
Introduction

Class analysis is at the heart of Marxism as a tradition of social theory. In one way or another, class figures in nearly all explanations Marxists produce, whether of conjunctural problems or broad historical tendencies. And at the core of class analysis is a specific way of thinking about the problem of economic inequalities: inequalities among people are seen not mainly as the consequence of their individual attributes (intelligence, education, motivation, etc.), but of the way the system of production is organized around mechanisms of exploitation.

The chapters in Part I explore a variety of different problems in class analysis. Chapter 1, "Inequality," attempts to define a variety of different types of inequality that social scientists study, and then to give precision to class analysis as a way of understanding inequalities in material welfare. The central argument of the chapter involves clarifying the contrast between explanations of inequality that focus on variations in individual achievement and the obstacles to "equal opportunity," and explanations that focus on class exploitation.

The second chapter, "The Class Analysis of Poverty," carries the argument further by focusing more intensively on the specific problem of poverty. The first part of the chapter gives greater precision to a class analysis of poverty by formally distinguishing it from three other types of explanations prevalent both in the popular imagination and in scholarly works. The second part then elaborates the substance of a class analysis of poverty by developing the contrast between *non-exploitative economic oppression* and *exploitation* as ways of distinguishing different forms of poverty.

Chapter 3, "The Status of the Political in the Concept of Class Structure," and chapter 4 (written with Michael Burawoy), "Coercion and Consent in Contested Exchange," both concern the problem of domination in the analysis of class relations. The first of these chapters engages John Roemer's influential work on class and exploitation.

Roemer argues forcefully that while domination may be important in protecting property rights, it is not important in understanding exploitation and class since exploitation can occur without the exploiters directly dominating the exploited. I argue that domination remains an essential part of the very definition of class relations. The second of these chapters discusses the very interesting work of Sam Bowles and Herbert Gintis on surveillance and coercion within the labor process. They are interested in showing that under conditions in which it is impossible to specify fully the criteria for the fulfillment of a contract and contracts cannot be costlessly monitored, exchange relations will have an essentially contested character. This has important implications for the nature of domination within what they call the "labor extraction function" – basically, exploitation – in the production process. In our critique, Michael Burawoy and I argue that various mechanisms which generate consent to exploitation are as important as domination in understanding how labor effort is extracted within production. We try to show how sociological attention should focus on the forms of variability of coercion and consent within contested exchange rather than exclusively emphasizing one or the other.

Chapter 5, "Class and Politics," shifts the focus from a discussion of the internal logic of class analysis and its differences from other forms of social theory, to the problem of using class analysis to understand politics. Building on the conceptual distinctions Robert Alford and Roger Friedland make between situational power, institutional power, and systemic power, the chapter explores three clusters of mechanisms through which class shapes politics: the class-based access to resources which can be strategically deployed for political purposes; the institutionalization of certain class-biases into the design of state apparatuses; and the way in which the operation of the economic system as a whole universalizes certain class interests.