

figment of our imagination but exists in an inseparable relationship to us. The world does not exist outside our relationship to it" (p. 59). Particularly in the context of social science, there is a deep ambiguity in the collective personal pronoun used in this statement. Is the claim that the social world does not exist outside of *my* individual relationship to it, or that it does not exist outside of the relation of *people* in general to it? The latter statement seems to me eminently reasonable: the theoretical objects of social science are constituted by the relations among people and their practices, and thus the social world does not exist independently of our collective relationship to the world.

The former statement—that the social world does not exist independently of my personal relation to it—does not make sense to me. I believe that apartheid exists, that workers are exploited and that the US government is supporting right-wing movements around the world independently of my individual relationship to any of these particular social phenomena. I could, of course, be wrong about any of these beliefs, but whether or not apartheid, capitalist exploitation or support of right-wing movements exists is independent of me.

Furthermore, with the exception of a radically idealist epistemology, in *all* of the alternative epistemological positions mentioned by Burawoy—consensus views of truth, pragmatic views of truth, realist views of truth—the belief that the social world exists independently of my individual relationship to it would be considered "true." Burawoy's preferred epistemology is what he terms the consensus view of truth "in which truth is what we agree to be true" (p. 70). It would certainly be the consensual view of human beings in general (and certainly of human beings in modern capitalist societies of whatever class) that the social world exists independently of each individual person, and thus the realist ontology would be consensually validated. It is one thing to say that each person does not exist independently of the social world (since we are all constituted as persons within social interaction) or that the social world does not exist independently of people in general, and quite another to say that the social world does not exist outside of my individual relationship to it.

A realist ontology does not logically entail a realist epistemology—the view that real mechanisms exist in the world independently of our theories and our individual relation to the world does not imply the view that we are capable of differentiating the relative truthfulness of claims about those real mechanisms. But a realist ontology does imply that our descriptions of the world, and the theories we construct using these descriptions, are constrained *both* by the effects of these real mechanisms and by the concepts which we use to analyze them. This double constraint at least opens up the possibility for scientific adjudications between rival concepts and explanations of the social world.

Classes and Class Analysis

Guglielmo Carchedi

By transporting the concept of capitalism from its production relations to property relations and by speaking of simple individuals instead of speaking of entrepreneurs, he moves the question of socialism from the domain of production into the domain of relations of fortune—that is, from the relation between capital and labor to the relation between poor and rich.¹

In recent years E.O. Wright has emerged as an influential sociologist of the left. In his most recent work, *Classes*, he undertakes a complete reformulation of his theory of social classes.² In this process of reconceptualization, Wright touches upon a number of issues which lie at the core of Marxist analysis. A review of *Classes* is thus an important occasion to clarify the issues and assess the consequences of choosing among the different, alternative, formulations of those issues. Thus, the importance and significance of the following discussion goes much further than the assessment of this work.

There are two dimensions to this work. A "biographical" one, which deals with the reasons for Wright's theoretical shift and with a comparison between his previous and his new conceptualization. In this review I shall not dwell on it. Rather, in what follows I shall focus on the second dimension, that is, on the characteristic features of Wright's new approach. Wright has a clear and immediate style of writing. He can present complex issues in an attractive way. He also undertakes a difficult task, that of providing empirical evidence for a Marxist theory of class. He should be given credit for this and the difficulty of the task should not be forgotten in assessing his results. But, unfortunately, and

1. R. Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution*, in M.-A. Waters (ed.), *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks* (New York: 1970).

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

contrary to Wright's own conviction, on the whole, his new conceptual apparatus does not constitute an advance compared with his previous one. I shall argue this by examining both his theory's internal difficulties and his claim to be faithful to Marx's political agenda and theoretical goals. Since a point by point substantiation of this claim would require a whole volume, I shall restrict myself to consider only some of the nodal points in Wright's theory.

Epistemology

Classes opens with a discussion of the "logic of concept formation." Concepts, says Wright, are produced by human beings, that is, by individuals. The production of concepts "takes place under a variety of constraints" (p. 20), that is, under both empirical and theoretical constraints. The latter are the theoretical suppositions which determine the range of possible concepts that can be produced. The former are the "real world" constraints and "operate through data gathered using the concepts of the theory" (ibid.). The key word here is "individuals." A critical remark should be made at once.

Wright's epistemology is individualistic, that is, it is based on individual producers of knowledge and thus on individual "actors." Within this theoretical constraint all one can do is to inquire into how classes affect individuals. However, the basic unit of analysis remains the individual, not classes. The difficulty with this kind of "micro-individual logic" is, as Wright is well aware, that it is unsuitable to explain "historical trajectories of struggle and chance" (p. 182). His answer is that people (individuals) are "systematically affected in various ways by virtue of being in one class rather than another" (ibid.) and that his theory explains the effects of classes on individuals better than rival interpretations do. Wright does not consider this result to be a definite proof of the superiority of his theory. However, he sees in this feature an element which lends more credibility to it than to other rival conceptualizations.

Whether Wright's theory is really a better explanation of the effects of class on individuals (as we shall see, he considers the effects on individuals' incomes and consciousness) depends on the validity of the method chosen. This is a question which will be considered later on. Let us assume, for the time being, that Wright's theory does fare better than alternative ones on the grounds Wright himself chooses. This does not show yet that his theory is a better explanation of "historical trajectories and change." But it is this latter which is the basic aim of the Marxist theory of classes, not Wright's problematic. From this perspective, the

theoretical link which alone can lend meaningfulness to Wright's careful statistical research is the one which shows that the ability to explain individual features in terms of class positions is also a proof of the ability to explain social phenomena (and thus that the theory which fares better as an explanation of individual determinations by classes is also the one which is more suitable to explain class phenomena). But this is the link which is missing, this is the theoretical nexus which Wright has yet to provide. Personally, I believe that this is an impossible task. Once one starts with a "micro-individual logic," the only way to come up to the social level is by aggregation of individual units. But aggregation of individual units cannot explain the social, that is, what constitutes the units as units of a whole. This is not the place to elaborate on this theme. Here suffice it to mention that the burden of providing the missing theoretical link falls on Wright.

One point should be stressed, in order to avoid misunderstandings. It has been mentioned above that the basic focus of Marx's theory of class is social phenomena and change. This does not imply that the concern for how classes affect individual phenomena is illegitimate. On the contrary, the importance of this area of study cannot be underestimated. But one thing is to inquire into how social phenomena (for example, classes) affect micro-individual ones. This can be done only *after* the alternative theories have shown their merits on the basis of their ability to explain social phenomena *and change* them. Another is to suggest that, somehow, the ability to explain how individual phenomena are affected by social phenomena is an indication of the ability to explain the nature and laws of development of the latter and to bring about social change. This is methodologically illegitimate because one logic of explanation is substituted by another. Moreover, as the last section of this review will argue, in Wright's case this substitution is accompanied by the adoption of a method which has a built-in ability to explain social change, a method which requires a static concept of both structure and consciousness and a deterministic notion of the relation between them.

Exploitation

Having presented his epistemological frame of reference, Wright goes on to introduce what could be regarded as the major element of novelty in his new formulation of classes: the concept of exploitation. This concept is adapted from John Roemer's notion of exploitation and is thus influenced by game theory. Therefore, in what follows I will have to briefly comment on this type of application of game theory to the theory of classes.

For Wright class locations structure the objective interests of the actors (p. 145). One can find two notions of objective interests in this book. The first is that people "have an interest in reducing the toil necessary to obtain whatever level of consumption they desire" (p. 36). The second is that people have an interest in increasing their capacity to act (p. 28). The relation between these two notions of "objective interests" is unclear, just as it is unclear why the term "objective" is used here. In any case, it is around the former notion that Wright conceptualizes exploitative relations. The link is "game theory." In terms of this approach the following question is posed: "if one of the classes would disappear, would there be more consumption and/or less toil for the other class?" If this question is answered positively, then there is exploitation. More concretely, and by way of example, "the lord is rich because lords are able, by virtue of their class relations to serfs, to appropriate a surplus produced by the serfs" (ibid.). In this view, then, the rich are rich because they appropriate the fruits of the poor's toil. There is a causal link "between the wellbeing of a class and the deprivation of another" (ibid.). But this link (1) is at the level of appropriation/distribution and (2) is an ahistorical concept. On the contrary, Marx's concept of exploitation is at the level of production and is an historically specific concept. Let us see why.

In order to conceptualize a general notion of exploitation, Wright shifts his analysis from the level of production to that of distribution. For him exploitation is "an economically oppressive *appropriation* of the *fruits of the labor* of one class by another" (p. 77; emphasis added). But in so doing Wright loses sight of the specificity of capitalism: the fact that exploitative relations are first of all production relations. "In other words," says L. Colletti, "capitalist appropriation is not exclusively or primarily an appropriation of *things*, but rather an appropriation of subjectivity, of working energy itself, of the physical and intellectual powers of man."³ Suppose that the capitalists would give back to the laborers the surplus they appropriated. This is an absurd example which I use only for didactical purposes, not to build a theory on it, as game theorists could do. In this case there would be no exploitation, in terms of distribution. Yet, at the level of production there would have been no change. The laborers might not be exploited any more in a distributional sense. But the nature of the exploitative relations at the level of production, the fact that the workers would still have no say as to what to produce, for whom to produce it, and how to produce it,

3. L. Colletti, *From Rousseau to Lenin* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), p. 102.

would not have changed. Both the distribution and the production aspects of exploitation are necessary. But Wright's "game theory approach" simply erases the latter, specific, one. As a result, there is implicit in this approach to exploitation the notion that if the rich would disappear there could be an equitable redistribution of wealth produced *in the same way*, that is, in a capitalist way, under a system of capitalist production relations. The congeniality between game theory and reformist policies becomes then clear.

Wright's notion of explanation is not only distributional, it is also ahistorical. If one's starting point is that in all class-divided societies there is *appropriation* of surplus by one class from another, then a general concept of exploitation is found principally at the distributional level of analysis. If, on the other hand, one's starting point is that in all class societies there are classes which *produce* for other classes, then a general concept of exploitation is found principally at the level of production. At this level of abstraction there are no compelling reasons to prefer either one of these concepts. If, however, one wants to analyze *specific* types of exploitation (for instance, feudal as against capitalist exploitation) then one has to proceed from the distributional level to the level of production. In fact, a notion of exploitation based on production can be made immediately historically specific by inquiring into the specific forms of production relations. The same can be done for a notion of exploitation based on distribution (that is, how is the surplus appropriated in specific societies?) only if one disposes to begin with of a theory of how that surplus has been produced. For example, the distribution of surplus under capitalism is distribution of surplus *value*, of the surplus produced under specific relations of production. An historically specific theory of distribution presupposes an historically specific theory of production. Or, if one remains at the level of distribution, one cannot descend to the analysis of concrete forms of exploitation. All one can say is that in all class-divided societies there is appropriation of surplus.

It is often said that a distributional theory of exploitation can provide a general framework. This, it is proposed, can then be filled with an historically specific content (specific forms of exploitation) when specific societies are considered, much the same as a bottle can be filled with different types of wine. Unfortunately, in social theory, different wines come in different bottles. From the above, it is now clear that an analysis in terms of production relations, conceptualized as historically specific relations, and one in terms of distribution relations, conceptualized as ahistorical relations, *are antithetical because they are the result of, and presuppose, two antithetical methods of abstraction*. These two analyses exclude, rather than integrate, each other. One method, which is

highlighted by Marx in the *Grundrisse*, is based on concentrating and focusing on the historical specificity of a socio-economic system. The other method, typical of bourgeois social sciences, is based on disregarding what is historically specific and focusing on formal, ahistorical similarities. In the case of exploitation, the focus of distribution presupposes *remaining* at the level of ahistorical similarities. It is because of this that Wright's and Roemer's concept of exploitation cannot be considered to be a general case under which the Marxian concept can be subsumed.

One of the novel features of Wright's new theory is that classes are rooted in three forms of exploitation: besides the traditional economic form (based on the ownership of capital assets), he considers also the exploitation rooted in the control of organization assets and in the position of skills or credential assets (p. 283). Wright himself has doubts about his new categorization. To these, I shall add two of my own.

First, ownership for Wright means "effective economic control" (p. 80). To own organization assets, then, means to be able to control them. But suppose somebody has an effective economic control of the organization of capital assets. How can then somebody else own those capital assets? This is possible only if by ownership of capital assets one means *legal* ownership. But this is inconsistent with Wright's claim that "the *basis* of the capital-labor relation should be identified with the relations of effective control (that is, real economic ownership) over productive assets as such" (p. 72). Or, to have the effective economic control of the organization of capital assets means in fact to be able to decide what to produce, for whom, and how; that is, it means to have the effective economic control of capital assets, to own them. The separation between ownership of capital assets and ownership of organization assets is meaningless since to control the organization of capital assets is to own them, in the effective, economic sense. To hold to this distinction would mean to reduce ownership to legal ownership, an absurd result in terms of Wright's problematic.

Second, it is equally impossible to uncouple skills from labor power as a separate "productive asset": the former are what makes the latter more or less skilled and thus more or less productive. Here, I shall not dwell further on this critique. I shall only consider one aspect of Wright's "skill exploitation" to indicate the width of the gulf separating Marx's and Wright's concept of exploitation.

Skills exploitation is based on credentials. "When credentials are operating, employers will bid up the wage of the owners of the credentials above the costs of producing the skills" (p. 76). This means that the owners of credentials (skills) exploit the nonowners. In terms of the Marxian labor theory of value, this only explains the payment of wages higher than the value of labor power due to a situation favorable to the

sellers of labor power: in short, the laborers with credentials reduce their exploitation. In Wright's theory this is a case in which the laborers with credentials exploit those without credentials, that is, both other laborers and the capitalists.

Four more considerations can be made on Wright's use of game theory. First, the game theory approach explains at most the actors' behavior. It is thus powerless to explain the laws of motion of society: yet this is the core of Marxist analysis. The game theory approach is thus perfectly consistent with Wright's individualistic epistemology but both are inconsistent with a Marxist approach to social phenomena. Second, for Wright "the labor-transfer approach to studying exploitation and class is a powerful and compelling one under certain simplifying assumptions . . . [but] it runs into difficulty . . . when some of these assumptions are relaxed" (p. 67). It is because of these "complications" that a second strategy is introduced, the "game theory approach." One of the two. Either one does not relax those simplifying assumptions, and then there is no need for the game theory approach. Or one does relax those assumptions and then one cannot use the labor transfer approach and must use only the game theory approach. However, Wright seems to opt for a compromise. He uses the game theory approach but specifies that, to have exploitation, there must also be "the appropriation of the fruits of the labor of one class by another" (p. 74), that is, the appropriation of surplus product (p. 100). But this does not work. In fact, in this case, neither the product nor the surplus product can be measured in terms of labor. How can we know then that "a person consumes more than they produce" (p. 75), that is, that there is exploitation? How do we know, for example, how much a factory worker produces in the absence of a unit of measure in terms of labor? It would seem that Wright has to rely only on the game theory approach. But this implies two further difficulties.

Third, in Wright's game theory approach, "the essential strategy adopted for the analysis of exploitation is to ask if particular coalitions of players would be better off if they withdrew from this game under certain specified procedures in order to play a different one [that is, if they would be better off in an "hypothetically feasible alternative"]. The alternative game differs in the way the assets are allocated (p. 68). But there are no methodological guidelines in setting up the "hypothetically feasible alternative." Therefore, there is arbitrariness in both setting up this alternative and in interpreting the results. Take the unemployed. They are economically oppressed, says Wright, since they "would surely be better off under the counterfactual conditions of the withdrawal rules," but they are not exploited because they do not produce anything and thus cannot be expropriated of the fruits of their labor (p. 75). Wright

does not say what this counterfactual condition is, nor can we find anywhere in his book the principles for envisaging such an alternative condition. Should we just let our imagination loose? Would they be better off if they withdrew from this society to form their own society? We do not know. Since they would have no capital assets, they might have to work more and consume less than in their previous situation (where they did not work but did consume something). This comparison implies of course that we are willing to disregard the objections raised in the second point. But let us assume that the unemployed would be better off. This means that they are economically oppressed. Now take the point of view of the employed. In the alternative situation (that is, without the unemployed) they too would be better off since they would not have to finance the unemployment benefits. Who is now oppressing whom? And, if we do not like the results of this "hypothetically feasible alternative" (whatever it might mean), what are the methodological reasons which allow us to discard it and to choose another one?

Fourth, as implied in what was just said, the game theory approach is built upon the analysis of phantastic models. These models are not a simplified depiction of reality, they are not models which encompass only the basic elements of reality. Rather, they are figments of the imagination, "fanciful examples" (p. 74), like the "credit-market island" and the "labour-market island" or the "hypothetically feasible alternative" to an existing situation. K. Kautsky remarked eighty years ago that bourgeois economics rests on the belief that "the best way to discover the laws of society is to disregard them completely."⁴ Does not this summarize the nature of the game theory approach as well?

Finally, a few words on the labor theory of value. There are incontrovertible signs that Wright abandons it. Let me mention briefly four examples. First, organization, skills and capital are productive assets on a par with labor power. For the Marxian labor theory of value, on the other hand, only labor power is the source of value: other factors can only increase its productivity. Thus, Wright chooses a variant of the "factors of production" approach. Second, exploitation is "rooted in the monopolization of crucial productive assets" (p. 106). It is, in other words, the appropriation of the surplus product (p. 100) as a result of a monopolistic situation (p. 101). This is a purely redistributive concept. Third, the "value" of a commodity is the price it would have in conditions of perfect competition (p. 101). Value here is a price category, a misnomer. Fourth, wage is both the cost of producing skills in terms of

4. K. Kautsky, *Etica e Concezione Materialistica della Storia* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1975), p. 112.

labor content (p. 70) and the price of the marginal product (p. 76) but not the tendential value of labor power. Wright quotes Roemer to the effect that "the labor theory of value should be dismissed entirely" (p. 99) without giving, however, his opinion on the matter. But what has just been said shows clearly that he too withdraws from it. The point of this critique is not that Wright casts off the labor theory of value. One is free to retain it or not. The point is that he replaces that theory with an eclectic mixture of elements of different theories while avoiding taking an explicit stand on it. This is unfortunate. The neo-Ricardian arguments, which seem to have made such an impact on Wright and which focus principally on the transformation problem, are unsound. As I show elsewhere (1984), Marx's labor theory of value is perfectly consistent.⁵

Classes

On the basis of what has been said above it is now easy to see that Wright's notion of exploitation does not disregard the ownership of the means of production. On the contrary, he raises ownership relations to the status of production relations. The game theory approach is not interested in what people produce, for whom, and how (the production relations). In this approach classes confront each other over the distribution of the product on the basis of property relations (that is, who owns the capital assets as well as the other assets, seen as property). In fact, "property relations of classes . . . define classes . . . by the productive assets which classes control" (p. 73). Ownership of the means of production is seen here as property, as distribution relations, not as production relations. And this cannot be otherwise since for Wright the class structure "constitutes the basic mechanism for distributing access to resources in a society, and thus distributing capacities to act" (p. 28).

But this is not all. Wright collapses classes (which should be defined in terms of production relations) into distributional groups (defined in terms of the distribution of assets) only for the bourgeoisie, the small employers, the petty bourgeoisie, and the proletarians. The first three categories own the means of production, the latter does not. However, Wright introduces eight more "classes," defined in terms of contradictory class locations. These locations have different degrees of ownership of organization and skill assets but do not own the means of

5. G. Carchedi, "The Logic of Prices as Values," *Economy and Society*, vol. 13, no. 4 (1984).

production. They are: expert managers, expert supervisors, expert nonmanagers, semicredentialed managers, semicredentialed supervisors, semicredentialed workers, uncredentialed managers, and uncredentialed supervisors (Table 3.3, p. 88). But, as it has been argued above, if the control of organization assets is simply the economic control (or real ownership) of capital assets and if skills are not separable from labor power as productive assets, the basis for deriving class relations from these categories collapses. We are then left with *occupational* groups, in no essential way different from the categories of stratification theory. Thus, in Wright's game theoretical approach classes are distributional and occupational groups with only a pale resemblance to Marx's original categories. If time and space allowed, it would be interesting to compare Wright's concept of classes with Weber's concept of "class situation."⁶

There are four problematic areas which Wright himself recognizes to be such and for which he admits not to "have entirely satisfactory solutions" (p. 92). The importance of these difficulties for his theory should not be underestimated and they, as Wright says, "may prove 'fatal' to the proposed concept of classes" (ibid.). One of these difficulties has already been alluded to: the identification of organization assets as a separate productive asset (force). Reasons of space prevent me from dealing with the other areas of difficulty. Suffice it to say here that Wright's answers are far from being convincing.

Class Structure and Class Consciousness

When it comes to testing his new theory, Wright inquires into the effects of class structure on individual incomes and consciousness. I shall disregard here the discussion of the effects of structure on income and will focus on consciousness. Basically, Wright constructs measurements of consciousness and relates them to his twelve classes by means of statistical tests. He uses "t-tests" to test the statistical significance of the difference in means between groups (p. 161). In slightly different words: he fills his class categories with occupational categories, constructs measures of class consciousness (on the basis of eight questions), asks a representative sample the relevant questions, and then applies statistical procedures to find out whether differences in consciousness can be explained by differences in class positions. It will come as no surprise that there is no difference here between this procedure and the one

6. M. Weber, *Economy and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 302.

followed by a stratification analysis of consciousness. It could be objected, of course, that the difference is in the concepts, in the categories to which the procedure is applied, and that the procedure in itself is neutral. My view, on the contrary, is that Wright's application of these statistical procedures to the study of the relation between structure and consciousness (1) requires a static definition of both concepts, and (2) replaces dialectical thinking with deterministic thinking.⁷ If these points can be substantiated, then Wright's basis for "empirically adjudicating contending class definitions" (already challenged above in the section on epistemology) is weakened on yet further grounds.

Consciousness

To begin with, Wright chooses attitudes as indicators of consciousness. He is aware of the weaknesses of this procedure but, nevertheless, chooses to disregard them (pp. 143ff and 188). I shall not repeat them here. Rather, I shall comment on the notion of consciousness employed by Wright. This is revealed by the respondents' answers to eight questions. On the basis of these answers, a measurement of consciousness is constructed, which goes from maximally procapitalist to maximally proworkers.

It will be immediately evident that this is an inherently static definition of consciousness, one which does not see consciousness in its concrete historical conjuncture. The question is not whether, according to a certain scale, a type of consciousness is always procapitalist or proworker, irrespective of the concrete situation. Rather, the question is whether that type of consciousness is a form of domination of one class over another under specific and concrete circumstances. For example, the first of Wright's eight questions is "corporations benefit owners at the expense of workers and consumers" (p. 146). A positive answer is supposed to reveal a proworker consciousness, a negative answer a procapitalist attitude. Is this right? Well, it all depends on the concrete situation. There are enough "anticapitalist" elements in European fascist ideologies to move a hypothetical fascist respondent to answer positively. This would hardly be a symptom of a proworker consciousness. Or, one can believe that "a main reason for poverty is that the economy is based on private profit" (Wright's fifth question; ibid.) without revealing a proworker attitude. This would be the case, for example, of a respondent's belief that there are no alternative feasible social systems and thus

7. On dialectical thinking and how it should be applied to social research, see G. Carchedi, *Class Analysis and Social Research* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

that poverty is inevitable. The real, ideological, content of such an answer is then procapitalist.

The issue here is not that one should be more careful in the formulation of questions nor that the number of questions seems to be extremely limited in relation to the task assigned to them. Even a different formulation or a greater number of questions would not answer the criticism that this method (1) assumes that there are questions whose answers always reveal a procapitalist (or proworker) attitude, abstracting from the ideological context of which they are part (a doubtful proposition), and (2) assumes that the simple addition of these answers gives us the contours of the individual respondent's consciousness.

This method, the addition of the parts in order to arrive to the whole, is diametrically opposed to that of Marx, which starts from the whole in order to explain the parts. In it the parts get their meaning from the whole and thus from their reciprocal interrelation. Consciousness should thus be seen as something in which it is the character of the whole which gives meaning to the parts, that is, as something in which the character of the whole is not given by the addition of the parts *and thus cannot be reconstructed by adding the parts* (the individual answers, in Wright's methodology). According to this alternative approach the same objectively determined consciousness (for example, ideology) is internalized by each individual in a different way.⁸ However, all these individuals can be said to share that consciousness inasmuch as they share its dominant features, its class content. Thus, the task becomes that of *searching the dominant forms of consciousness in a specific situation*, those forms which are shared, in a variety of individual ways, by a number of individuals sufficient to make of those consciousnesses social phenomena, social forces. Even assuming that there are questions the answers to which always reveal a procapitalist or a proworker attitude, what is important: to discover this immutable form of consciousness or to discover the dominant forms of consciousness under the concrete circumstances, the changeable forms of ideological domination shared in their class content by a great number of individual forms of consciousness? It is clear that this latter view of consciousness is unsuitable for tests of statistical significance. Or, alternatively, if one chooses to measure consciousness as conventional sociology does, one has to adopt a static and 'micro-logical' notion of it.

8. See *ibid.*, ch. 3.

Structures

But Wright conceptualizes structures too in a static manner, that is, in a structuralist fashion. Structuralism sees structures as crystallized realizations. A structure becomes a complex of positions (pigeonholes) to be filled by people. Structuralism does not see that the relation between structures and people is not one between pigeonholes and pigeons but one in which people are the personifications of the structure, of its inner contradictions, and thus can also be the agents of change. This is why *positions should be seen as processes* and thus as elements of a whole, as the expressions of definite relations but also, at the same time, of the dynamics inherent in those relations. For example, it is not structuralist to define the new middle class in terms of production relations and to stress that people filling those positions belong to the new middle class, provided that those positions are seen as the result of a specific dynamic and thus historical process. One could thus define the new middle class in terms of a contradictory combination of those elements of the production relations which define the two fundamental classes but, in the same breath, would have also to stress that the emergence of these positions is the result of the needs of capital accumulation. At the same time, the same needs subject those positions to a process of dequalification as soon as they realize themselves and this process is, in its turn, counteracted by the introduction of new techniques which create new, qualified, jobs in a constant process of tendential and countertendential phenomena.

More generally, a Marxist dialectical approach defines positions in terms of relations of production but also inquires into whether those positions are in the process of being qualified or dequalified, whether they belong to a production process subject to technological innovations or not, whether they are part of a process organized on the basis of, say, scientific management or of the human relations approach, whether they are part of a branch of industry being threatened by restructuring or one in the process of economic expansion, whether that category of agents has qualifications which match those required by the positions they fill, whether those qualifications are in the process of being brought down or up to the level required by those positions, etc. The study of structures does not lead necessarily to structuralism and is, needless to say, essential for class analysis. But the study of structures without dialectics cannot but fall into a structuralist, that is, static, analysis.

In short, the difference between a structuralist (Marxist oriented or not) and a Marxist dialectical approach is that the latter sees both consciousness and structures as processes, in their movement. From the point of view of dialectics, consciousness, seen as the dominant forms of

class domination under specific circumstances, must be related to positions seen as the dynamic expression of production relations. Thus, both structures and ideologies must be seen *in their historical and conjunctural specificity*. They must be seen as representing (in a contradictory way) the interests of the different classes in the sense that *the ideological form of these interests is not fixed and predetermined* but changeable as the conjuncture, and thus the interrelation with all other social phenomena, changes.

If structures, positions, are seen not as a process but statistically, and if positions determine consciousness, then changes in class consciousness can only be determined by extrastructural, or nonclass factors. Alternatively, if changes in positions do occur, then Wright's approach must move directly from these changes to changes in consciousness without being able to examine *within the framework of class analysis* the role political parties, trade unions, schools, social movements, etc., have in the formation of *class* consciousness. As Leo Panitch convincingly argues, it is this kind of crude determinism which is at the basis of much contemporary, as well as past, reformism.⁹

The Relation Between Structures and Consciousness

As I have just hinted at, Wright conceptualizes the relation between structure and consciousness in a deterministic way. Let me elaborate on this. Within Wright's theoretical frame of inquiry, only structures determine consciousness. Of course, other factors, the so-called 'nonclass mechanisms' affect the concrete form taken by consciousness (p. 29), but they fall outside the explanatory power of the model; they only account for the deviations of these concrete forms from what should be the consciousness of the respondents as indicated by their positions and in a form independent of the historically specific conjuncture. Thus, somehow, positions account for the "pure" form of consciousness while the actual, concrete, form taken by consciousness is the result of both class determination (which accounts for this pure form) and of the nonclass mechanisms (which account for the deviations). In short, class determination is insufficient to explain concrete realizations. But a theory which relies on nonclass mechanisms for the explanation of the concrete form taken by phenomena—in this case, consciousness—cannot but fall into a view in which consciousness is somehow predetermined by the structure and in which the real, concrete form taken by social

9. L. Panitch, "The Impasse of Working-Class Politics," in *The Socialist Register* (London: Merlin Press, 1984-5).

phenomena falls outside class analysis's explanatory power. This tremendous, but unnecessary, constraint imposed on class analysis is nothing else but the result of having collapsed class determination into class determinism.

Wright attempts to escape this criticism by pointing out that class positions do not "strictly determine class outcomes, but only the probabilistic tendencies for such outcomes" (p. 186). This seems to cleanse this approach from its deterministic features, it seems to introduce the concept of tendency, a dialectical concept. But whether class positions explain the class consciousness of the respondents or the probability that the respondents have a certain consciousness, the fact remains that in Wright's scheme class position is the only determinant of these dependent variables, the only independent variable. As Wright puts it, "where deviations occur it is due to factors which are *contingent* relative to the effects of the positions themselves" (*ibid.*, emphasis added). (Concrete examples of institutions through which these deviations take place are political parties, trade unions, schools, etc. (p. 251).) The addition of the probabilistic element does not change the deterministic character of the model in which there are dependent and independent variables into a dynamic one, in which there are determinant and determined social phenomena.

This is obviously not the place to discuss the dialectical method of analysis.¹⁰ However, a few remarks are necessary to clarify the meaning of my critique. The dialectical method does not consider phenomena as dependent and independent variables. Rather, there are determinant and determined social phenomena. They all interact with, and modify, each other so that a certain instance's realization is the result of the interaction of all instances, determinant as well as determined. However, the determinant instance is "more important" than (that is, determinant of) the other instances. There are various interpretations of what "more important" means. One of them, the one to which I subscribe, is that a certain instance is determinant when it can be said to call into existence the other (determined) instances as conditions of its own supersession or reproduction. Structural determination, then, does not mean that the structure determines a certain form of consciousness and that this form is modified by other nonclass factors, so that the structure is accountable for a part (percentage) of a certain class consciousness. *Structural determination means that the structure determines the class content of a certain consciousness* (almost inevitably a contradictory content) and that the realization of, the concrete form taken by, that consciousness is

10. See Carchedi, *Class Analysis and Social Research*.

the outcome of the complex interrelation of all instances (determinant as well as determined) in their concrete, realized form.

For Wright structural determination does not mean that the determinant instance gives its class content to the determined ones; rather, for him structural determination becomes a separable step in the concrete realization, in the specific form taken by, the determined instances. But the "homogeneity of the effects generated by the structure" (p. 137), that is, class consciousness, is not something which can be observed empirically aside from the modifications produced on class consciousness by other "effects" generated also by the same structure. This is so because both the structure and the "effects" realize themselves in their specific form in a process of mutual interrelation. Wright does not seem to realize that the attempt to find out by statistical means the "pure" structural determination of consciousness is precisely the point where a dialectical view is replaced by a deterministic one, the point where the "reflection" (even if only a partial and distorted one) of the structure into consciousness is sought.

This can be easily seen if one considers that the greater the explanatory power of the model (that is, the match between positions and consciousness) is, the less relevant schools, parties, unions, etc., become for the formation (and thus for the explanation) of class consciousness. At the limit, a theory finding a perfect match between positions and consciousness would be the best theory in terms of Wright's problematic. This theory, however, would leave no room for the influence all other phenomena (both social and individual) have on class consciousness. Thus, the better a theory is, the less realistic it becomes; or, the best theory is also the least realistic. In short, the best theory leaves no room for human agencies in the production of class consciousness and thus in effecting social change. Again, this is a consequence of the structuralism implied in Wright's approach.

If this critique is accepted, then to inquire into concrete, realized cases of structural determination, into the "homogeneity of the effects generated by the structure," takes on a different meaning. The empirical observation that, say, 65 per cent of the incumbents of a certain type of positions have a certain ideology (consistent, somehow, with their structurally determined interests) does not mean that the other 35 per cent have another ideology due to extrastructural (or nonclass) factors. On the contrary, if the structure (due to its inner contradictory nature) generates its own (contradictory) conditions of reproduction or of supersession, then the 35 percent holding an "inconsistent" ideology do that for reasons no less structural than the ones explaining why the other 65 percent holds a "consistent" ideology, that is, they do that because of the influence on class consciousness of social phenomena other than the

class positions of the individuals. The so-called nonclass mechanisms (that is, social phenomena nonspecific to classes as for example the oppression experienced by women and minority groups), become then so many conditions of reproduction or of supersession of the structure since they too are elements shaping the formation of class consciousness.

Thus, to inquire into the empirical relation between positions and consciousness is methodologically valid only if (1) both positions and consciousness are seen as processes, and (2) the relation between them is interpreted not in the sense that the discrepancy is due to nonclass factors (so that the less the discrepancy the higher the explanatory power of the theory) but in the sense that it too is an element of class determination, a result of class struggle. From Wright's "micro-logical" perspective, in which statistics are used to test whether differences in consciousness are due to differences in class positions, it is logical that what is not explained by class positions must be the result of nonclass factors. From the point of view of classes, in which dialectics is used to inquire into the relation between structures, that is, classes, and their realized conditions of existence or supersession, what is not a condition of supersession of the system (for example, a proworker ideology) is a condition of its reproduction (for example, a procapitalist ideology). Statistical tests of significance here are inapplicable. They are thus not neutral, they have a class content, because their application requires a redefinition of the dynamic concepts of ideology and structure into static ones as well as radical (micro-individual) reconceptualization of the relation between them.

This last remark raises an important question in class analysis: the conditions of applicability of certain techniques of social research. Let me consider another technique of social research on which Wright relies heavily in order to inquire into the respondents' class consciousness: the method of the interview. That this method can be applied within any type of logic of social research is a self-evident truth for the great majority of social researchers, no matter what their strategy of social research is. Yet there are reasons indicating that we should apply this method cautiously. When a worker is confronted by an interviewer, s/he is alone. Chances are that s/he would answer the same questions differently in a different situation, for example, in a workers' assembly. This is so not only because of psychological reasons (that is, because s/he is not alone with, and intimidated by, the interviewer but is part of a group, of a community) but also because of deeper epistemological reasons. In fact, in this collective situation, the individual worker becomes part of a process of collective production of knowledge in which his or her individual knowledge both is enriched by the collective one (through discussion with the other members of the community) and contributes to

(and thus enriches) that collective knowledge.

But, it could be argued, this is the use of the questionnaire made by conventional sociology, and by Wright. The same method could be applied in a different situation, for example, during a workers' assembly. This is true. Yet, this application would not cancel the capitalist nature of this technique. The nature is given by the fact that this technique is an "acquisitive" tool of research, an appropriation by the researcher of the knowledge of the respondents, instead of being a process which also provides information, a process which shapes consciousness. It is this capitalist nature which makes this technique contradictory to socialist social research. This, however, does not mean that the method of the interview should never be used. This, as other methods of conventional sociology, can be used within a Marxist dialectical framework on condition that they can be immersed in this framework, if they are not incompatible with this framework, and on condition that their use is limited and subordinate to this framework. Let me elaborate on this latter point by providing a short example of the conditions under which the method of the questionnaire can be used to inquire into the determination of consciousness by structure.

First, we need a theory of classes which has been tested, verified, in terms of both its internal consistency and, especially, in terms of practice, in terms of its ability to explain *and change* social phenomena. This (and not statistical tests of significance) is the ground on which alternative theories should be compared and chosen, assuming, of course, that our main interest is, as Wright puts it, Marx's theoretical agenda and political goals.

Second, on the basis of this theory, we should identify positions within the social structure and analyze them as *processes*, as the contradictory result of a process of development. I have given an indication above of what elements to look for when conceptualizing positions.

Third, we consider ideologies. Three points must be made in this regard. To begin with, we consider ideologies not only in terms of what people say but also in terms of what people do (for example, voting patterns). Also, we do not look at ideologies as construed by the sociologist, not at the ideal type of what the respondents' ideology should be under any circumstances. Rather, we must look for actually existing, realized social phenomena (for example, a certain racist ideology). Then, the individual discrepancies, internalizations of that ideology become unimportant since they all share the dominant features, and thus the class content, of that ideology. Finally, these ideologies must be considered dynamically, as processes, as the contradictory result of a process of development.

Fourth, the relationship between structure and ideology should be

looked at dialectically. That is, the concrete form taken by ideologies as social phenomena (disregarding the variety of individual internalizations) should be seen as conditions of either reproduction or of supersession of the concrete form taken by the structure, by positions.

Fifth, it is within this framework and only at this point that questionnaires can be used to inquire, for example, into how many of a certain position's incumbents share an ideology functional for the reproduction of the system (and thus, for example, contrary to their own interests) and how many share another ideology (functional for the supersession of the system and consonant with their interests).

This last point requires some further comments. The questionnaire can be used to study individual class consciousness but this must be done along lines different from those followed by Wright. Having identified, as mentioned above, those ideologies which have become social phenomena, we look at those which have penetrated the individual's consciousness. We only look at the dominant features, that is, we disregard the individual, particular ways they have been internalized. Then, from this point of view, an individual consciousness appears as the particular and contradictory internalization, at the individual level, of socially realized ideologies, all of them being conditions of reproduction or of supersession at the ideological level of the capitalist production relations. Therefore, the individual consciousness can be considered as an individual, that is, *potential* condition of reproduction or of supersession of the capitalist production relations, something which, because of this potentiality, can become an actual, socially realized, condition of reproduction or of supersession.

Since many social phenomena go into an individual's consciousness, an individual's *class* consciousness is formed by the internalization of all those phenomena, of all those conditions of reproduction or of supersession. Therefore, class consciousness is given not only by the individuals' ideas concerning, and attitudes towards, capital but also by the ideas concerning, and attitudes towards, unions, women, migrants, blacks, homosexuals, peace, etc. Or class consciousness is the consciousness of the need to abolish capitalism by substituting not only the capitalist *production* relations with different, socialist production relations, but also all other capitalist *social* relations (relations of subordination of women, colored people, etc.) with socialist social relations. If we do not follow this approach, we separate artificially the different fields of struggle for socialism, we foster (once more) a notion of class struggle as the struggle to replace a system of production relations by another system of production relations. This is a limited and ultimately self-defeating concept of class struggle.

Since all social phenomena influencing the individual's class

consciousness change continuously, it is important to consider the individual forms of consciousness not as immutable, *a priori* forms which are modified by nonclass factors. Rather, they must be seen as the changeable forms social phenomena take at the individual level, as the contradictory potential conditions of reproduction or of supersession, the concrete form of which must always be inquired into. It is this form of consciousness which should be studied by using the questionnaire, it is this form of consciousness which should be related to positions, seen as moments in a process of historical development.

Thus, the questionnaire can be used in dialectical class analysis in spite of its class content (it is acquisitive) because it can be immersed into, and thus subordinated to, a radically different analytical approach. This is possible because the adoption of this technique does not force us to reconceptualize our notions of structure and consciousness. On the other hand, statistical tests of significance cannot be used within a dialectical approach to the study of the determination of consciousness by structure because these tests force us to reconceptualize these notions in a static and individualistic way. These tests are thus incompatible with a dialectical class analysis of the determination of class consciousness by structures. Therefore, whether a technique can be applied to dialectical class analysis (in spite of its class content) or not is a question which can be answered only by considering the specific features of each technique, only case by case: if the application of that technique does not require the static and individualistic reconceptualization of dynamic class phenomena, it can be immersed in the dialectical frame of analysis in spite of its class content, in spite of its being contradictory to it. If such a reconceptualization is required, then there is incompatibility between that technique and dialectical analysis.

To conclude, that Wright's theory fares better than rival ones only means that it explains better individual consciousness, a feature which, as Wright admits, is not a proof of being a better theory of social change. Wright advances a more limited claim: if his theory's explanatory power is no proof, it is perhaps an indication of its usefulness for a socialist strategy. But even this limited claim must be properly assessed. How useful can this theory be if it uses static concepts instead of dynamic ones, if it is based on a deterministic (instead of a dialectical) relation between them, if this relation is inquired into by exclusively using techniques of social research unfit to both research and form collective consciousness, and if it is to these techniques that this theory owes its credibility? In what measure can such a theory both analyze and influence social change, that is, the *movement* of history? If these questions are answered negatively, is this not the result of Wright having shifted to a terrain in which concern for social change is not built in any more into

the logic of social research, a terrain alien to socialism no matter how one wants to define it? If this is the case, then Wright's rival theories, as he construes them, are not a relevant term of comparison.

Conclusions

This review has touched upon only some of the most important aspects of Wright's most recent work. My thesis is that Wright's approach is undermined by extremely serious internal difficulties. Only some of them have been mentioned in this review: the separation of the control of the organization of capital assets from the real, economic ownership of those assets as separate productive assets; the separation of skills from labor power also as separate productive assets; consequently, the collapsing of the concept of social class based on those separations; the methodological problems inherent in the game theory approach; consequently, the collapsing of the notion of exploitation based on this approach; the use of attitudes as indicators of consciousness; the extremely limited number of questions used to measure consciousness. These are all elements of a critique based on the internal consistency of Wright's new approach. But my critique has also a different dimension. My thesis is also that Wright has chosen a frame of reference in which the Marxist unit of analysis (classes) has been replaced by individuals; the Marxist labor theory of value has been replaced by an eclectic mixture of neo-Ricardian and neoclassical economics; the Marxist method of historically determined abstractions by the fantasies of game theory; the Marxist concept of classes rooted in production relations by a concept rooted in distributional and occupational categories; Marxist dialectics by determinism; and the Marxist concern for social change by the concern for the explanation of individual consciousness.

In opening his book, Wright remarks that his answer to the question "what constitutes a class?" is not the one Marx would have given if he had completed the last, unfinished chapter of the third volume of *Capital*. I agree. However, he also remarks that *Classes* proposes an answer faithful to Marx's theoretical agenda and political goals. With this, I could not disagree more. If the above conclusions are valid, then it is the meaning itself of Wright's enterprise which is called into question.