
Preface

When I discussed the proposed title of this book, *Interrogating Inequality*, with various friends and family, some people proclaimed that the title was ridiculous, that it didn't mean anything. *Interrogating Inequality*, they argued, makes no more sense than *Shaking Hands with Contradiction*, or *Speaking to Triangles*. Various alternatives were suggested: *Investigating Inequality*; *Studying Inequality*; *Examining Inequality*. None of these was quite right. They each suggested that inequality as such was the main topic of the book – that the book was either an empirical study of inequality, or that it explored various theoretical and philosophical problems with various kinds of inequality. This is not really what the book is about.

Interrogating Inequality is meant to evoke a different image. Inequality is a witness in a criminal investigation, perhaps even the prime suspect. It is being questioned to get at some underlying truth about the crime, an injustice that has been committed. Our concern is not simply with the witness itself, but with what we can learn about broader issues by probing the witness. The book, then, is as much about the kinds of questions we need to ask in this interrogation, and the concepts we need to use in asking them, as it is about inequality itself. It is about class analysis as a way of asking questions about inequality, about socialism as a way of challenging inequality, and about Marxism as a broad framework for linking the moral concerns with inequality to the theoretical tasks of explanation and the political tasks of transformation. Perhaps it would have been better to have used as a title the more straightforward message of the subtitle of the book, *Essays on Class Analysis, Socialism and Marxism*, but that seemed too boring. So, at the risk of sounding a bit post-modernist, I settled on *Interrogating Inequality*.

The twelve essays gathered together in this volume were written between 1979 and 1993. Four of them were commissioned for specific purposes. "Inequality" (chapter 1) was prepared for *The New Palgrave*,

edited by John Eatwell (London 1987) and was written with an eye to explaining to economists what was distinctive about a Marxist approach to inequality. "Class and Politics" (chapter 5) was written for the *Oxford Companion on Politics* (Oxford 1993) and was designed to serve a similar function for political scientists. "Marxism as Social Science" (chapter 9) was written as an invited response to a series of critiques of a previously published exchange between me and Michael Burawoy which appeared in the *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*. The set of critiques and my reply were then published as a symposium in the *BJS* in 1989. "Falling into Marxism; Choosing to Stay" (Prologue) was written for a conference celebrating the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Sociology Department at the University of Kansas. A number of sociologists with some kind of connection to K.U. were invited to give sociological talks on their own careers. My connection was that I grew up in Lawrence, Kansas, and both of my parents were professors at K.U. (although in psychology, not sociology). My essay is an attempt at understanding the trajectory of choices I have made that have generated the kind of academic Marxist scholarship I try to produce. This essay subsequently appeared in 1991 in a journal published by the K.U. Sociology Department, *The Midwest Review of Sociology*.

Several of the essays were written as direct engagements with the work of fellow members of the annual London Analytical Marxism meeting (this group is described in the Prologue). "The Status of the Political in the Concept of Class Structure" (chapter 3) was my first encounter with the work of John Roemer. It was eventually published in a special issue of the journal *Politics and Society*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1982, devoted to Roemer's work on class and exploitation. "Why Something Like Socialism is Necessary for the Transition to Something like Communism" (chapter 7) grew out of discussions about a paper, "A Capitalist Road to Communism," presented by Robert Van der Veen and Philippe Van Parijs for the 1986 Analytical Marxism meeting. It was later published in an issue of the journal *Theory & Society*, vol. 15, 1987, along with the Van der Veen and Van Parijs paper and a series of other commentaries. Finally, "Coercion and Consent in Contested Exchange" (chapter 4, written with Michael Burawoy) is a response to a paper, "Contested Exchange," by Sam Bowles and Herb Gintis, discussed at the 1989 meeting. Both papers were published in the June 1990 issue of *Politics & Society*.

All of the rest of the chapters in the volume were originally conceived as talks, given at various universities and conferences. "Capitalism's Futures" (chapter 6) was first presented at a conference on "The Theory of the State in Contemporary Capitalism," at Puebla University, Puebla, Mexico, in October 1979, and at a conference on "New Developments in the Theory of the State," University of Toronto, December 1979. After

many revisions (mainly because of theoretical and, perhaps, political disagreements with the editors of the journal), it was published in *Socialist Review*, no. 69, in 1983. "What is Analytical Marxism?" was prepared as the Keynote Talk at the Brazilian Sociological Association Meetings in Rio di Janeiro in June 1989. It was also published in *Socialist Review*, no. 4, 1989. Sections of this essay were later embodied in parts of the first chapter of my book with Andrew Levine and Elliott Sober, *Reconstructing Marxism* (London 1992).

"Explanation and Emancipation in Marxism and Feminism" (chapter 10) was first presented at the American Sociological Association annual meeting in August 1990, and later at the University of Capetown, South Africa, in June 1992. Of all of the papers reprinted in this book, I had the greatest difficulty in originally getting this one published. I first submitted it to the *New Left Review* in 1990. It was sent back to me with many comments and a request for revisions. After making substantial changes which I thought dealt with all of the important objections, I resubmitted the paper. This time it was rejected outright. The members of the editorial board apparently felt that in the paper I unfairly characterized Marxism as having a largely deterministic view of the self-destructive trajectory of capitalism, and that I denigrated feminism by seeing its emancipatory goals as less problematic than those of Marxism. I then submitted the paper to the *Socialist Review* and in relatively short order it was rejected. While the paper was seen as "provocative," many of the members of the editorial board had strong objections to its arguments. My next try was the *American Sociological Review*. I had never tried to publish a theoretical essay there and I thought that perhaps, since left-wing journals seemed not to like this piece, the bastion of establishment sociology would go for it. The rejection was prompt in coming. The paper, I was told, was insufficiently scholarly, lacking adequate references for its various claims about the nature of Marxism and feminism as theoretical traditions. The paper was eventually published in the journal *Sociological Theory* in March 1993.

"Marxism After Communism" (chapter 11) was first presented under this title at the American Sociological Association Meeting, August 1992, but various bits and pieces of it had been presented earlier as talks at various universities in South Africa and the United States. Some of the ideas appeared in an earlier form in the last chapter of *Reconstructing Marxism*. This version of the paper was published in the *New Left Review*, no. 202, November–December 1993.

Finally, "The Class Analysis of Poverty" (chapter 2) was prepared for a conference in October 1993 on "Measuring Social Inequalities in Health" at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development in Bethesda, Maryland. I was invited in order to bring a "class

perspective” to bear on the problem of inequalities of health and decided that the best I could do was to lay out the basic principles of a class analysis of poverty. This paper has not been previously published.

Over the nearly fifteen years that spanned the early drafts of the first of these essays and the final draft of the last of them, profound changes have occurred in both the immediate intellectual context and the broader social and political context within which Marxist scholarship has taken place. In the late 1970s, Marxism was still at the core of intellectual work on the left. Classical Marxist themes and concepts were still being hotly debated – the labor theory of value, historical materialism, the nature of the capitalist state – and many of the classical formulations were still given considerable credibility even by their critics. By the time the final essay, “The Class Analysis of Poverty,” was written in the fall of 1993, Marxism no longer held center stage among critical scholars in the academy, and many of the core concepts of the Marxist tradition had either been abandoned or significantly transformed by many people who still considered themselves working within that tradition.

These changes in context are reflected in theoretical and rhetorical shifts across the essays. In some of the earlier essays, for example, discussions of the labor theory of value still appear. In the later essays, the labor theory of value does not figure at all, except occasionally in passing. The two chapters on socialism (chapters 6 and 7), one initially written in 1979 and the other in 1986, more or less take for granted the epochal alternatives of capitalism and socialism, whereas the two essays written in the early 1990s, which discuss the emancipatory project of Marxism (chapters 10 and 11), both treat socialism and communism as problematic concepts in need of serious defense.

It is tempting, given these historical changes in the parameters of intellectual debate, to edit the earlier essays to make them more in keeping with the preoccupations and sophistication of the current period. (In fact, in the initial plans for this book, three essays written in the early 1970s were considered for inclusion – “Recent Developments in Marxist Theories of the State,” “Modes of Class Struggle and the Capitalist State,” and “The Parsonsian and Structuralist-Marxist Theories of the State” – but I subsequently decided not to include them because they seemed so dated.) I have resisted this temptation and have not expunged the naïvety of any of the essays. The only editing that has been done is the removal of some sections from certain chapters which closely overlap discussions in other chapters and adding occasional short clarifications.

Many people have provided extensive comments, both written and verbal, on many of these chapters. I would particularly like to acknowledge the insightful and often sharp criticisms of Michael Burawoy, who

constantly urges me not to give up too much ground in order to be respectable. Many of the papers were dissected at the annual meetings of the Analytical Marxism group attended by Sam Bowles, Robert Brenner, G.A. Cohen, Jon Elster, Adam Przeworski, John Roemer, Hillel Steiner, Robert van der Veen, and Philippe van Parijs. Periodic discussions during dog walks with Andrew Levine and Sunday breakfasts with Joel Rogers are also reflected in many of the pieces. Over the years the graduate students in the class analysis and historical change program within the Wisconsin Sociology Department have been the initial audience and critics for many of the ideas that eventually appeared in these essays.