

# **“The Development of Class in Canada in the Twentieth Century”: A Critique**

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Leo Johnson's essay on the development of class in Canada<sup>1</sup> is significant in many respects. With the contradictions of monopoly capitalism becoming manifest, and the world-wide trend of countries seeking independence as background and formative factors, the nationalist upsurge in Canada has given rise to the embryo of a distinctive Canadian social science. Tracing its roots to the works of Harold Innis, the new social science is at once historical, political, sociological and based on a political economy which is couched increasingly within a Marxian framework. Johnson's work clearly is part of this trend and therein lies much of its positive value. It might be conceded nevertheless that this new social science (which is not a purely Canadian phenomenon but on the contrary one that is being felt throughout the capitalist world), in Canada, runs the risk of being somewhat ethnocentric in its concentration on 'things Canadian' to the extent that it misinterprets both Marxism and Canadian history, a problem encountered, for example, in some of the work of Tom Naylor. Canadian experiences sometime need interpretation in the light of some more global processes. That is, while it is obviously incorrect to try to fit the Canadian facts into an imported theoretical framework derived from an analysis of concrete conditions elsewhere that proves to be inadequate in that context, it is also incorrect to carry out indigenous analysis in isolation from those theories that provide important insights into the nature of social transformation in Canada.

It is against this specific background that Johnson's article can best be appreciated. It is in many respects a model of the new interdisciplinary methodology of the new Canadian social science and explicitly tries to maintain a Marxist framework of analysis. However, it also demonstrates some of the problems in the emerging school, in particular, its failure to reflect the contribution that contemporary Marxist theoretical analysis can provide for an understanding of Canadian history and Canadian social structure.

While I recognize many important strengths of Johnson's analysis, this critique focuses on what I perceive to be the major theoretical weaknesses of his article. To an extent the critique is over-drawn in that it ignores some of the qualifications and 'other-things-being-equal' clauses in the work. To draw implications from an argument is not to imply that they were foreseen by the author, only that they follow logically from the analysis he presents. The major short-coming is that Johnson fails to analyse the structural changes that have occurred in the political economy in this century, and presents a simplified picture of class developments in Canada which ultimately rests on an overly mechanistic interpretation of Marxism, and totally fails to take adequately into account that militant working class consciousness has in fact been on the decline in North America. Yet in the light of current reactionary theories based on this datum that suppose the working class to have lost entirely its revolutionary potential, this is an extremely important point.

In the first half of this paper specific passages from Johnson's article will be examined critically and the above observations will be made more explicit. While unable to present an alternative to Johnson's thesis, in the second half of this paper I briefly discuss certain aspects drawn from contemporary sociological literature which ought to be included to yield a more thorough class analysis of Canadian society. This will involve some discussion of the historical

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<sup>1</sup> Leo Johnson, "The Development of Class in Canada in the Twentieth Century," in Gary Teeple, ed. *Capitalism and the National Question in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 141-184. Hereafter, all page references in the text refer to this article.

and structural changes in world capitalism in general and Canadian capitalism in particular. Some of the implications for revolutionary strategy and tactics emanating from Johnson's analysis will be discussed as well.

#### Part I

Johnson's article is both a critique of past left practice in Canada and a challenge to Marxists "to begin the process of indigenous analysis and criticism which has proved so fruitful in the development of correct analysis and successful political strategy elsewhere" (p. 144). While disclaiming any intention of providing "comments about political strategy", certain tactics follow logically from his theoretical analysis.

He begins by contrasting two approaches to class analysis: the bourgeois approach which is primarily based on the subjective perceptions of individuals, and the Marxian approach which begins with objective criteria and "assumes a direct relationship between the objective condition of individuals and their conscious understanding and activity" (p. 142). While it can be objected that this is much too superficial an approach, Johnson's purpose was principally to suggest that neither of these approaches is methodologically sound and that Marxists, while correctly emphasizing objective criteria, must recognize that there will not be this direct, one-way relationship between objective and subjective elements. (He ought to have added that these factors tend to coalesce in crisis or revolutionary situations which result in leaps of consciousness.) While his point is well taken, in his class analysis Johnson presents an overly mechanical interpretation based exclusively on objective factors, interpreting even these narrowly, and neglecting the subjective aspect in important ways that will become clear.

Johnson continues: "To a Marxist scholar... class carries a precise definition which relates, not to the attitudes of individuals, but to their external material relationships centered on those created by the productive process." On this basis, which may be criticized by his own standards, he identifies three classes: the bourgeoisie, the petite bourgeoisie and the proletariat, differentiated along two dimensions: ownership of the means of production/non-ownership, and buying/selling labour power. This outlines the essential classes of the 19th and early twentieth century capitalism, and remains a useful analytical model. While Johnson recognizes that the actual class divisions are never so clear-cut, it is instructive that he draws his examples of this from Marx rather than contemporary Marxist class analysis. He suggests that Marx saw fit to analyse "white collar 'clients' of the bourgeoisie and [the] demoralized 'lumpen-proletariat'" (p. 143), but it is one of the major criticisms of this paper that Johnson does not adequately deal with structural changes in twentieth century capitalism that have, to this point, greatly complicated the social structure and made a more complex class analysis necessary.

Frequently in reading Johnson's article one is tempted to agree with specific points until the general line of the argument becomes clear. Although somewhat inconsistent in his use of what has become an unfortunate term, Johnson is essentially correct when he states that "the further a worker is from control of his means of production, the greater is his alienation, and consequently the greater will be his potential for revolution and the attainment of the socialist state" (p. 143). It is correct insofar as he uses the term 'alienation' to mean the separation of the worker from the ownership (and control) of the means of production, one of the criteria by which Marx identified the proletariat as a revolutionary class (other criteria included that it alone produced surplus value which placed it at the strategic center of the production process). That Johnson may not mean this precise definition of the term, however, seems evident from his use of 'alienation' later in the paper. I do not wish to deny that alienation in the psychological sense

of the term may be instrumental in precipitating spontaneous revolts in the working class. The point is that other factors are necessary in order to channel spontaneity in socialist directions.

Johnson argues that Marx was more concerned with general analysis rather than with particular developments and strategies (which is not entirely correct, and seems to posit an unwarranted distinction between the ‘thinker’ and the ‘doer’ – Marx being both). What is needed is, in Lenin’s terms, the concrete analysis of concrete conditions. Johnson – seems content to remain at the level of ‘general historical trends’ and to implicitly assume that correct tactics can follow from them.

In his criticism of past left practice in Canadian politics, Johnson charges that they failed to recognize the fundamental differences between class developments in Canada and those in Europe and Asia. He seems to state this as a mere formality, however, another example of a basically correct position which bears little resemblance to what the article is actually about, but would provide possible ammunition to refute criticism. More in line with his essay (in which he *is* interested in parallels with Europe), Johnson continues: “even when Canadian developments have paralleled classical models, the left has failed to recognize the precise degree or stage in the development of the paradigm” (p. 144). This borders on a possible mechanistic interpretation that is correct insofar as it suggests that one must understand the ‘precise degree or stage in the development (i.e., concrete conditions), but in his criticism of the left for its lack of a ‘time sense’ Johnson appears to be mechanically applying tactics on the basis of general historical developments rather than concrete conditions.

Canadian left leadership, he asserts, has in the past seized what were short term crises and proceeded to direct capital-labour confrontations when conditions were not ripe for such activity, a fact that led to their subsequent defeat. I am not disputing that tactics which are inappropriate in one historical conjuncture may be appropriate in another and vice versa. The key point is that Johnson puts too much emphasis on simplistic determinants of tactics, an emphasis that is related not only to his simplistic class distinctions, but more fundamentally to his omission of important factors that make the contemporary social structure different from that of the 1890’s. I hope to be able to make these criticisms more specific below.

He accuses left leadership in Canada, in essence, of tailing after the masses, but blames this on an incorrect analysis of the numerical class forces at the time, He gives no indication that much more is needed than merely a correct class analysis, an omission that relates directly to his failure to give any consideration to the subjective factor. Specifically he does not recognize that the lack of correct revolutionary tactics and strategy in the past is much more importantly linked to the lack of a genuine working class party that could provide correct proletarian leadership. Johnson’s emphasis on purely quantitative objective factors fails to recognize that the subjective conditions have to be forged as well, principally through the leadership of a vanguard party.

In his historical analysis of Canada, Johnson begins by in essence claiming that in the past (up until the end of world war two) the principal contradiction in Canada was that between the petite bourgeois and the bourgeois modes of production. Therefore it was ‘inevitable’ that the working class would enter this conflict as a junior partner of the petite bourgeoisie in common opposition to the ‘capitalists’. “As a result... working class elements,” claims Johnson, “traditionally have entered the political arena on terms and conditions set by the on-going struggle between the petite bourgeoisie and the capitalist class” (p. 147). This idea results solely from Johnson’s mechanical, overly numerical analysis. There is nothing ‘inevitable’ in petite bourgeois hegemony despite their numerical preponderance. The history of socialist revolutions in the twentieth century clearly demonstrate that the proletariat need not be in a majority in

society to begin the first stages of a proletarian revolution; numbers do not simply make up a limiting factor by themselves.

While we can grant Johnson's point that conditions in Canada in 1890 (for example) were significantly different from revolutionary Russia and China, especially in terms of the importance of the contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the feudal modes of production in these countries, the principal criticism must still center around that indispensable missing subjective ingredient. But Johnson's mechanistic approach becomes even clearer: "so long as this struggle [that between the bourgeoisie and the petite bourgeoisie] holds center-stage, and no great political or economic errors are made by the capitalist protagonists, the growth of working class consciousness will be slow" (p. 147). Limiting factors, then, besides numerical insufficiency, include the dearth of errors by the capitalist class. Johnson does not enter into a discussion of how the working class achieves revolutionary consciousness; he simply asserts that under conditions prevailing historically it was impossible. Secondly, the emphasis on ruling class errors seems to be un-Marxian in that it does not take into account the contradictions internal to monopoly capitalism that produce crises irrespective of the best efforts of the capitalist class. It implies that, probably since Keynes, the bourgeoisie has had such control over the economy that only errors on their part cause crises.

"For the past century," Johnson claims, "Canada's history has been shaped by their [the petite bourgeoisie's] losing struggle against the maturing capitalist economy" (p. 151). The proletariat as junior partners fought essentially bourgeois battles (which ought not to imply that under specific conditions these battles may be the best interests of the working class). When labourers attempted to put forward their own demands, for example, for the One Big Union in 1919, "the workers found their erstwhile allies, the petite bourgeoisie, lined up solidly with the capitalists against them in a strategy of state repression. Given the numerical predominance [sic] of the petite bourgeoisie at those points in time, as well as the high level of their conscious class self-interest, the likelihood of a working class triumph [was slight]" (p. 151).

Johnson seems to moralize somewhat about the alliance with the petite bourgeoisie as if it were always a strategic mistake to have such allies. Conditions may not have been ripe for a working class triumph but the correct tactic would have been to unite all the classes that could be united, although it is necessary to eschew petite bourgeois leadership, and isolate the chief enemy thereby advancing one step at a time. At any rate, class alliance does not imply all alliance and no struggle. Canada was certainly sufficiently industrialized by that time to possess a proletariat of sufficient strength to use the inherently reaction) populism of the petite bourgeoisie to advance progressive causes, in this case, an anti-monopoly coalition.

In an important series of passages, Johnson further argues that,  
... therefore, a socialist strategy which drew its analysis from the European experience and concentrated on politics [?] and confrontation tactics rather than social development would appear to have been badly timed, unless significant sectors of the petite bourgeoisie could have been persuaded to join the workers in a socialist revolution. (p. 153)

Here, in the last part of the passage, Johnson does not recognize what appropriate tactics would have been, and that there is more to politics than only a socialist revolution. The paragraph also suggests his own conception of present tactics. By suggesting that they were badly timed, occurring as they did when the petite bourgeoisie had numerical hegemony, Johnson is implying that they are appropriate for the present based on no more of an analysis than the numerical decline of the petite bourgeoisie:

Thus, traditional appeals to the working class and classical strategies which were inappropriate in the Canadian class structure in 1920 or 1940 may now take on a new validity as the essential class conflict shifts to one between the working class and the capitalist owners. . . . In a situation where some 83 per cent of Canadians depend upon wages and salaries for their income, the loyalty of the majority of the population to the principle of private ownership of the means of production must [must!] be greatly weakened. (p.153)

This is hardly the dialectical treatment Johnson seemed to promise us in the beginning of his article and borders on the mechanical assumption of a one-to-one correspondence between objective and subjective factors; or at least suggests that objective factors are sufficient for the working class to achieve socialist consciousness. Had Johnson phrased it differently – that the potential for achieving such a consciousness given the decline of petite bourgeois property is greater for greater numbers of people – then objections would be minimal. He seems to be saying that since we are all proletarians now, socialism is on the immediate historical agenda. This has to be carefully qualified in relation to concrete conditions and cannot be accepted as baldly as Johnson's analysis implies.

The point is that given structural changes, and the present subjective conditions, the type of confrontation Johnson seems to be suggesting may still be inappropriate. Having practically dismissed alliance with the petite bourgeoisie because it was not socialist, Johnson draws this point out somewhat further:

Second, while the ideological remnants of the petite-bourgeois-capitalist struggle are likely to linger on for some time to come (indeed, it is to the advantage of the capitalist to confuse the situation by the perpetuation of populist and progressive ideals), the significant fact is that the petite bourgeoisie itself can no longer serve effectively as the first line of defense against a genuinely class conscious working class. (p.153)

But this passage begs the question. What could serve as an adequate defence for the bourgeoisie against a 'genuinely class conscious working class'? The question is: how does such a consciousness arise, and what are the current strategies necessary to produce it in the long run? And short of socialist consciousness, what are appropriate political tactics in the here and now? In an ideological sense it is true that the petite bourgeoisie does in fact provide the first line of defence for the capitalist class. This is an example of how an ideology that arises from material conditions in society can remain as a survival long after the original conditions which gave rise to it have disappeared. But this first line is not identical with Johnson's presentation above. In the era of imperialism the perpetuation of progressive and populist ideas (infused with nationalism) would be historically progressive and in need of cultivation, particularly in view of the low level of socialist consciousness in the working class. Under such an historical situation in Canada, as wide as possible an alliance must be created to struggle against U.S. imperialism, while integrating this struggle with the economic struggle in the country, which is a necessity given the extent of U.S. ownership in Canada. What may be needed is a 'national' stage or phase in the Canadian revolution in which the petite bourgeois remnants will serve as an ally – albeit an uncertain one – of the working class. It is interesting to note that Katz's criticism of Johnson's handling of the fisherman's strike in N.S. was that he failed to recognize that it was a petite bourgeois struggle *in alliance* with the working class, implying that the petite bourgeoisie is still in some cases progressive.

This criticism holds even in light of the following: "finally, a disillusioned petite bourgeoisie itself can make significant contributions to a socialist revolution, particularly in the

early stages” (p. 153). But they will do so precisely as a ‘petite bourgeoisie’; not as Johnson rather sarcastically suggested earlier by fighting for a socialist revolution, but by fighting for their own interests as a class in the present conjuncture. This, however, contradicts Johnson’s view that the petite bourgeois ideologies of populism, etc., are defences for the capitalist class. Even if Johnson means to say that these ideas, if held by the working class, are defences for the bourgeoisie, this is not true in light of the major contradiction: U.S. imperialism. It can be argued that even such a consciousness as populism could be progressive in the working class in light of its current subjective development. This does not deny that the perpetuation of petite bourgeois ideology hinders socialist consciousness; this, however, is more of a question of the development of the subjective factors to undermine bourgeois ideological hegemony.

Thus, it can be seen that the character of the structural analysis is intimately related to the type of tactical policies that seem required. What I am suggesting is that socialism is not on the historical agenda, as Johnson implies, in the sense that Canada might have to pass through essentially a form of ‘new democratic’ nationalist phase that would actually make agitation and confrontation on purely socialist grounds not only counter-productive but counter-revolutionary in the long run. Johnson, however, is careful to allow the implications to speak for themselves. He is merely suggesting that both tactics and theoretical analysis ought to be re-examined “and be accepted, modified, or rejected as they appear useful in the changing Canadian context.” (p. 153). To reiterate once more, however, Johnson’s analysis *implies* certain tactics, and in fact by leaving this discussion out, Johnson creates a vacuum in which these implied tactics speak for themselves and appear to be considered correct.

Turning briefly to Johnson’s section dealing with the bourgeoisie, he distinguishes between three types: a minority who are “at least temporarily still members of a national bourgeoisie with few or no ties to foreign capital or business activities”; the majority who are “deeply involved in multinational corporate business”; and a final minority group who “have reached the status of multinational capitalists themselves” (p. 159). Johnson is pessimistic, and probably correctly so, about the possibility of an alliance with the national bourgeoisie (such as it is), and seems to hold the position that any national capitalists will relate to the movement as they see fit rather than there being a determined policy of alliance with this class fraction. This categorization, it should be noted, seems to suggest that the major contradiction is U.S. imperialism. This factor may be precisely the one that distinguishes Canada from other developed Western capitalist nations: Canadian workers cannot settle accounts with their own bourgeoisie because to a considerable extent its own bourgeoisie is international capital. In some respects, then, Canada seems to be part of the third world, placing this nation in a unique position not only colonized, but to some extent colonizer as well, and this makes tactical considerations relatively complicated, especially with regard to Canadian capitalists.

Turning to Johnson’s analysis of occupational redistributions and changes in class composition in the non-capitalist classes, the key changes Johnson clearly demonstrates have been a decline in the percentage of farmers and menial labourers, and a corresponding increase of manual workers and especially white-collar workers. What the meaning of these shifts?

Apologists for capitalism and technology [?] have ... often argued that the creation of an enormous class of middle management where status is high and alienation low effectively refutes Marxist assumptions that capitalist modes of production create a high number of alienating tasks. (p. 163)

Here Johnson is again using a largely psychological definition of alienation – it is not used in the sense of separation from the means of production. Connected to this use of ‘alienation’ is a

confusing usage of the term 'proletarianization'. Johnson correctly defines as objectively proletarian all those who work for wages and do not own their own means of production (although certain categories, such as corporation lawyers, ought to be excluded on other grounds). He then discusses how, as an historical trend, the petite bourgeoisie has become proletarianized, i.e., deprived of their means of production and forced to sell their labour power. In discussing the white collar sphere, however, Johnson seems somewhat inconsistently to redefine proletarianization as a process of becoming psychologically alienated at work. Thus he can write: "It would seem, therefore, that the process of proletarianization-through-automation that destroyed the crafts worker in the nineteenth century may be repeated among the white collar workers in the twentieth" (p. 165). This is doubtlessly exactly what is occurring, but Johnson is confusing his terms; he does not claim that a 'new middle class' is being proletarianized, but that a sector of the proletariat is being proletarianized. Either there is more to class definition than objective relationship to the ownership of the means of production, or the objective fact alone of working as an employee of capital suffices to define the proletariat. Johnson began with the latter, but he slides into the former without explicitly indicating a changed definition of the working class. The problem is that Johnson does not deal with subjective factors and there is a clear problem with the assumption of a one-to-one relationship between class position (defined in his original three-class model) and subjective consciousness. Hence, when Johnson does try to integrate the subjective into his account, he does so in psychological terms.

Finally, Johnson attempts to explain structurally the failure of the Canadian working class to develop class consciousness. His explanation, positing the main contradiction historically as that between the petite bourgeoisie and the capitalists, requires him to delay somewhat the completion of Canadian industrialization until after 1945. "By 1961, the capitalist economic system was virtually all-encompassing in Canada" (p. 171). The period of growth had not been linear but on the contrary had been marked by "large and dramatic convulsions in the relationship of capital and labour, each of which created a period of unrest and heightened labour consciousness" (p. 172); but as previously indicated, the proletariat in each case was 'sold out' by their petty bourgeois allies.

This late industrialization, however, is what explains the stabilization of the proletariat in Canada. The rapid expansion of capitalism into pre-capitalist societies yields enormous profits. In the twentieth century, Canada had undergone this process. Furthermore the higher productivity of the capital-intensive industries allowed increased exploitation of the virgin Canadian environment. The result was that "the capitalist system could allow a high and increasing standard of living to the favoured sectors of the work force" (p. 172). It is one of the main theses of the study of contemporary imperialism that expansion of capitalism into pre-capitalist societies has only tenuous benefits for the colonized people. One can also fail to detect in Canada a spreading of industrial capitalism that this seems to suggest. Undoubtedly, Canada is a more 'developed' capitalist nation now that it was in 1901. This point does not negate that by 1901 standards Canada was an industrial nation. The industrialization was, and remains, centrally located, and the remainder of the country was (and remains) a resource hinterland and market. The implications that follow from the fact that Canada was an industrial nation in 1901 negate much of Johnson's discussion.

This point is of prime importance to this critique. Johnson seems to hold two assumptions. The first is an essentially mechanistic interpretation of Marxism that is content to stay at the level of objective long-term historical trends in terms of class definition. Secondly,

Canadian economic history has been marked by the decline of the petite bourgeoisie element which has resulted in a polarization into classes foreseen by Marx one hundred years before. Now this objective proletarianization ought logically to have led to an increased class consciousness on the part of the working class in Canada. Much of Johnson's concern is to show why this class consciousness has failed to develop as rapidly as it should have. However, what has happened historically is actually the opposite of what Johnson's argument would lead us to expect; that is, that this objective proletarianization has been accompanied by a decline in working class militancy.

Put more precisely, one of the sources of Johnson's difficulty is that he fails to draw the distinction between two kinds of working class consciousness: trade union consciousness and socialist consciousness. While Johnson argues that even the objective conditions in Canada were not ripe for socialist consciousness at the turn of the century, the actual existence of such a consciousness at that time indicates the inadequacy of Johnson's chronology. His whole perspective does not allow him to perceive that over the course of the twentieth century, the early militancy of the industrial working class has diminished and been replaced by business unionism. His focus on the numerical decline of the petite bourgeoisie has little to do with the decline of militancy in the twentieth century. In fact it was primarily the objective conditions in Canada (and elsewhere) that gave rise to the decline.

E. P. Thompson, in his study of the English working class, discovered a spontaneous development of working class consciousness between 1780 and 1832. Stephen Langdon, in his studies on the making of the working class in Canada contends that "a somewhat similar process of class emergence is clear among central Canadian working people, in the 1845-75 period. ... [and] argues that this development had reached significant proportions, and a relatively radical political perspective, by the early seventies."<sup>2</sup> In his article Langdon provides evidence to show that the increasing class consciousness of the workers in the 1870's included a perspective that linked them to workers elsewhere in the world, and that included a conception of inevitable class conflict with the bourgeoisie. There was a sense of proletarian internationalism and a developing class conflict that was becoming increasingly recognized for the power struggle it was. Workers "defined the struggle in strictly class terms; and they moved toward collective institutions that were meant to unite all workers across the country in a defence of their rights against the capitalists."<sup>3</sup> Besides recognizing the degree of militancy of the working class (which was not confined to Canada – how else to explain the expectation of Marx, Engels, Lenin that a European revolution was imminent?) Langdon's analysis also points to the significant growth of industrial capital that was occurring in central Canada by the 1870s, indicating that the process of Canadian industrialization was underway sufficiently early to make Johnson's historical analysis seriously incomplete.

There is evidence that a similar phenomenon existed concurrently in the United States. James Weinstein concluded a study of socialism in early twentieth century 'America' by denouncing the liberal myth of a lack of socialist heritage in that country:

A broadly based movement for socialism did exist in the United States before and during the First World War. ... [It] was conscious of its traditions and was ideologically unified by a commitment to a socialist re-organization of society....

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen Langdon, "The Emergence of the Canadian Working Class Movement, 1845-75," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, May, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Langdon, "The Emergence of the Canadian Working Class Movement 1845-75." Part II, *Journal of Canadian Studies*, p. 24.

Before 1920, the old Socialist Party had mass support at the polls, a widespread and vital press, a large following in the trade union movement, and a profound influence on the reformer and the reforms of the day.<sup>4</sup>

The major focus of Weinstein's book, however, was to demonstrate how, to a large extent, the failure of American socialism had been internal rather than external. Similarly, Michael Harrington, however reactionary his politics may be, provides a very useful brief summary of early socialist movements in the U.S., lest one conclude that socialism is foreign to North America.<sup>5</sup>

While Langdon recognized wide-spread militancy among the Canadian working class, he also sees what he interprets as a contradiction that only a minority of them had what in essence would be called a socialist consciousness. This spontaneous class consciousness of the minority of workers arose without the aid of a vanguard party, which it is so "paternalistically" thought workers will need. The unanswered questions are why socialism develops only among a minority of workers and the role of the existing socialist party in helping to develop this ideology. Like Johnson, he does not distinguish between kinds of consciousness. Trade union consciousness could indeed be very militant and secure important concessions for the working class. This the workers will spontaneously develop in the economic struggle alone. Socialist consciousness has to be brought to the workers from the outside. The point is what kind of party helps develop this consciousness and what form does it take?

Martin Robin has argued that militant consciousness was actually low in the late nineteenth century, which he attributes to the ethnic and geographic heterogeneity of the working class, status and income divisions, social mobility and employment fluctuations.<sup>6</sup> Michael Harrington for the U.S. case and Stephen Langdon for the Canadian, have demonstrated, however, that historically, common working conditions could overcome some of these divisions, particular the ethnic heterogeneity. It is somewhat of a paradox that there was more solidarity between ethnically differentiated groups within the working class historically than currently, at least among more radicalized sectors, perhaps a reflection of the success of ruling class tactics of dividing class allies.

Charles Lipton singles out the dominance of international (U.S.) unions in Canada as a significant factor in the decline of labor militancy in Canada, The defeat of the national trade union movement by the 'internationals' paved the way for establishing a labour aristocracy of trade unions in Canada which were dominated by the philosophy of business unionism.<sup>7</sup> This occurred both during the Great Depression, and earlier in the history of Canadian labour. Irving Abella has shown how this process was actually encouraged by Canadian radicals, indicating that by the 1930's, trade union consciousness and right opportunism permeated the labour movement in Canada.<sup>8</sup> This view, however, contradicts both Harrington and Langdon for whom the 1930's marked a rise in class consciousness. In particular, it consolidated the hold of business unionism on the working class; it aimed at increasing the share of national product going to labour but was very far from calling for the end of wage slavery. This tendency within the labour unions is

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<sup>4</sup> James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America 1912-1925*, (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1967), p. ix.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Harrington "Old Working Class, New Working Class," *Dissent*, Winter, 1972.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Robin, "Determinants of Radical Labour and Socialist Politics in English-Speaking Canada, 1880-1939", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, May, 1967, pp. 27-39, passim.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Lipton, *The Trade Union Movement in Canada 1827-1959*, (Montreal: Canadian Social Publications Ltd., 1960).

<sup>8</sup> Irving Abella, "The C.I.O.—Reluctant Invaders", *Canadian Dimension*, Vol. 8 No. 6, March-April 1972, pp. 20-23.

presently coming under attack as the rank and file mount reform campaigns within the unions, and reject negotiated settlements. While such tendencies are progressive, they are still economistic. The role of the left becomes very problematic; in fact, while supporting the legitimate demands of the workers, explicitly revolutionary propaganda aimed at the rank and file is frequently counter-productive. The first step would be to approach the leaders who the workers themselves respect. Support from the left must be based on the wishes of the people they desire to help. It is still true (despite Stanley Aronowitz's claim) that the appropriate policy is to allow the working class to develop skills in practice. This is the function of trade unions, and is the real socialistic function of strikes. It is ultra-left to enter disputes once they erupt and try to claim leadership positions. The actual hard work of organizing and 'agitating' is the real revolutionary activity in the present. The greatest tactical weakness of Johnson's article is that you do not get this sense of slow development. It seems to be merely a question of spreading the word to the objectively ready to be converted and thereby precipitating the final labour-capital confrontation which will bring in socialism in one motion. From the point of view of this paper, however, the important problem is a theoretical one: to recognize the external, i.e., structural factors in Canadian capitalism that have resulted in the decline of working class militancy in this century.

## Part II

There seem to be two basic problems with Johnson's class analysis. One is that even speaking purely objectively, he has not drawn a sufficiently careful distinction between various strata. It is unacceptable to claim that all wage and salary earners are even objectively proletarian. The second point is that a Marxist class analysis which is to be the basis of practice (the only legitimate reason for doing a Marxist class analysis – other reasons are purely bourgeois) must incorporate the subjective element as well. Ossowski says, "The sharing of permanent economic interests is a particularly important characteristic of social classes in Marxian doctrine, and is ... in the Marxian view, a necessary condition [but] ... not ... a sufficient condition for a valid definition of social class."<sup>9</sup> To become a class in the full meaning of the term, the members who share the economic interests must be bound to each other by the ties of class consciousness. According to Charles Anderson, class is a matter of degree, and he posits six definitional criteria of social class, the final and most highly developed of which is political organization.<sup>10</sup>

This qualification opens up the possibility of a wider divergence of subjective from objective factors than a focus resting exclusively on objective criteria would suggest. Lukacs distinguished between two kinds of consciousness, actual and ascribed, the latter representing the consciousness one would have if capable of completely grasping all the ramifications of the prevailing condition.<sup>11</sup> Unlike the bourgeoisie, who can successfully act independently of other members of their class, the working class must act collectively. According to Hobsbawm, to be effective this collective action requires a formal organization with structure and leadership which is capable of exercising hegemony over the working class. "Revolutionary socialist regimes, unlike bourgeois ones, arise not out of a class, but out of the characteristic combination of class and organization. It is not the working class itself which takes power and exercises hegemony, but the working class *movement* or *party*."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Stanislaw Ossowski, *Class Structure in the Social Consciousness*, (London, 1973), p. 71.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Anderson, *The Political Economy of social Class*, (Englewood Cliffs N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1974), pp. 49-50.

<sup>11</sup> E.J. Hobsbawm, "Class Consciousness and History", in Istvan Meszaros, (Ed.) *Aspects of History and Class Consciousness*, (London: Routledge & KeGan Paul, 1971), p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

If we include class consciousness in our definitional criteria of the working class, then a subjective analysis would have to follow the objective to illuminate correct tactics in any concrete struggle. It therefore becomes necessary to discuss those divisions within the working class that prevent workers from identifying their class interests.

While under 'normal' conditions, bourgeois hegemony prevails, "under conditions of growing social crisis, a growing part of th[e] ... working class cannot but liberate itself progressively from that same ideology and pattern of behavior inspired by the ruling class."<sup>13</sup> While it is true that under crisis situations rapid transformations of consciousness are possible, such situations have been short-lived, and it has proved difficult to maintain the level of consciousness developed. However crisis situations are crucial to the development of socialist consciousness, and it is for this reason in part that one can claim that the decline in militancy (especially since 1945) has primarily been caused by objective factors; that is, while we may postulate a separation of the subjective and the objective, it is still true that they must react upon each other, and that the subjective factors will not develop without the material base. The key to the process, then, is "the interaction between the spontaneous struggles of the workers, the role of the vanguard organization, and the growth of working class consciousness."<sup>14</sup>

In his essay on "Class structure and Social Consciousness", Bottomore seems to be suggesting that if aspirations can be satisfied, then revolutionary potential will be undercut. If on the other hand aspirations cannot be satisfied, then a revolutionary situation will develop. The French revolution, it seems, would not have occurred had the ruling class made sufficient concessions (or, it may be added, was capable of making these concessions in the first place). Consequently, the basis of the stability (hitherto) of twentieth century capitalism has rested on concessions rationally granted by the ruling class.<sup>15</sup> This view would appear to be based on the history of the opportunism in the British working class movements.

If we accept this as a partial answer to the question of how to account for the decline in working class militancy, it seems clear that we must first discover on what basis it has been historically possible to 'bribe' significant segments of the working class. Marx and Engels clearly recognized the tendency towards right opportunism on the part of English workers. Engels wrote to Kautsky (when the latter was still revolutionary) that in England "the workers merrily share the feast of England's monopoly of the colonies and the world market."<sup>16</sup> This caustic comment must not be misinterpreted, however, and Lenin correctly places the emphasis when he writes that "imperialism has the tendency to create privileged sections also among the workers, and to detach them from the broad masses of the proletariat."<sup>17</sup> Lenin recognized that the imperialist division of the world prior to World War One had created such 'labour aristocracies' in each imperialist nation.

It is important to recognize the dialectical interaction between the Third World and the imperialist metropolises. While it is correct to show that the advances in technology and the increase in the relative surplus value are important factors in the increase of the standard of living of most of the classes in Canada, it is also clear that imperialism in the twentieth century has primarily taken the aspect of the export of capital to the hinterland. It is one of the main

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<sup>13</sup> Ernest Mandel, "Revolutionary Strategy in the Imperialist Countries," in Mandel and George Novack (Eds.) *The Revolutionary Potential of the Working Class*, (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1974), pp. 34-5.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> T.B. Bottomore, "Class Structure and Social Consciousness" in Meszaros (Ed.), *op cit*, *passim*.

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Engels to Kautsky, August 11, 1881, quoted in *Guardian*, Oct. 25, 1972, p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> Lenin, quoted in *Guardian*, Oct. 25, 1972, p. 11.

arguments of Baran and Sweezy's *Monopoly Capital* that this export could not solve the contradictions of capitalism because the exported capital exploited the people of the third world to an even greater degree, which resulted in the transfer of surplus back to the metropole, aggravating the surplus absorption problem. Nevertheless, imperialist exploitation is crucially responsible for the creation of privileged sections of the working class. Canada can be an imperialistic nation without owning colonies. The dialectical interaction of the North American economy with the Third World is becoming increasingly evident as the movements for independence, liberation and revolution in the Third World force the imperialist nations to turn increasingly to the exploitation of their own working class.

It is against this background that one can understand the "social transformations which have characterized the move from crisis capitalism to organized capitalism."<sup>18</sup> (Perhaps the terminology has become somewhat unjustified in the present crisis.) The 'new capitalism', for Goldman the second phase of 'imperialist capitalism', has provided the material base for the rise in real wages that has been a general trend since the Second World War. It has also "profoundly altered the social structure of western societies. ... It has progressively replaced the old middle strata [petite bourgeoisie in Johnson's terms] ... by a different sort of middle strata, who enjoy an income which is large ... but who are also specialists dependent on or employed by others."<sup>19</sup> From this point of view, Johnson's article is a step backward from C. Wright Mills who, in *White Collar*, analysed a similar numerical decline of the 'old middle class' but then went on to describe and characterize the 'new middle class' which had progressively taken its place, and which was infused with liberalism and petite bourgeois ideology. Several recent studies have taken a Marxist structural approach to understand the rise of this new middle class. Martin Nicolaus, from his study of the *Grundrisse*, has claimed that Marx not only recognized the increasing numerical importance of the middle strata, but that his analysis of capitalism is quite capable of explaining this growth.<sup>20</sup> This analysis was taken farther by John Urry who provides not only a useful typology of the 'middle classes' based on objective factors, but goes on to explain why the functions they fulfill cannot be undertaken by either the bourgeoisie or the proletariat.<sup>21</sup> Rosenberg, in his article on "Perceptual Obstacles to Glass Consciousness" lists several factors rooted in the economic and political institutional structure that have led to misperceptions of one's class position,<sup>22</sup> most of them particularly relevant to the middle classes.

It is important to discuss the question of the development of revolutionary potential in the North American working class and the forces that have fettered this development. It should be pointed out that Johnson spends considerable time discussing these factors in the context of explaining why class consciousness has not developed in step with the objective proletarianization, although he seems to give a much wider meaning to the concept of a 'labour aristocracy' than is warranted, including within it all industrial workers.<sup>23</sup>

The point of this brief overview of alternative conceptions of class is that there is more to the objective transformation of objective conditions than the rise of an unpropertied majority, and that subjective consciousness does not parallel objective circumstances in any unmediated way.

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<sup>18</sup> Lucien Goldman, "History and Class consciousness", in Meszaros (Ed.), op cit, p. 79.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Nicolaus, "Proletariat and Middle Class in Marx...", *Studies on the Left*, Vol. 7, No. 1, Jan.-Feb. 1967, pp. 22-49.

<sup>21</sup> John Urry, "Towards a Structural Theory of the Middle Class", *Acta Sociologica*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 1973, pp. 175-187.

<sup>22</sup> M. Rosenberg, "Perceptual Obstacles to Class Consciousness", *Social Forces*, Vol. 32, 1953, pp. 22-27.

<sup>23</sup> Letter from Larry Katz to Leo Johnson, July 25, 1972.

In particular, it is necessary to face the structural changes that have created a large, non-manual employed stratum that is conscious of itself as a 'middle class' and does not spontaneously gravitate to working class politics.

In sum, Johnson's work has many major shortcomings. His analysis is based on a mistaken chronology for capitalist industrialization leading him to posit the untenable theory that because of its numerical minority relative to the petite bourgeoisie the proletariat has failed to achieve its aims in the past seventy years. His emphasis on purely quantitative factors leads to an omission of the subjective factors from his analysis, of the distinction between trade union and socialist consciousness, and of the necessity for a working class political organization. Consequently he fails to take into consideration the historically demonstrable decline in working class consciousness and militancy in the post-Second World War part of this century. This decline can largely be attributed to objective changes in contemporary capitalism and the simultaneous social transformation that has taken place in the class structure relating to the rise of a surplus class in an intermediate position between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. This surplus class fulfills functions of both capital and labour, and its conditions of work make it particularly susceptible to petite bourgeois ideology. Johnson fails to give a concrete analysis of concrete conditions, instead staying at the level of historical generalities, imputing tactics from them.

Johnson implies that the chief contradiction in Canada is between labour and capital and that therefore the tactics which proved erroneous in a period of petite bourgeois hegemony may now be appropriate given the polarization of the class struggle between bourgeoisie and wage-earners. His tactical mistake is his failure to recognize that the chief enemy is imperialism, and that the Canadian working class must struggle for independence in alliance with the petite bourgeoisie as the first stage of the Canadian revolution. As in other countries historically and in the present, the question of the middle strata is fundamental. Tactics, however, cannot be laid down in advance but must remain flexible. If the present crisis were to profoundly worsen, then objective conditions for the development of socialist consciousness might alter short-term tactics. Without this alteration, however, it would seem that political practice requires the foundation of a broadly-based anti-imperialist movement in Canada while 'theoretical practice' requires a thorough knowledge of the structure of twentieth century capitalism in Canada, focusing on the complexities of the class structure on one hand, and the proletarianization of the white-collar sector on the other, particularly the poorly paid but vital government employees.