CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS
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1974

It has become commonplace to begin a discussion of contemporary social class by admitting that Marx assumed the European proletarian revolution would erupt in his own century, and then acknowledging that almost one hundred years have passed without a successful proletarian revolution in any advanced capitalist nation. As a consequence, the responsibility has been placed on twentieth century Marxists to explain the absence of this necessary historical phenomenon within the Marxian framework, and to rebut bourgeois theorists who have been proclaiming the end of ideological Marxism. Placed in a defensive position by the unfolding of historical events, most Marxists have reacted by attacking bourgeois theories rather than carrying out a comprehensive analysis themselves. A work such as Charles Anderson’s The Political Economy of Social Class,1 one of the early attempts to extend Marx’s analysis to the post-1970 American class structure, appeared only after the turbulent and in some respects revolutionary sixties brought Marxist thought back to the forefront of social criticism.

This chapter presents a review of some of the relevant literature, and an outline of some of the major hypotheses that have been advanced to explain the seemingly low degree of revolutionary consciousness of the North American proletariat. Part I will highlight some important theoretical issues within the broad realm of class consciousness. The discussion in part II will center around current notions of economism, consensus capitalism, the theory of the ‘new working class, and the embourgeoisement thesis. Finally the last section will be concerned with the development of mass revolutionary consciousness. I will try to present an overview of many issues rather than an in-depth analysis of one.

In the Marxist class model, whether in its theoretically dichotomous form or its analytically multi-class form, class position is chiefly determined by relationship to the means of production. This is the essence of a class-in-itself. Other conditions must be present for a class-in-itself to develop into a class-for-itself, which is a more substantive and socially crystallized group.2 According to Ossowski, “an aggregate of people which satisfies the economic criteria of a social class becomes a class in the full meaning of the term only when its members are linked by the tie of class consciousness, by the consciousness of common interests, and by the psychological bond that arises out of common class antagonisms”.3 Social class itself is a matter of degree, and is partially determined by the degree of class consciousness. In this chapter I confine my attention almost exclusively to proletarian consciousness, and I am assuming that this consciousness, in its highest degree, is revolutionary consciousness. Various intermediate stages correspond to lower degrees of class consciousness.
CONTINGENT AND NECESSARY CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

In Marx’s writings there appears a significant element of what we may call economic determinism, which has caused some theorists, for example C. Wright Mills, to abandon Marxist theory while embracing Marxist methodology. It may to a certain extent be justifiable to claim that a materialist exaggeration was necessary in the nineteenth century to counterbalance the idealism of Marx’s predecessors and contemporaries. Marx was not a vulgar materialist, and his criticisms were directed in this direction as well as its opposite. It is, therefore, only apparently paradoxical that, while technological determinism seems to be an important explanatory element for many contemporary bourgeois social scientists, neo-Marxists frequently advocate the independent importance of the superstructure.

This does not turn Marx completely on his head. The relationship between the base and superstructure should not be conceived in a purely deterministic manner, but rather dialectically with complex interrelationships. According to Marx, the superstructure is dependent on the base only “in its macroscopic and catastrophic aspects, so to speak, that is, in relation to social revolutions”, or what may be termed qualitative changes. Within the base-superstructural relationship, then, we can conceive of numerous quantitative changes in the latter. The base merely determines the limits of these quantitative changes; to transcend these limits would involve transforming the base itself. All that is conceivable is not possible, and while the idea of socialism was practically born with the industrial revolution, the first socialists were utopians precisely because the material preconditions for the development of socialism were insufficiently advanced. Given their historical circumstances, socialism was not achievable in the early nineteenth century. Fundamental social change would seem to depend on changes within the economic base. The process is not unidirectional, however; the base itself changes over time, but it can also be changed, a process that is perhaps illustrated by the experience of Soviet industrialization. In the view of Timpanero, “Engels . . . warned that it would be naive to think that each single superstructural fact was the repercussion of a change in the infrastructure”. Within the constraints imposed by the material base, quantitative changes within the superstructure have an autonomous existence. It becomes legitimate, then, to consider the economic situation as given for a specific historical period and, abstracting from this, concentrate attention on cultural events. I would maintain, however, that these cultural events become fully explicable only when related to the mode of production. The question of the autonomy of the cultural sphere becomes crucial in the debate on
the possibility of a peaceful transition to socialism.

Nevertheless, there remains much in Marx’s writings that provides a basis for a mechanistic interpretation of social change. In the context of this chapter, it involves Wolpe’s notion that consciousness “must be seen as a simple, direct expression of the economic situation. This view [Gramsci] described as ‘primitive infantilism’”.

Bourgeois critics of Marxism most frequently resort to this when, in interpreting Marx in an extremely doctrinaire way, they refute what they take to be his main propositions. Continually mystified by its revival, these critics then conclude that Marxism is essentially a religion to which believers adhere by blind faith.

The central theoretical problem revolves around this question of causation, and the slow maturation of the proletariat is accounted for in relation to a postulated discrepancy between the objective and subjective conditions necessary for the development of class consciousness. It has chiefly been asserted that while the objective conditions are ‘ripe’ for revolution in the advanced countries, the subjective conditions, which primarily involve revolutionary proletarian class consciousness, have not developed to the same extent. This implies, initially, that there is not a one-to-one correspondence between material conditions and subjective reflection, and thereby assumes that certain mediating conditions are necessary. This was Marx’s position essentially, since he expected revolutionary activity, but recognized that the proletariat was not sufficiently developed at the time to become engaged.

The ‘ripeness’ of the conditions themselves are problematical. In Consciousness and Action Among, the Western Working Class, Michael Mann seems to assert that a subjective—objective dichotomy does not actually exist. There is a unity, he believes, between the subjective and objective factors, and when the subjective elements are undeveloped, the objective elements must be so as well. Thus, the absence of a revolutionary consciousness is indicative of the absence of a revolutionary situation. It seems clear that the objective conditions can vary significantly over time in the degree to which they approximate a revolutionary situation. This does not deny that over time the objective conditions may become more suitable; it is only to assert that this process is not linear. Periods of crisis open up greatly the objective possibilities of revolution. Similarly, if taken as a hypothetical average, the subjective element will probably vary directly with the waxing and waning of objective conditions.

It seems at least conceivable, however, that material conditions may deteriorate, thereby increasing the objective possibilities of revolution, without there being a corresponding increase in the degree of class consciousness. There may, of course, be changes of consciousness which take altogether different forms. To claim that there is a necessary connection between the two such that they rise and fall simultaneously seems overly mechanistic. In the crisis-ridden North America of the 1970s, the objective conditions for mass social action increased without producing an increase of class consciousness. This distinction between objective and subjective factors is crucial in that
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many of the material pre-requisites for socialism are present without there being a corresponding socialist consciousness. To accept the necessary unity between these factors is to deny the present possibility of socialism and place its attainment far into the future when both sufficiently mature. It is a Menshevik-like position suggesting that revolutionary consciousness of a socialist kind results automatically from historical development. This thesis may be based upon an essentially faulty conception of the determinants of consciousness.

It is certainly a truism that the objective conditions for revolution (of which class consciousness is actually one) must be fully developed before a revolution is possible, and that if you don’t have a revolutionary situation, than almost by definition the objective conditions are not fully developed. But this argument only postulates a one-to-one correlation of subjective and objective conditions at the time of the revolution, with which few Marxists could argue. It says nothing about the relative degree of maturation of these two factors prior to the revolution, and thus leaves room for a wide gap between them.

But by the objective conditions being ripe for revolution, I don’t believe Marx entirely had in mind this all-embracing full development. The fundamental contradiction in capitalism is that between the forces of production and the relations of production. The objective conditions for social revolution arise when the relations of production, instead of promoting the development of the forces of production, act as hindrances. Socialized production co-exists with private appropriation, and the forces of production revolt against the relations. The existence of crises is empirical evidence that this contradiction is exacerbated and provide the clearest indication that capitalism has out-lived its progressive period and has become a hindrance to further human progress. These are the objective conditions for socialist revolution, and they have existed since Marx’s time. These are, however, what I have referred to as the material pre-requisites without which the desire for socialism is utopian. The position I am advocating would have to argue that socialism in backward Asia is a result of cultural diffusion.

One of the significant points of Mann’s book was to show that the development of capitalism, by itself, would not produce the subjective factors, or revolutionary consciousness, a view which seems to contradict his rejection of the subjective-objective dichotomy when we draw out the implications of this rejection. At this juncture, Mann is refuting the mechanical notion, again with roots in Marx, that the contradictions of capitalism would become more extreme, producing progressively mere severe crises, and thereby developing the consciousness of the proletariat, determined by these objective conditions, to the point where revolution occurs and capitalist domination is overthrown. This is saying, in essence, that capitalism, like a living organism, will
eventually pass away of its own accord, and is the vulgar deterministic interpretation of Marxism. Few revolutionary Marxists would counter Mann’s view that a class-in-itself will not, merely through the economic development of capitalism, be transformed into a class-for-itself. Mann is net simply demolishing a straw man, however. This view not only exposes and rejects vulgar determinism, but it also fundamentally draws the rug out from under the contemporary “revisionists” who argue that where capitalism is weak it must be strengthened since you must have full capitalist development before you have socialist revolution. In the view of the Chinese, this was the Soviet view of the 1970s, and was a repudiation of their revolutionary history.

Just as all Marxists agree on the ultimate end of their activity, so most realize that the question of revolutionary consciousness is paramount; the disagreement is over how such a consciousness is developed. Rosa Luxembourg and Leon Trotsky, (although in this regard as in others Trotsky is a contradictory figure), held the hypothesis of the revolutionary proletariat; that is, that the proletariat had within itself the possibility of developing into a class-for-itself. However, other Marxists, notably Lenin, believed that the proletariat did not spontaneously tend to challenge capitalism, and while the revisionists as a consequence gave up all ideas of revolution, the Bolsheviks believed that a revolutionary consciousness could be brought to the workers from outside the economic struggle. The implications of this view are far-reaching, and will be discussed briefly in the last section. It should be noted at this view, which is consistent with the arguments being developed here, may be itself a revision of Marx. As Bottomore argued, for Marx, the role of the intellectual, while unclear, is chiefly subordinate. Marx stated “quite plainly that the working class will, through its own efforts and experiences, attain a fully developed consciousness of its class situation and aims”. This does not deny the role that Marx foresaw for his own doctrine, but he believed that the working class would automatically gravitate towards it because it was so relevant to their own experience. Hence, Lenin could claim that the workers would instinctively assimilate socialism while at the same time indicating the necessity for communist cadres to agitate, propagandize, and organize in the face of bourgeois ideology that imposes itself to a much greater degree on the working class.

Marx was aware that class consciousness had to intervene in the vicious circle of determinism before people could make their own history. He believed, however, that the objective conditions would produce this consciousness. Lukacs, in History and Class Consciousness, also argued, according to Goldman, that while the “social conditions for revolution already existed, its victory depended above all on the consciousness of the proletariat”. There seems to be an element of determinism in the writings of the early Lukacs, who believed that the source of this consciousness was found in the crises that periodically beset capitalism, and that these would culminate in one final crisis (as outlined above). Lukacs, faced with the consolidation of capitalism after the first world war and the defeat of the European revolutionary movements, abandoned somewhat
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the notion of a spontaneously crisis-produced revolutionary proletarian consciousness, and accepted the view that the proletariat needed outside intervention in order to become fully class conscious, Basically, he acknowledged the important role of a revolutionary vanguard. The revolutionary vanguard must not be considered in the sense of a Blanquist conspiracy, he said, but ought to be conceived essentially as the party composing the most advanced elements of the working class.

Given the failure of the concept of the spontaneous nature of class consciousness, the role of proletarian leadership became a crucial issue in bridging the gap between actual and possible consciousness. As Hobsbawm noted, “the working class . . . consists almost by definition of people who cannot make things happen except collectively. . . . But even their collective action requires structure and leadership to be effective. Without a formal organization for action . . ., they are unlikely to be effective; without one which is capable of exercising hegemony...they will remain as sub-altern as the common people of the pre-industrial past.”11 The character and ideology of working class leadership is a key element in the evolution or retardation of class consciousness.

Hobsbawm distinguishes between two kinds of consciousness: psychological, actual, or contingent trade union consciousness—the consciousness that Lenin believes the workers will spontaneously adopt but not be able to raise themselves above—and second, necessary, ascribed or socialist consciousness. The former comprises the ideas that people have; it is their presently existing consciousness, while the latter is the ideas people in a given situation would have “if they were able to grasp in its entirety this situation, and the interests deriving from it.”12 While this formulation seems to involve the “is” versus “ought” problem, Marxists believe that worker exploitation is an objective empirical phenomenon to which there corresponds a correct consciousness which can be achieved by scientific analysis and promulgated by propagandistic activities. In Ollman’s view, the role of revolutionary leadership, then, is to convert the actual into the possible; to help workers “draw socialist lessons from their conditions”.13 The discussion of revolutionary consciousness is primarily confined to the third section. Before proceeding to these issues, I wish to examine in a cursory fashion some of the more substantive issues directly related to the failure of revolutionary consciousness to mature at this point in time.

PART II

We have already indicated that Marx postulated a gap between the objective possibilities and subjective consciousness and that he expected this gap to close relatively rapidly; that is, for there to be a convergence of the subjective and objective
factors which would result in a proletarian revolution. Marx, Ollman argues, tended to blame this temporary lagging on the leadership, the short memories of the workers, national characteristics, or the enmity between the Irish and the English workers.\textsuperscript{14} For his part, anticipating some current notions, Engels complained that “the English proletariat is becoming more and more bourgeois.”\textsuperscript{15} Both he and Lenin afterwards explained the higher living standards as resulting from the secondary effects of colonial exploitation, a hypothesis that can still be profitably applied to advanced capitalism.

While they considered these hindrances to be only temporary and therefore non-essential features that did not require close examination, in some of Marx’s and Engels’ writings the embryo of an analysis can be found to explain the problems involved in the development of consciousness. In the \textit{Communist Manifesto} they had recognized that exploitation was “veiled by religious and political illusions” during the feudal period in Europe.\textsuperscript{16} However, they believed that capitalist rationality had virtually pronounced the death sentence of religion, superstition, and perhaps nationalism. Their optimism failed to conceive of bourgeois society effectively employing these essentially anti-rationalist illusions. Just as micro-rationalism exists in the midst of macro-irrationalism in the monopoly capitalist economy, so bourgeois rationalism co-exists with irrationalism, and the worker fails to recognize his own ‘real’ interests. There is no necessary relationship between what is objectively true and what people in general perceive to be true, although this is a difficulty for social analysts because it assumes that a certain body of people \textit{can} perceive objective reality correctly. However, theories are empirically verifiable, and unless we hold the notion of a totally contingent universe, patterns and regularities do appear and can inform practice. Marx expected that the triumph of science would close this gap between perceptions and reality and thereby promote universal rationalism. However, in \textit{Socialism, Utopian and Scientific Engels gives a fascinating account of ruling class ideology, thundered from the working class pulpits, designed to mystify the workers.}\textsuperscript{17} With the promotion of religious interpretations of reality, the discrepancy between what is and what one is conscious of widens, and the subjective conditions are pushed back even farther.

This analysis points to the importance of superstructural factors in inhibiting the development of class consciousness, it follows, then, that it is insufficient to postulate a necessary correlation between the degree of capitalist development, or length of such development, and the degree of class consciousness, although this is an implication that follows from Mann’s notion of unity between subjective and objective factors, if this notion implies a necessary development of both. The importance of this point of view becomes concrete when we turn our attention to the empirical difference between the consciousness of the European as opposed to the North American proletariat.

In Europe the Social Democratic parties, as well as the “revisionist” Communist Parties have maintained a revolutionary rhetoric that is in keeping with the revolutionary tradition still alive in the rank and file. It is true, of course, that even this
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rhetoric is abandoned as these parties come close to sharing parliamentary power lest they alienate middle class voters, as the current strategy of the Italian Communist Party indicates. However, this posturing, and more fundamentally the basis on which it rests, provides a major key to understanding the essential differences between the European and North American worker. In North America, rather than class collaboration masked by revolutionary words, open collaboration between the Unions and the owners is frequently acknowledged. ‘Sweetheart deals’ occur all the way from Californian farm labourers to Dalhousie University clerical and technical staff. The recent no-strike pact made in the major U.S. steel industry is only the most blatant example. “With few exceptions,” Aonowitz argues, “employers regard labor leaders as their allies against the ignorant and undisciplined rank-and-file workers”.18 With explicitly integrationist leadership, the development of a revolutionary Consciousness has to occur outside the official trade union organizations, or covertly within then on the shop floor. It becomes partly understandable, then, why American workers do not have that European attitude that is well summed up by the French workman who, when accidentally jostled by T.S. Eliot, retorted: “Me, I am a proletarian exploited by the capitalist class”.19 In this one phrase is summed up almost all of the elements of class consciousness.

Economicism is the stock-in-trade of the unions on both sides of the Atlantic. Mann makes the point, however, that this is, in fact, in the interest of the working class: “the almost exclusive preoccupation of trade unions with economism” he says, “is not a mere case of ‘betrayal’ by their leadership: it is rooted in the workers’ very experience, and he reinforces the union’s position.”20 This question centers around the ends to which union activities are oriented. If workers spontaneously develop only trade union consciousness, than unions merely express this consciousness. Marx believed that by organizing, the workers would become accustomed to collective struggle, and as they failed to achieve their objectives would be radicalized in the process. But objectives confined to economistic demands can frequently be satisfied. The ends are as important if not mere important than the means, and if unions, through their leadership restrict themselves to these demands than the workers will develop only the embryo of class consciousness, a perception of common interests. And if we take the no—strike movement as an extreme example, common interests may be thought to include management and owners, since everyone is dependent on profitability, the workers for their jobs no less than the shareholders for their dividends. The ideology promoted by the union is one element that shapes the worker’s consciousness.

It may be objected that this is predicated on the ability of the capitalist system to continue to meet the economistic demands, or at least be successful in having them lowered to the point where they can be approximated in the appearance of compromise. It is my position, however, that even if through crisis the demands of the workers could
not be satisfied, the ruling ideas could promote the acceptance of lower aspirations through belief in natural cataclysms, or a national emergency. The ideology of ‘common-boatness’ would seem to be a useful one in the repertoire of the ruling class, and may historically coincide with potentially radicalizing crises. It would be interesting to test the notion that worker’s demands lessen during periods of ‘trouble’, and to test the extent to which national emergencies, such as the energy crisis, motivate people to do what they can to ‘help the nation out’. This ideology seems totally antithetical to revolutionary consciousness, and is probably a response most intimately connected with the middle class who have more reason to identify with the system. The point to be made here, however, is that the unions themselves are not a revolutionary force, and their effect can be either positive or negative; they can either speed up or fetter the revolutionary consciousness. To a large extent their role seems determined by the character and ideology of the leadership.

Furthermore, the claim that economism is in the best interests of the workers (which I must admit Mann does not explicitly make, although he tends in this direction when he rejects the notion of betrayal) is to claim that workers rationally knew what their best interests are. (This hinges around one of the major differences between social science as it is usually practiced and Marxian social science that explicitly states its values and draws inferences and conclusion from the interaction between empirical reality and theoretical constructs on the basis of these values. The concept of ‘real’ interests as opposed to the interests that workers ‘really’ have is foreign to academic social science. This issue is akin to the ‘consumer sovereignty’ issue when it is claimed that if people did not want all the gadgets on the market then they would not buy them. The responsibility then, is shifted onto subordinate strata and the social milieux in which values and ideas are shaped is obscured and regarded as inoperative in the realm of consumer freedom. Ultimately these become only self-fulfilling prophecies which result from the position in which people are placed. It is true, as Lane asserts, that the worker’s “life goals are structured around achievement and success in monetary terms. Take away these and life would be a desert”. What is absent from this truism is any notion of alternatives. It is rather a shoddy rhetorical trick to present two alternatives as exhaustive, one of which is extremely negative leaving the ether as the only rational choice. It is this whole idea of alternatives that lies behind the conception that what people want may not be in their best interests. Without this distinction we are left in a position of accepting reality at face value and rational alternatives are obscured. Rooted in the present, in trade union consciousness, the workers merely express their own existence, and hence the necessity of the revolutionary vanguard to present alternatives.

What then is the revolutionary potential of the U.S. working class? Writers from surprisingly diverse political orientations have arrived at similar conclusions, Baran and Sweezy contend that organized workers have been “integrated into the system as consumers and ideologically conditioned members of society”. This is part of the basis
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of the criticism of *Monopoly Capital* maintaining that Baran and Sweezy, in leaving out the working class, fail to develop a socialist alternative to the insolvable contradictions they perceive in capitalism. This would directly lead us to ask whether significant structural changes have occurred that would nullify the contradictions of capitalism to an extent that would lead us to expect the working class not to be revolutionary in the future because it may no longer be exploited. This is the view, as Zweug put it, that “it took the employer a long to imbue the worker with his own values and to turn him into a full and willing partner in the acquisitive society, but he has finally succeeded.”

This view typically emanates from the theory of consensus capitalism which, on one level, begins its analysis with the difference in consciousness between the European and North American worker. The United States is considered to be a more fully developed capitalist society than Europe. The greater degree of class consciousness of the European workers is then taken as evidence that there is an actual inverse relationship between the development of capitalism and the growth of proletarian consciousness. This development is then considered to be ‘normal’ and since the United States is the mirror that shows Europe its future, this decline in ideology becomes a necessary concomitant of the industrialization process per se under capitalism, and the conclusion is reached whereby harmonization is predicted to follow sooner or later in Europe. The assumption being made here is that the contradictions, or as they would prefer, the ‘imbalances’ of capitalism are being progressively solved, undercutting revolutionary possibilities. Hence, capitalism becomes, once again, the eternal system. This school’s credibility rests on the successful prevention since the second world war of serious crises, a conjunctural dependence, we may remark, that is becoming obvious in the persistence of crises.

Given the successful prevention of serious crises, the narrowing of the inequality gap (both of which are questionable assumptions), the proclamation of the ‘affluent society’ (which even Galbraith admits was somewhat premature), the basic question is whether these phenomena are the results of fundamental structural changes or whether, on the other hand, they are the result of specific short term historical forces. One cannot separate these phenomena from the unique historical period in which they occurred.

Arguments have been made that these phenomena are the temporary result of specific historical forces prevailing in a period of permanent cold war economy following upon the most destructive war in history after which the United States was able to structure the world economy to its liking, and so on, and then goes on to argue that these circumstances have begun to crumble. While an analysis of this very important question is clearly outs the scope of this term paper, we may point to the resurgence of capitalist rivalries exacerbating the contradiction between capitalist countries the current trade war, the monetary crisis and the break—down in the
Bretten-Woods agreement, as well as the crisis in neo-Keynesianism, as indications that this latter may in fact be the case. From this point of view, somewhat related to American exceptionalism, the position taken is not that Europe will mirror the U.S. in post-industrial harmony, but that the U.S. will tend to mirror Europe in open class conflict following the breakdown of American hegemony, a process accelerated by imperialist wars. While Marx and Engels were unable to grasp fully the reasons for the conservatism of the English working class in comparison to their continental rivals during the period of British hegemony, neo-Marxists frequently assert that the conservatism of the North American proletariat is at least partly accounted for by the privileged position American capitalism and imperialism exercise in the world. As the present crisis is paid for by the working class, as manifested in the decline of real wages and the rise in unemployment, a new situation may arise and workers’ consciousness may make significant strides.

The position advocated here is similar to Anderson’s view that “the working class continues to be exploited but has so far acquiesced to the status quo”.

This is basically Veblen’s ‘full-dinnerpail’ notion; the belief, as Sombart put it (quoted by Harrington), that socialism in America ran aground “on shoals of roast beef and apple pie”. Harrington attempts to refute this by claiming that in the period prior to world war one the German working class had simultaneously rising living standards and a social democratic consciousness. He accepts, however, a very weak reformist conception of class consciousness that does not escape from economism. His demonstration that affluence does not have lead to political ignorance, does not disprove that it can. One must also ask to what extent the German working class attributed their rise in living standards to their politics consequently reinforcing them. If the North American working class believes that U.S. capitalism is responsible for their ‘affluence’, such as it is, than this itself militates against socialist consciousness.

Harrington performs a useful function by describing pro-world war one radical labor movements in the United States, lest one claim that socialism is intrinsically foreign to the U.S. working class. Yet his contention that the U.S. working class, through heightened class consciousness, succeeded in putting through the New Deal against ruling class interests may not be entirely correct. I do not wish to deny the importance of mass pressure on the ruling class which was clearly perceived as a threat. Concessions from the powerful to the powerless invariably function as social control measures. The New Deal, however, is an instance when a segment of the U.S. ruling class failed to see what was in their own best interests as a class. There was a tactical division within the bourgeoisie related to the two means available to solve domestic problems and suppress the working class, a division that continues to the present and is one of the main ideological differences that divides the two parties in American politics. The list of Nixon vetoes provides the clearest indication that the Republican party continues to hold the ‘stick’ approach. In the light of this, Harrington’s flirtation with
the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, resulting in a possible broad united front with the liberal bourgeoisie, would seem to have little possibility of building socialism. Reformists have probably argued that a series of quantitative reforms will eventually produce a qualitative change. I am skeptical of this because a qualitative change (which was identified earlier as social revolution) requires mass participation, while reformism typically is accomplished through appropriate channels without massive mobilization. In fact, in cases of citizen organizations that demand change, local governments will frequently create agencies designed to supplant such grass—roots movements.

The question if working class affluence, then, can play a significant part in determining the revolutionary potential of the working class. To Lukacs, proletarian consciousness was linked to the unity of subject and object that was expressed in the worker’s awareness of himself as a thing, an object. The bourgeoisie cannot achieve this unity because he owns things and thereby separates himself from them; there is no subject—object unity. Worker affluence, then, may produce a subjectivity that undercuts the possibility of attaining proletarian class consciousness. What is frequently claimed is that workers are becoming middle class. This is the embourgeoisement thesis by which it is claimed that “as manual workers and their families achieve relatively high incomes and living standards, they assume a way of life which is more characteristically ‘middle class’ and become in part progressively assimilated into middle class society.”26 As a member of the middle class, the subject—object unity is re-established.

One of the best known attempts to systematically study and attempt to determine the validity of this thesis was carried out by Goldthorpe and his associates in a study of affluent workers in Britain’s automobile industry. Even given the fact that this was a critical case analysis, which means that they studied a group of workers most likely to exhibit ‘embourgeoisément’, their findings did not support the thesis as it was stated above.27 There still existed distinctive working—class common social experiences; the workers did not emulate middle class norms and life styles; they did not desire assimilation into the middle class. Affluence did not change the class position of the worker, and they concluded that to the extent that class differences are lessening it seems to be much more significantly in the direction of the emergence of a white—collar labor force. ‘Proletarianization’ would better characterize this convergence of the classes than would ‘embourgeoisement’.

Summing up their conclusion, and pointing to the centrality of the labour-capital contradiction, Goldtorpe states:

’a factory worker can double his living standards and still remain a man who sells his labor to an employer in return for wages; he can work at a central panel rather than on an assembly line without changing his
subordinate position in the organization of production; he can live in his own house in a ‘middle-class’ estate or suburb and still remain little involved in white collar social worlds.”\textsuperscript{28} The last factor is significant for the development of class consciousness since the working class community, as a reservoir of working class culture and values, reinforces class solidarity. However, a more important question may not concern much assimilation into middle class sociality, but the extent of privatization of the affluent worker’s life, a point that Goldthorpe raises as well.

While demonstrating the inadequacy of the ‘embourgeoisement’ thesis as they defined it, Goldthorpe and his associates indicated that working class solidarity both in the workplace and the community seems to be in decline. The workers defined their work instrumentally as essentially means to ends which are extrinsic to the work situation, and their life was becoming increasingly family-centered. A more companionate relationship in the home satisfies the expressive and affective needs of workers whose life is increasingly dominated by domesticity.\textsuperscript{29} Even if we overlook the fact that the workers expressed discontent with their work and that home as a refuge for recuperation is their only alternative, the question remains: is their work deprivation minimized by an overall happiness that outweighs the bad? Mann poses the question, given alienation in the work place, is life outside of work so good that it leaves the worker unalienated?\textsuperscript{30} This contention, however seems to swim upstream in the face of the apparent social decay, the ideological crisis, and the legion of studies on alienation not only in the work—place, but that tend to locate the chief source of alienation not in labor but in society at large.

While the ‘end of ideology’ theorists, such as Aron, Galbraith, and Daniel Bell, point to homogenization of incomes and living standards, automation breaking down the distinction between ‘us and them’, and ether processes accompanying industrialization as producing a decline in alienation, Marcuse, who recognizes these trends, argues that alienation has significantly increased net only or chiefly in the world of work but mere fundamentally in the world of consumption. This alienation, outside the context of production, he contends, is the truly revolutionary force in the west.\textsuperscript{31} Abandoning any hope in the co-opted traditional working class, Marcuse mistook new left student radicalism for revolutionary consciousness, and anti-materialism for revolutionary ideology. He considered the petty-bourgeois student rejection of materialism as being a revolutionary act against capitalism whereas in essence it was an extension of traditional bourgeois bohemianism. This is a middle-class view, and I would argue, a temporary one, net in the sense that it will eventually die out but that it will be confined primarily to certain age groups. This concern for the crass commercialism of our society is not part of a worker’s experience since, as Mann argues, “for them an adequate level of material consumption is not guaranteed even in contemporary society”.\textsuperscript{32} On the other hand, the notion of student anti- materialism is
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frequently a myth since it really makes little difference whether one consumes traditional middle class goods such as lawn mowers or component stereo systems.

We have already noted the possibility that ‘equalization’ may be conceived as being a process of ‘proletarianization’, and this ought to be remembered when the media foster the view of blue collar workers receiving wage increases making it equivalent in income to such middle class ‘professions’ as teaching. A further aspect of this process is indicated by the automation of white collar clerical occupations turning the office into a ‘paper factory’, a process which has been accompanied by the spread of time and motion studies to these categories of workers. The embourgeoisement thesis is weak at its very foundations, as was pointed out by the quote from Mann in the above paragraph. As Andersen points out in The Political Economy of Social Class, there has been an increase in inequality reflected by the increasing concentration of capital. Ours is therefore not an era of equalization. Even during the 1960s the proportion of income in Canada that went to the top and bottom tenth remained the same as it had throughout the century, although there was some shifting around in the middle brackets. As Meszaros argues, the problem may be that neutral social scientists, perhaps through wishful thinking, inflate “phenomena of necessarily limited significance into universal laws…. The smallest sign of marginal … equalization is eagerly greeted as fundamental or structural equalization.”33 While economism has not resulted in a fundamental redistribution of wealth, the monopoly position of some labor unions have prevented the predicted immiseration of large sections of the working class. This kind of co-optation, however, is predicated on the enlargement of the economy, on a sustained economic growth that appears to raise living standards. In our society, Bottomore argues, “a condition of sustained economic growth and steadily increasing prosperity is both a reasonable expectation and a pre-eminent value.”34 Yet it may prove increasingly difficult to continue this expansion, as is shown by the zero rates of growth that have been reported, and rising expectations that go unfulfilled are potentially dangerous. Hence the necessity to lower aspirations, to project the image of equal sacrifice, to lower thermostats and defend high profits as necessary for future development, although profits are calculated after reinvestment.

The process of proletarianization, which is a concept that Marx applied to the petty-bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century, seems in contradiction with statistics that show the traditional working class is shrinking as a proportion of the labour force although maintaining itself in absolute numbers. Part of this difficulty lies in the definition of the working class, which may or may not include certain strata of the wage-earning population. When intellectuals interpret history, it has been pointed out, they attribute a significant historical role to intellectuals. Contemporary neo-Marxists, having abandoned hope in the traditional proletariat, focus their attention on the
growing body of engineers, technicians and service employees who make up the ‘new working class’, and postulate that this stratum will be the leaders in the socialist revolution. Objectively proletarian in that they receive wages and do not own their own means of production, the new working class imperceptively shades into a new petty bourgeoisie differentiated by the extent to which it lives off surplus value, and by its relationship to the means of production. This is the ‘rational’ and educated section of the working class and therefore in a position to determine rationally its own interests.

It is postulated that this stratum will become increasingly important until it becomes absolutely indispensable to a very sensitive and easily sabotaged productive process. Its economic power will increase at the expense of the capitalist who will become increasingly superfluous. Finally a political revolution will occur in which this class will grab political power in a process that will mirror the growth of the bourgeoisie under feudalism. The bourgeoisie was originally a middle class which grew up separately from the lord-serf dichotomy and conquered political power only after establishing economic power, and the same sort of process is predicted for the technicians and engineers.

The traditional working class discovered their economic power quite early in their evolution, and being indispensable to production, learned that the strike was their foremost weapon in the class struggle. As unskilled workers, though, they were easy to replace, while on the other hand, highly trained technicians, it is suggested, are difficult to replace, thus enhancing their economic power. This is somewhat difficult to accept, however, because money will buy people, which to a certain extent today, has created an over-supply of certain highly trained specialists resulting in white collar unemployment. Furthermore, their conditions of work are often not cooperative in the sense Marx implied, and their individual advancement, privatized working space, and identification with the firm, are unlikely to produce socialist consciousness. Their interests are mainly reformist, and while it has been suggested that, because their material wants are satisfied, they will then go on to demand workers control of production, it has never been shown that this is necessarily so, and given the unlimited material wants that capitalism continues to be able to create, I think that we are justified in being pessimistic about the ‘revolutionary-reformism that Goldman talks about and that seems so close to the shoddy idealism of Charles Reich.

If a new stratum of engineers and technicians do gain political and economic power as a class, then I think what we can look forward to is not a proletarian revolution at all but a new ruling class of technicians, managers, scientists and engineers. It is possible that such a development may have already occurred in the Soviet Union where a new ruling class seems to have arisen.

Under capitalist conditions, however, the autonomy of this stratum should not be exaggerated. They remain hired hands despite their high salaries and to the extent that they increase their economic power, they do it individually by integrating with the
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ruling class becoming either a part of it, (or even originating as part of it), or serving its interests, and most frequently by this last method. The so-called ‘managerial revolution’ by which the owners were considered to have been expropriated by their hirelings is incorrect not only because managers themselves are not insignificant owners, but also because in their role they perform the functions of the capitalist (profit maximization, capital accumulation, and so on) efficiently, and if they fail to do so, their removal is simply an indication that power remains with ownership. The diffusion of shares in reality does not greatly increase the autonomy of management since a controlling interest is much lower than 51 percent.

The middle class has been implicitly separated into two components, the uppermost of which will probably gravitate to the bourgeoisie ideologically. The new working class proper, however, that part which is objectively proletarian, for example clerical workers and technicians, cannot be said to be definitely reactionary or definitely revolutionary, but to have potentiality in either direction. The obstacles to the development of class consciousness in the new working class are numerous. For example, it is within this strata that minute invidious distinctions of status are magnified out of all proportion resulting in an ideology of competition, one-upmanship and promotionism. Goals are sought individually in relation to careerism, and there is certainly more than an element of truth in the notion that self-aggrandizement is antithetical to a socialist consciousness in which the collective’s interests are advanced before the interests of the self. In this simple distinction can be seen the fundamental gulf that separates bourgeois from socialist society, and the great difficulty of building socialist consciousness in the latter, let alone in the former.

PART IV

Fundamental to an understanding of the underdevelopment of the subjective factors, as well as the concept of ‘false consciousness’, is Marx’s contention, deserving an extensive quote, that

“the ideas of the ruling class are, in every age, the ruling ideas; i.e. the class which is the dominant material force in society is at the same time its dominant intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time ever the means of mental production, so that in consequence the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are, in general, subject to it.”38 (Emphasis in original).
Under monopoly capitalism, the dominant class characteristically retains its power not only through control of the means of production and the ‘legitimate’ means of violence, but through its control over cultural institutions and agencies. While in the last resort, and frequently before, if the threat is considered severe, the bourgeoisie will fight to retain its privileges, ideology is its first line of defense, The ruling class exercises ideological hegemony ever subordinate strata, isolates dangerous dissidents, and attempts to preclude acceptance of alternative interpretations of reality through early indoctrination. However, as Edgar Friedenberg once remarked, reality breaks in too often, leaving people sick, mean and edgy. It is precisely this notion of the separation of people’s consciousness from objective reality which is at the basis, net only of false consciousness, but of the incongruence between subjective and objective conditions.

By false consciousness, Marx meant, according to C. Wright Mills, “an untrue calculation of interest. He explained it as a rationalist error, due to ignorance, or, in more willful moods, to the lack of correct proletarian propaganda. False consciousness ... is an incorrect interpretation which hides the real world rather than reveals it in a manner adequate for effective action.” Friedenberg distinguishes between proletarian and bourgeois false consciousness. The worker, he argues, is falsely conscious when (1) “he fails to perceive that his interests require the abolition of capitalism” and (2) “when he fails to realize the universal task which the proletariat is called on to perform”, the eventual abolition of all classes. Worker false consciousness is an impediment that is theoretically remedial. On the other hand, bourgeois false consciousness is necessary for the bourgeoisie, as Marx put it:

“for each new class which puts itself in the place of one ruling before it, is compelled, merely in order to achieve its aims, to represent its interest as the common interest of all members of society, i.e. employing an ideal formula, to give its ideas the form of universality and to represent them as the only rational and universally valid ones.”

This false consciousness, Friedenberg concludes, “legitimates bourgeois rule in the eyes of the bourgeoisie and thus makes it easier for him to press that legitimacy upon others. The bourgeoisie needs this kind of false consciousness.”

Marx recognized that the bourgeoisie, as the new ruling class, did represent the interest of the whole of society to a certain extent, which made it possible to propagate its competitive and individualistic world view throughout all social classes. Bourgeois ideas and values were made to appear eternal. However, as Anderson puts it, “to persist in the bourgeois world view at a time when the contradictions between the forces and relations of production are growing is to have a distorted mental picture of reality, to have false consciousness.”

One of the ways in which false consciousness manifests itself is through deep cynicism. The worker en the job need not be an enthusiastic supporter of capitalism; his role is as instrumental as his consciousness appears to be. Alienation may be defined as the recognition of the distance between one’s potentialities and one’s actual existence,
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but the longer a worker experiences deprivation in work, the more likely he is to adjust pragmatically and develop a fatalistic view about life in general and the prospects for change. The gap between desire and actuality seems unbridgeable. Young workers have a greater sense of grievance than elder workers. This is false consciousness because it fails to transcend the ‘is’ and there is no sense of possibilities inherent in the present. Positivism studies the ‘is’ with no sense of its negation; Marxism studies the present to unfold its potentialities. To abandon the notion of false consciousness is a capitulation to positivism and is itself a characteristic cynicism that seems to pervade bourgeois social science.

Gramsci believed that the lack of correspondence between the conceptions that social actors have of their actions and the consequences of these actions was instrumental in permitting the continuation of the system, which he explained by the notion of hegemony: a legitimate mask over the real structure of ruling class power. For William, alienation corresponds to “an order in which ... one concept of reality is diffused throughout society in all its manifestations, infusing with its spirit all taste, morality, customs, religious and moral connotations.” This concept of social reality serves to legitimize social institutions. The development of revolutionary consciousness must mean the replacement of bourgeois hegemony with proletarian hegemony.

How does a revolutionary consciousness arise in the working class? Revolutionary situations themselves can produce qualitative leaps in consciousness such as the 1968 May-June situation in France which failed, according to some interpretations, because of the hypocrisy of the French Communist Party. In Mann’s view, for example, “the parties of the left including the Communist party did not accept the revolutionary reality of the movement, but accepted the Grenville compromise and eventually betrayed their own militants.” In a study of the Cuban working class, Maurice Zeitlin demonstrated the rapid growth of proletarian consciousness among the working class, who were not involved in the guerilla struggle, after the success of the revolution. He also pointed out that radicalism developed in youth was net a ‘periodized’ phenomenon that passes away in middle age, but can be aroused again in the correct revolutionary circumstances.

Marx recognized the importance of working class struggles and conflict in the development of class consciousness. Lenin believed that normally this would produce only trade union consciousness unless revolutionary content was diffused through a vanguard party which carried on activities of propaganda and agitation. The workers were to be aided in developing political explanations as they confronted a problem. As Wolpe argues, “The party must ‘merge’ its activities with the practical every-day problems of working-class life, and secondly, it must explain these problems to the worker in the course of their ... confrontation with them.” Gramsci maintained that
neither of these would necessarily produce revolutionary consciousness, and he pointed out the necessity of a concrete historical and economic analysis of the social structure, a study of past radical action and the reasons for successive failures, and finally, the discovery of the correct form of struggle in a specific real historical situation. In connection with the complexity of the superstructure, Gramsci laid great stress upon ‘intervening’ conditions and processes, elements of the superstructure that would have to be taken into consideration.52 However, no analysis of the superstructure has been carried out in any detail at all comparable to that of the economic base. Wolpe concludes that we are left in the position that “revolutionary consciousness can only be explained as the resultant of an asymmetrical configuration of factors…. The theoretical problem concerning the conditions of the development revolutionary consciousness remain largely unsolved.”53

The future is not entirely bleak. The current stagflation has resulted in militant wildcat strikes and increased the possibility of worker militancy. Braverman and Merkx54 believe that the under-class composed chiefly of minority workers, suffering the highest degree of exploitation and unemployment have the greatest revolutionary potential. But these workers are the least unionized and the least likely to rise above spontaneous revolts. Sections of the highly paid blue collar workers exhibit reactionary consciousness which can be incited to violence by the uling class against progressive forces. When we combine these two, however, a basically non-white under-class with a potentiality for revolt if not revolution, and an authoritarian privileged section of the white working class, what Lenin would probably call a ‘labor aristocracy’. with racial prejudices reinforced by the ruling class, one becomes pessimistic about the future of revolutionary movements developing in North America. A right wing reaction would seem to be a much more sound prediction, and it becomes understandable why so many Marxists have shifted attention to the Third World where revolutionary possibilities seem infinitely greater.

Endnotes:

6 Harold Wolpe, “An Examination of Some Aspects of the Problem of the Development of Revolutionary Consciousness.” Telos, No. 4, Fall 1969, p.139.
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8 Lucien Goldman, “Reflections on History and Class Consciousness” in Istvan Meszaros (ed.) Aspects of History and Class Consciousness. London: Rutledge & Kegan Paul, 1971, pp. 69-70. In What is to be Done? Lenin stated that modern socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge…. The vehicle of science is not the proletariat, but the bourgeois intelligentsia . . ., it was in the minds of individual members of this stratum that modern socialism originated, and it was they who communicated it to the more intellectually developed proletarians….Thus, socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without…, and not something that arose within it spontaneously. Accordingly … the task of Social Democracy is to imbue the proletariat…with the consciousness of its position and the consciousness of its task. There would be no need for this if consciousness arose of itself from the class struggle.” (Emphasis in original) Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969, p.40n
10 Lucien Goldman, “Reflections on History and Class Consciousness”, p. 69.
20 Michael Mann, Consciousness and Action Among the Western Working Class, p. 35.
32 Michael Mann, *Consciousness and Action Among the Western Working Class*, p. 32.
36 Lucien Goldman, “Reflections on History and Class Consciousness”.
41 Karl Marx, from *The German Ideology*, in Bottomore and Rubel (eds.) *Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*, p. 80.
44 Michael Mann, *Consciousness and Action Among the Western Working Class*, p. 29.
48 Michael Mann, *Consciousness and Action Among the Western Working Class* p. 52.
50 VI Lenin, *What is to be Done?* Moscow Publishers, 1969.
52 Harold Wolpe, “An Examination of Some Approaches to the Problem of the Development of Revolutionary Consciousness”, pp. 139-42.