incompletely proletarianized) with respect to alienation.

In the traditional Marxist vision of the historical trajectory of capitalism, there is a systematic tendency for these two dimensions of class structure to progressively correspond. Capitalism simultaneously brings ever-broader sectors of economic activity under a regime of capitalist exploitation and deepens the conditions of alienation within the capitalist labor process. In the essential Marxist teleology of history, then, the workplace experiences that generate collective identities progressively coincide with the exploitation relations that generate material interests. In these terms, the persistence, and perhaps even the intensification, of the disjunction between exploitation and alienation, constitutes the social basis for the existence of a middle class in capitalist societies.

This general line of reasoning in class analysis is in keeping with a variety of recent work in class theory. There is, of course, a long tradition in mainstream sociology in which the concept of "social" class is linked to issues of common lifestyle which is closely tied to the issue of common subjectivity and identity, presumably rooted in some structuring of common lived experiences. More significantly for radical class analysis, the attempt to integrate the problem of common experiences and identity formation into the concept of class finds a resonant cord in the work of Pierre Bourdieu.³⁰ Bourdieu attempts to elaborate a view of class around the dual concepts of class *habitus* and *capital*. A class habitus is defined by a set of common *conditions* in everyday life which produce common *conditionings* experienced by people and which, in turn, generate a common set of internalized *dispositions* to act in particular ways. These dispositions range from *tastes* (the central preoccupation of Bourdieu's book, *Distinction*) to receptivities to particular ideological appeals and calls to action. In Bourdieu's analysis, a class habitus is not simply constituted within the workplace, but in community, schools, families, and other institutions as well. These institutional settings generate lived experiences (conditionings) over the life cycle which reinforce certain modes of thought and action and undermine others. As in Brenner's argument, the decisive criteria which distinguish classes are thus not reducible to differences in their material

30. For a good review of Pierre Bourdieu's work on class theory (*Distinction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups," *Theory and Society*, vol. 14, no. 6 (1985) and "What Makes a Social Class?" *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, vol. 22 (1987)), see R. Brubaker, "Rethinking Classical Theory: The Sociological Vision of Pierre Bourdieu," *Theory and Society*, vol. 14 (1985), no. 6, pp. 723-44.

interests (based on their control over different kinds of capital in Bourdieu's analysis), but must include differences in their habituses as well.³¹

A general reconstruction of the concept of class structure along the lines proposed by Brenner is an important, and potentially powerful, alternative to approaches such as my own which more narrowly elaborate the concept of class structure around material interests. To be convincing, such an approach needs to construct a clearer abstract concept of the commonality of workplace experiences that are constitutive of different class positions in capitalism. In the case of exploitation-centered concepts of class structure, there is a systematic, abstract, deductive logic to the specification of what it is that all members of a given class have in common: all workers in capitalism are exploited through capitalist mechanisms of exploitation; all capitalists are exploiters. Of course, there is great variation within classes in what I have called elsewhere *immediate* interests—interests determined by particular markets, particular working conditions, particular forms of competition, etc.—but members of a given class share common *fundamental* interests, interests over how the basic property relations of the society should be organized.³² What is needed, then, to construct a concept of class structure which is, in part, based on workplace relations and practices and not just exploitation, is a parallel abstract specification of “fundamental” and “immediate” commonalities of workplace experiences.

What is the abstract dimension of workplace experiences that is shared in common by workers in a nineteenth-century textile mill, a contemporary Japanese auto factory, and a Swedish high technology factory in which worker teams are given high levels of collective autonomy? In his comparative research on the organization of industrial work, Michael Burawoy has defined a number of different “factory regimes”: market despotism, patriarchal regimes, hegemonic regimes.³³

31. Brenner's arguments are also in keeping with Michael Burawoy's emphasis on what he calls the “relations in production” in constituting the working class; *The Politics of Production* (London: Verso, 1985). In his view a class cannot be defined simply in terms of a set of “empty places” within the relations of production (the relations which generate exploitation in my terms), but must include a specification of the relations in production, the relations within which the daily experiences of social interaction in production are created.

32. Stated in somewhat different terms, immediate interests are interests defined within a particular set of rules of the game; fundamental interests are interests over what game should be played (that is, what should be the mode of production). See Wright, *Class, Crisis and the State*, pp. 88–91.

33. M. Burawoy, *The Politics of Production*.

We can say that in each of these cases the workers are capitalistically exploited, but what *precisely* defines the fundamental commonality of their lived experiences within work? If we simply say that they are “dominated” within work and lack full control over what they produce and how they produce it, then this does not distinguish their lived experiences from those of workers in many noncapitalist systems of production (for instance, workers in the Soviet Union). If we try to define the forms of domination in a less vague way, then it is hard to encompass all of the cases that we would want to consider “capitalist”.

Because of these difficulties in defining adequately the distinctively capitalist form of workplace experiences, for the moment, I continue to have reservations about the ultimate fruitfulness of this conceptual strategy. While I think that the substantive problem of identity-formation is important and, furthermore, that the micro-experiences within the daily practices of work are likely to be an important determinant of class identities, nevertheless I am not persuaded that the best way of advancing class analysis is to subsume these processes under the concept of *class structure* itself. The alternative is to define classes in terms of a structural map of material interests (based on exploitation or some other account of material interests) and then to treat the problem of lived experiences as an independent source of variation within classes rather than as a criterion for class as such.

Now, if one were convinced of the traditional, teleological version of the Marxist theory of history, then there would be a good reason for insisting that the structural map of relations of exploitation and the map of workplace lived experiences should be combined into a single concept of class structure in spite of the difficulty of constructing a rigorous abstract concept of such experiences. Such a class concept would capture the immanent, dynamic tendencies of the system as a whole in a powerful and elegant manner. If, however, one is skeptical about the strong teleological versions of the Marxist theory of history and question the existence of any immanent tendency for these two dimensions of class to coincide, then merging them into a single concept is likely to hinder, rather than enrich, the development of class theory. Under these theoretical conditions it is better to have two distinct concepts—one of class structure centered on exploitation and interests, and one of class experience, centered on workplace practices and the formation of identities. Instead of seeing the linkage between these two concepts as having some immanent necessity, the problem of their interconnection could then be treated as a theoretical problem in its own right in which a considerable degree of variability and even indeterminacy is allowed.