

THE STRUCTURE AND CRYSTALIZATION OF THE “NEW MIDDLE CLASS”

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Introduction.

Intellectuals writing in both Marxist and more orthodox sociological traditions have revived the controversial question of the existence of a ‘new middle class’ in contemporary capitalism. This debate is most extensive among neo—Marxists faced with the need to conceptualize the proliferating occupational specialties in western societies. Among neo—Marxists, the theoretical basis of this ‘new class’ is located in its close relationship to authority (Dahrendorf, 1954; Wright, 1976), or its contradictory structured condition as simultaneously wage labour and agent of capital accumulation (Carchedi, 1977; Crompton and Gubbay, 1979), or as mental A workers responsible for reproducing capitalist relations of production (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, 1977). Writers have differed on the theoretical status afforded these occupational groupings who are combined variably as members of the new ‘class’, in some cases denying its existence in favour of unity with the working class (Johnston, 1972) or the traditional petty bourgeoisie (Poulantzas, 1973; Szymanski, 1979), in other cases postulating its existence as an intermediate stratum (Wright, 1976), and in others, asserting its ultimately reactionary character as fundamentally opposed to the working class (Lindsey, 1980).

For their parts some sociological writers have sought the explanation for the existence of an apparently crystallized ‘new middle class’ in Weberian notions of ‘closure’ (Parkri, 19714), or capitalist market mechanisms (Blackburn and Mann, 1979). Giddens, the most influential sociologist writing on contemporary class, includes as theoretically secondary definitions in class determination (relative to market forces), the importance of several elements in the social relations of production (Giddens, 1973). While for the neo—Marxists, the status of the ‘new middle class’ as a distinct generic class interest is problematic, sociologists tend to assume that all qualitative breaks in the social division of labour identify class differences.

In reviving some of the elements in this debate this paper begins from the point of view that the labor/capital distinction is the most fundamental class division in capitalist society. Within the enormous proportion of the occupational structure which falls on the ‘labor’ side of this basic contradiction, there are numerous divisions which relate directly to other significant factors in the social division of labor, specifically authority relations and the mental/manual axis. None of these divisions amount to the theoretical status of interests determined by the labor/capital contradiction in capitalist

Structure and Crystallization of New Middle Class

society. But as immediate determinants of class action, class consciousness and organization, they have a crucial explanatory rule. The 'new middle class' emerges as a theoretically secondary division in the class structure, important because of its salience in class struggle, and its significance in socialist and other post – capitalist modes of production where the gross question of private property ownership has been solved or considerably modified.

In pre – capitalist social formations, there were numerous modes of exploitation – the concrete forms in which the surplus product of the producers was appropriated by the non – producers – in many of which the producers retained certain rights over property. In industrial capitalism, the class structure emerges in the context of the polarized ownership of the means of production. The essential class distinction is expressed by the dichotomy between property and propertylessness which defines two general class categories: these who possess rights over productive property and those who possess nothing but their capacity to labour.

The condition of propertylessness is not by itself socially sustaining for it entails no autonomous means of subsistence. The property dichotomy not only defines two groups with opposite characteristics, but implies that there is a necessary relationship between them. The form of this relationship is not fixed merely by the condition of propertylessness and the manner of exploitation can vary, depending on historical circumstances (Petras, 1978). In the model of the capitalist mode of production, in order to procure subsistence, the propertyless are constrained to sell their labour power on the market. This distinction formed the basis of the Marxian dichotomous model of class.

This dichotomous model is modified in two ways: vertically and horizontally. Vertically, the capitalist mode of production is divided between the various analytically separate moments of the production and reproduction of capitalist society, specifically the productive sphere, the sphere of circulative, and the state. These define the various fractions within the two dominant classes, determined by the source of income. These will be discussed briefly below. The second major source of differentiation is horizontal and derives from other elements of the social relations of production. It is in the latter sense that a more or less crystallised "new middle class" emerges in industrial capitalism, and the bulk of this paper will be concerned with these theoretically secondary divisions.

Proletarianism and Proletarianisation.

With regard to the determination of social classes, the vertical division of labour modifies, but does not change fundamentally, the two – class model which is the sine qua non of the capitalist mode of production. In the nineteenth century, however, the

Structure and Crystallization of New Middle Class

actual class structure of industrializing Europe was more complicated than Marx's dichotomous model. This was first because of the continued existence of classes external to the capital/ labour relationship. The third class identified by Marx in his note on classes in *Capital*, the landowners receiving income in the form of rent, was destined to be absorbed by the principal classes (1971: 88~—886). More numerous than this grouping among the propertied were the various petit bourgeois groupings comprising the peasantry in rural areas and small scale producers as well as retailers in urban areas.

Within a class definition which rests on property, because of its unique properties, there is room in the productive sphere (as distinct from those excluded from production altogether), for a group which neither buys nor sells labour power but produces independently. The petite bourgeoisie, as defined, stands apart from the fundamental class distinctions of industrial capitalism — they are not involved in either aspect of the basic structural relationship. Within the petty bourgeois there is endemic *cam* — petition between its constituent parts among sellers for a share of the market. The conditions that compel these variegated elements towards separate class formation result from its historical position between the classes of large scale industrial capitalism. It is middle rather than only a third class because on the one hand its subordinate relationship to powerful combines produces a common, if not mutual, antagonism shared by the proletariat, for their part as sellers of labour. Alternatively, this temporary alliance can be undermined by threats to the privileges of property.

In Marxist theory, with the development of industrial capitalism, these small owners were to undergo the classical form of proletarianisation: being separated from the ownership of their small scale property by the forces of competition, the petty bourgeoisie would be forced to sell its labour on the market. Classical proletarianisation was a process which directly affected individuals, independent producers who were literally forced on the labour market following the loss of their capital. This was a process of immediate and personal alienation, a process occurring while Marx was in Europe discovering the proletariat. Proletarianisation in this direct form would most logically have given rise to immediate radical responses of various types. Marx's claim was not simply to discover the alienation brought about by the spread of capitalist relations — all socialists of the period were acutely aware of this — but to see a potential in the modern proletariat for overcoming all economically — based antagonistic forms of alienation. Those particularistic interests which depended on the possession of rights over productive property were absent in the propertyless proletariat, giving them the capacity for constructing a socialist society, as well as the generic interest in such a society.

While direct proletarianisation may lie behind many dramatic historical responses, in addition to this change affecting formally independent producers, it is useful to consider the effects of the other meanings of the concept. As indicated in the

Structure and Crystallization of New Middle Class

transformation of the occupational structure, there is a longer—range structural component involving the recruitment of new employees to proletarian positions. This reflects inter—generational rather than intra—generational shifts as the sons and daughters of independent workers seek employment in expanding industrial capitalism. This process has perhaps fewer immediate implications for radical action, but the long—term structural effect of the rise of a proletariat is most significant.

Both of these uses of the term, individual or structural proletarianisation, involve the transformation of independent work to more or less dependent employment. However, as was indicated by the classical definition of the proletariat, the great bulk of the labour force occupies a common position. Clearly, however, while all employees share the experience of selling their labour power, this unity of interests is complicated by the fact that specific labour powers have greater or lesser value (see Russell, 1981:251—252).

If the proletarian condition implies routine work in a large and hierarchical employment setting, under close direction and supervision, for returns that provide only a socially—defined subsistence minimum (Ossowski, 1963), then there can be two conceptions of proletarianisation within the working class as a whole. The first is structural and is expressed in degrees of proletarianism, since not all of the positions generated in the division of labour constituted the full conditions of this “model” proletarian position. The second is processual and refers to a downward convergence affecting the relatively privileged strata of the propertyless. A stratum becomes relatively proletarianised to the extent that those aspects which have initially differentiated the grouping from the proletarian condition are eroded. Again this implies a process directly affecting individuals subject to work rationalisation, wage—cuts, redundancy, and so on. The concept is not specific to a white—collar grouping but can equally apply to more or less advantageous positions within the manual working class.

In this sense the concept “proletarianism” has both a static and dynamic element. In the former, it would be possible to distinguish between occupational strata as representing degrees of proletarianism. As a dynamic process, the concept entails change over time and an erosion of those elements which had accorded a grouping a superior position.

The principal of property ownership and the polarisation of the work—force between propertied and propertyless is the primary class distinction in capitalist society. The emergence of labour power as a commodity is centrally important to the capitalist mode of production. Within this necessary relationship all sellers of labour power express some degree of separate interest vis—à—vis their employer. Seen as a commodity exchange, a process of bargaining is inherent, whether it involves a particularistic relationship with the employer or collective action in a large organized

Structure and Crystallization of New Middle Class

enterprise. Managers and administrators may also, in this respect, be members of the wage—and—salary grouping (assuming no stock ownership and an appropriately modest salary), and conditions specific to their terms and conditions of employment can lead to individualistic or collective responses to this bargaining.

In the case of the propertyless, this bargaining is constrained, first and foremost, by the necessity of selling labour power which is implicit in the condition itself. At a certain empirical level of ownership, the relationship between the propertied and the propertyless implies a certain mutual dependence which is the basis of inter—class cooperation. Below this specific level the identical imperative is not operative for the propertied since it is possible for them to work with their means of production independently. However, in the capital/labour relationship, both the employers' investment and the workers' security seem to depend mutually on the success of the enterprise. Analytically, however, there is an important distinction. For the employer the maintenance of his class position is dependent on the success of his capital. For the small employer especially, to go bankrupt carries with it the threat of proletarianization. For the employee the failure of the firm does not strip him of his property nor, generally speaking, of his class: depending on market factors he can sell his labour power to another capital. Concretely, however, this process is complicated by the fact that not all sellers of labour power are equal.

Horizontal Division of Labour.

It was not only the existence of classes from superseded modes of production which complicated the class structure of industrial capitalism, but in addition to this there have been processes of differentiation among the propertyless. Specialization represents one of the general models of the horizontal division of labour in capitalist society. There is an even greater proliferation of processes of increasingly specialized knowledge and skill. This unceasing growth, the process of individuation, continually expanded the number and scope of particular interests. The result was diversification, fragmentation and the partial dissolution of social classes as crystallized groupings. The division of labour in industrial capitalism, however, took on an especially exaggerated form. In this mode of production, in which the possessors of capital exercised unilateral formal control over the work process, each complex specialized task was further sub—divided, assuming a sufficient scale of production, into minute components each of which became the province of individual workers. This degree of 'alienation' within the work process, as distinct from the alienation of the product, arose less from technological imperatives and more from the mode of organisation of work determined by capital in its own interests (Braverman, 1974; Rinehart, 1975). Beginning with this extreme division, however, this second model predicts a specific kind of

Structure and Crystallization of New Middle Class

homogenisation of labour, not of occupations, which concerns the specific parameters of the task performed, but of the general level of skill, such that workers could move freely between jobs, each of which required only minimal competence and on—the—job training. This model posits a tendency operating in industrial capitalism to reduce labour costs by fragmenting and simplifying work processes within an increasingly complex division of labour.

Specialisation and polarisation express, on the one hand, alternate models of the division of labour. However, in a certain sense, both strategies have been pursued, the former absolutely and the second in a special sense connected to the notion of degrees of proletarianism. As discussed above, this concept derives from the commodity status of labour and includes the conditions and terms of the sale of labour power within the context of the subordination of labour.

The origins of capitalism as a mode of production are essentially located, according to Marx, in the mass emergence of labour power as a commodity. The labourer was free in a double sense: negatively “free” from the ownership of productive property, and legally free to sell his labour power on the market. Under capitalism, the labourer “must constantly look upon his labour power as his own property, his own commodity” (Marx, 1906: 186). The labour—capital relation appears, first, as a market transaction in which an individual, who possesses nothing but a capacity to work, agrees to alienate this capacity and place his labour at the disposal of an employer under certain agreed conditions. In each such case an individual labour contract is implied between two formally equal agents. Seen in these terms, as is the case with any commodity exchange, the seller is concerned to get the maximum exchange value and the buyer is concerned to pay out the least. This difference of interests is the same as that between any buyer and seller on the market.

There is an important distinction with the selling of labour power, however. In most other cases, when a commodity is alienated, the transaction finishes with the transfer of ownership of the commodities. With payment, the buyer simultaneously possesses the commodity and becomes the legal ‘owner’ of the commodity labour power for a set period of time. But this ~ownership’ is of a different kind. The employer does not become the owner of the labour, that is, the labourer. Like any commodity, according to Marx, labour power has both a use value and an exchange value and the worker realizes that latter and parts with the former for a specific period during which time the capitalist has the use of this labour power: it “no longer ‘belongs’ to the seller” (:216).

However, in selling his labour power, the worker “does not renounce his rights of ownership over it” (:187), although for a specific period the labourer has voluntarily agreed to waive this right. (of course, in a situation of propertylessness the voluntary nature of this contract is a formality.) Labour power is appropriated by capital and what

Structure and Crystallization of New Middle Class

was initially a formally equal relationship between the equal rights of two commodity owners becomes asymmetrical. The labour contract implies a voluntary subordination of labour to capital and in the process capital acquires “command over labour”. But because, unlike other commodities, labour power cannot be disembodied, this contract implies command over the “labourer himself” (:336). The labourer continues to possess the labour power during the time of the contract. The transaction is not completed until the work process is over, after the full appropriation of labour power when the wages are paid.

The fact that the commodity cannot be disembodied, and that its appropriation occurs over a period of time, means that, unlike other commodity sellers, the worker has an intrinsic interest in the conditions of use of his commodity; that is over the conditions of work. If there is some sense of a “fair” market price for labour (for Marx, the cost of reproducing labour power of a specific quality, or skill), there is no inherent limit to the demands that can be made by the labourer with respect to the conditions of appropriation of the use—value of his labour power. This issue of control implies a far more fundamental antagonism of interest between labour and capital, based on the subordination of labour, than the disagreement over the prices of labour, and relates directly to the social relations of production.

Class analysis, which proceeds from these relations, must go beyond the essential contradiction between private appropriation and social production, the essential dichotomy of the property variable. Among the social relations within the latter aspect of the contradiction, within social production, two structural tendencies in the division of labour stand out: the relations of authority in the enterprise and the tendency to divide work tasks along the mental and manual axis.

Derived Authority

In industrial capitalism, property implies among other things “the power of disposing of the labour power of others” (Marx, 1974: 52—53), a relation which implies authority, control over the workforce and the material means of production, in addition to the rights of appropriation of the whole product. The specific legal framework defining the rights of this disposal may vary between, for example, privately owned or state owned enterprises. The main issue is the actual form and content of the relationship between the management and the workforce, there being considerable variation, from the embrace of paternalism, through bureaucratic rigidity to formal autocracy. The exercise of class control — power over others in production — is expressed as a continuous process since it can be found in varying degrees. While it emanates from the power at the apex of the organization, below this level it is delegated, it is “derived authority” (Mills, 1956). In hierarchial organizations there is a defined structure of

Structure and Crystallization of New Middle Class

delegated authority over those below and responsibility to those above. Such authority, in descending degrees, includes a discretionary element, a degree of autonomy in independent decision—making. This introduces a third important element: relative autonomy. In addition to the exercise of delegated authority and the proletarian condition, defined in part as being the object of such power (while noting that power is never absolute and there is always an element of negotiation), there are degrees of autonomy, of partial freedom from constant surveillance and control. While those with delegated authority of necessity exercise some autonomy, they are directly responsible for the output of others below them and are subject to review. Those without such derived authority who nevertheless exercise degrees of control over their own work — from professionals to some unskilled outdoor workers or truck drivers — are in a distinct relationship vis—à—vis authority compared with the proletarian condition (Blackburn and Mann, 1979).

Employers who exercise control over the workforce or the allocation of resources within the enterprise are regarded as being in an ambiguous class position since they sell their labour power, and are therefore subject to authority from above, while simultaneously directing the labour powers of those below. Insofar as they are employees they have interests with regard to the selling of labour power which are at variance with the employer. On these grounds a potential common antagonism exists with other employers. Insofar as they exercise domination over other personnel, they occupy a position which reflects the authority of the employer. As a continuous grouping, the position of supervisory and management personnel depends on the relative weight of the authority they wield and the control to which they are subject, that is, their relative autonomy.

As a third general position vis—à—vis authority relations, autonomy expresses one of the important attributes of a second set of positions determined by the division of labour in advanced capitalism: that between mental and manual tasks.

The Mental/Manual Axis

In addition to the question of ownership and authority, the division of labour has tended to separate two inter—related components of the process of production: conception and execution. For Marx, labour—power, or the capacity for labour, consists of “the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he exercises whenever he produces a use value” (Marx, 1906: 186). The uniquely human form of labour is that the labourer has a purpose which is constructed mentally prior to the productive act which, in turn, realizes this purpose. In the manufacturing system, Marx noted, there was a tendency to create detail labour within which the intellectual facilities were stripped from the workers and concentrated in the hands of

Structure and Crystallization of New Middle Class

capital. There was the separation of labour from “the intellectual potencies of the material process of production, as the property of another, and as a ruling power” (:397). In this context, Marx argued, science became a productive force which was both distinct from and arrayed against labour (:397), and he noted how capital was more and more tending to separate these two components of the labouring process (:399). With regard to both the authority dimension and the aspect of conception, it is possible to speak of processes of actual usurpation or appropriation, as well as structural modes which tend to reproduce the distinctions between authority and powerlessness and mental and manual work. By mental work is usually meant the performance of tasks which require specialized symbolic knowledge and a considerable degree of autonomy or independence in the work situation. It relates to control over the technical aspect of the labour process (as distinct from the power over the work of others). Mental work usually entails a demarcated sphere of competence sufficiently wide to allow for degrees of independent creativity in the conception or performance of tasks, as opposed to merely carrying out instructions or performing routine operations. Complex manual skills retain vestiges of this conceptual aspect in addition to relative autonomy over the work process. This relative autonomy creates the conditions for the development of conceptions of distinct “class” interests. Among mental workers, intellectuals narrowly speaking — — those symbol generators with high degrees of autonomy, although they may increasingly be brought within organizational structures which limit their independence — — have the greatest capacity for developing such separate “class” interests. Other mental workers whose sphere of competence is more narrowly restricted by their position in bureaucratic organizations may have less capacity. In any case, the position in such a structure is ambiguous because, on the one hand, there may be problems of “rationalization” which narrow the sphere of competence (and elicit conflict within bureaucratic organizations), and on the other, such organizations provide defined niches not only for independent career development, but for exercising relative degrees of independent work.

The proletarian condition, then, with regard to the objective relations of production, entails the selling of labour power in a situation where the worker has no control over the work process — — on the contrary, is directly subject to authority — — does not exercise delegated power, and occupies positions which require, at best, only the residues of conceptualization. Proletarianization, as a relative process which occurs among the property — less, entails the stripping away from individuals of their opportunity to exercise their skill or delegated authority in more autonomous situations, and compelling them to exercise it within more systematically restrained conditions. As with the classical conception, this sense of the term describes a process which may affect individuals directly. For example, reclassification or reorganization of work can redefine the job description of individuals limiting their opportunity to

Structure and Crystallization of New Middle Class

exercise previously utilized skills and placing them in a structure of hierarchical power where they are subject to direction more than they exercise authority. To the extent that relative proletarianization has been incomplete, the process will develop semi—proletarian groups which continue to possess modicums of those objective attributes which distinguish them from the proletarian condition.

The proletarianization of the work force, as a process, only partially proceeds by the down—grading of specific individuals. More significant numerically has been the recruitment of individuals to relatively more proletarianized positions in the division of labour. This involves two dove— tailing occurrences. One is the division of labour which is organized so that such positions are created, and the second involves the question of selective recruitment (Parkin, 1971). In the context of a glutted labour market for individuals with intricate skills, those defined as overqualified may be hired to work in a position which offers less opportunity for the exercise of full competency. (This is generally seen as problematic by the employer because the individual is less liable to develop the requisite loyalty to the firm since the job will be seen as a temporary demotion in a life—time career of richer prospects. Such employees may be more resistant to company domination.)

More important, however, is the recruitment of those who are largely unskilled to fill positions developed which more closely approximate the proletarian condition. These are usually filled by social minority groups, or by female labour. Besides generating more proletarian positions, the division of labour has to some extent reinforced the distinction between extra—class social groups: as structural proletarianism proceeds simultaneously with selective recruitment, the class structure comes more closely to parallel other social cleavages. Whether social oppressions overlap or cross—cut class cleavages, social action is inextricably entangled with these other dimensions.

Relations of Production in the Social Division of Labour

The horizontal division of labour in capitalist society has been expressed by both the principles of differentiation and polarization. In the process while the diffusion of authority and the separation of mental and manual tasks have been the main strategies, the resulting division has been a more complex than a simple manual/non—manual cleavage, and such a division does not correspond directly with a mental/manual distinction. This separation between intellectual and manual tasks is not absolute — insofar as human labour is concerned it could not be. No productive task performed by a human is a purely mechanical, reflex—like action. Similarly, nothing is accomplished mentally without some physical expenditure of energy. In this sense it is a false dichotomy. Nevertheless the relative separation of the two constituent components has

Structure and Crystallization of New Middle Class

proceeded in a process which has sub—divided the work process into mental and manual spheres, albeit in a complex and shifting fashion which produces essentially manual tasks within the mental sphere of work.

The petty bourgeois producer combined in his role several essential elements of production: he performed both mental and manual work, combining conception and execution. He had a degree of autonomy over the work, controlling its organization and time: although increasingly the expanding capitalist market imposed constraints, bringing in its train long hours, difficulties of supply, distribution, credit, and so on, he was not subject to the direct imposition of regulations and control by an overseer. Many small businessmen continue to subsist in this fashion in all western countries (Bechhofer and Elliott, 1968).

One step removed from this partly autonomous producer is the situation where employers hire a number of craftsmen who do not possess means of production. With the absence of the conditions for independence, they are forced to sell their labour to capital for wages. A certain amount of the mental component of the production of commodities has been severed from the work process in addition to some control over the work, both becoming the province of the capitalist (or delegated by him). The craftsman retains some degree of autonomy in production as well as certain aspects of innovation.

The commodity status of labour encompasses labour—powers of very different qualities which, in general, command differential exchange values on the labour market. Marx held that the period of manufacture was the extreme form of the social differentiation of trades, creating a hierarchy of labour— powers and wage scales (1906: 384; 396). These different qualities or skills would logically coalesce into numerous particularistic crafts which were not subject to complete proletarianisation in the period of industrial capitalism but continued to exist in particular branches or industries. There was associated with this proliferation a principle of unionization by crafts which institutionalized narrow particularisms but nevertheless promoted a conception of common interest among craftsmen.

However, “simultaneously with their hierarchic arrangement” in various classifications (:403), manufacture “creates a qualitative gradation...in the social process of production” (:400). There are, in addition to specialized crafts, “simple manipulations” which become the “exclusive functions of...a class of so—called unskilled labourers”. Hence, “(a) long— side of the hierarchic gradation there steps the simple separation of the labourers into skilled and unskilled” (:384). The labour market, then, both produces quantitative gradations as well as significant cleavages which become the bases for qualitative social distinctions among the proper— tyless.. These divisions were given expression by different forms of consciousness and awareness and by different labour movements.

Structure and Crystallization of New Middle Class

The capitalist, in the early stages of development, did not always play the role of technical innovator, the creator of new productive processes often being a skilled craftsman who embodied full knowledge of the production process (though he might subsequently become an entrepreneur). The expansion of the surplus from which a host of less directly productive employees could subsist was largely a result of changes in the mode of organization of work and the introduction of increasingly sophisticated machinery which displaced some of the skills of the traditional craftsman.

Preserved from partially superseded modes of production, skilled workers in many essential industries retained craftsmen—like skills. Having a detailed knowledge of the entire work process, these skilled workers exercised a rudimentary form of workers' control, sometimes contracting unskilled labour themselves and controlling apprenticeship procedures (Kealey, 1976; Montgomery, 1974). From the perspective of the capitalist compelled to introduce micro—rationality into his enterprise in the form of increasingly mechanized work processes, the fundamental prerequisite in these situations was to wrest the vestiges of control away from these workers. In some places the strength of the craft union protecting the interests of the skilled workers made this class struggle overt as the owners overcame an obsolescent labouring system (Stone, 1975). In such dramatic historical episodes, which proceeded less conflictually elsewhere, one historical root of the distinctions between control and execution, as well as mental and manual labour, is laid bare.

The expropriation of the overall knowledge of the production process from the workers was accompanied by its centralization in the hands of managers, technicians and engineers. In contrast to the office sector discussed below, this change expressed a differentiation in the productive rather than the administrative end of the enterprise and separated the process of production into manual and mental components, requiring, on the one hand, relatively unskilled workers for routine operation, and on the other, increasing numbers of employees capable of not only servicing, but of improving the machinery. The consequence of this was the proliferation of scientific and technical workers who, while being 'superior workmen', were at least one step divorced from the physical act of transforming commodities for exchange and who manifested levels of skill or education considerably superior to their complement, the semi—skilled operatives. (These semiskilled operatives may be regarded as the prototype of the proletarian.) Historical conditions had continuously generated proletarian groupings in mass production industries — — the manual proletariat did not suddenly appear with the massive concentration of production which occurred at the turn of the century, although it became more significant numerically.) The semiskilled operatives formed a second, major qualitative break in the hierarchy of labourers, separated from the craftsmen in mass industries, developing a more developed collective consciousness which was, in part, expressed in a different principle of unionization: industrial rather

Structure and Crystallization of New Middle Class
than craft unions.

On the other hand, the creation of a stratum of scientific and technical workers generated a new, superior grouping exercising degrees of autonomy in their work, and in some cases direct control over the sub—alterns in the productive sphere. However, the tendency of structural separation of mental and manual tasks proceeded beyond this overall distinction and there was further specialization within the mental component. Not only was there created a stratum of better educated engineers to improve machinery and organize work routines, but other groupings to perform routine operations or maintenance were simultaneously created, especially in the new technologically complex industries. In short the mental component of the work process underwent a structural polarization in which the positions requiring extensive scientific or technological knowledge were divorced from those of routine technicians, positions requiring little detailed knowledge and involving mostly routine technical operations, positions which called for the exercise of little autonomy and were often subject to control either through a separate administrative apparatus or through the higher scientific experts. The upshot was the creation of a more or less qualitative economic and social break, differentiated along the manual/mental axis, with the formation of a “middle” grouping and a technical semi—proletariat. To the extent that the latter grouping retains some vestiges of control over the work process, performs some degree of mental labour, and receives market rewards commensurate with this, they represent a degree of proletarianism which differentiates them from the model of this condition. This retention of relative privileges goes beyond immediate rewards and includes future prospects. One of the benefits of performing routine work within the mental sphere is that promotion possibilities may exist to a greater extent and in this sense career patterns are important, for individuals within such positions, for an understanding of similarities of attitude and for predictions about class identification and action.

A similar complex differentiation along the manual/mental axis has occurred in the office component of work. The origins of clerical work in industrial capitalism have been traced to a differentiation in the tasks of capital accumulation which, originally, had been the province of the owner (Renner, 19%; Urry, 1973). The result was the development of a new middle stratum of office workers, separated physically from the shop— floor, both as a consequence and as a condition of the expansion of production. The growth of the clerical and other office groupings took place initially in the commercial and financial spheres with the largest proportion of the white—collared salariat employed in banking, commerce and finance (Anderson, 1977). A similar process of diversification, although resulting in a lower proportion of non—manual employees, occurred in productive enterprises to account for the office component — those per— forming tasks associated with capital accounting.

Structure and Crystallization of New Middle Class

As had been the case in the productive sphere of enterprises, where managers were hired to take responsibility for the task of co—ordinating labour, within the office the authority role was delegated to managers and staff supervisors to oversee the office staff consisting of those, such as accountants or book—keepers, who performed various aspects of more mental work, and clerks who shared at least a modicum of this work. Among the office staff, then, there is a differentiation of skill and knowledge, but concomitant with this development is also a structural polarization as the tasks associated with mental work are divided between those involving genuine intellectual skill and those which involve merely routine tasks which are necessary for the mental work to proceed. The complement of the specialized expert is the progressive stripping away of the more mundane aspects of work and the expansion of routine positions. The result has been the development of an internally stratified white—collar work— force divided between mostly ‘mental’ workers and a non—manual semi— proletariat.

The structural and spatial separations are both important in separating the new strata from the proletariat. The mental/manual distinction has pre—capitalist roots and vestiges of the superior status adhere to even sub—alterns in the sphere of office work. In turn the spheres of work are physically separate: office buildings distinct from factories, the office distinct from the shop floor. The degree of proletarianism of these groupings, even the mass of the more routine clerical and technical workers, remains problematic: the proletarian model presupposes standardized, closely supervised work in large impersonal settings, conditions which only the most extremely rationalized offices approximate. Both possession of degrees of authority and performance of ‘mental’ tasks are continuous rather than absolute categories and the existence of intermediate categories obscure the divisions. The hiring practices to fill the more proletarian positions have often reproduced other social inequalities. Routine “non—manual” positions have frequently been filled by female employees, and the selective hiring of disadvantaged social groups can have the consequence of fragmenting social unity. The young male clerical worker, by contrast, has the most advantageous promotion opportunities. Often hired directly from an educational institution outside the firm, males consciously begin a career pattern in a position from which they soon escape. Older males and females, on the other hand, are more frequently placed in dead—end jobs as the management routes on high attrition or retirement to take its toll.

The Vertical Division of Labour

Two structural features within the relations of production, the exercise of delegated authority and the division between mental and manual tasks have been isolated as second order class distinctions which exist within one aspect of the dominant division. This is distinct from the existence of “fractions” which relate to

Structure and Crystallization of New Middle Class

certain (vertical) aspects in the division of capitalism in its productive and reproductive aspects as distinct from the relations of production specified.

Although the division of labour, according to Marx, 'only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears' (197)-i-: 51), the greatest such divisions was, between the town and country, the growth of the former being bound up with the origins of class society. "The next extension of the division of labour" was the separation of production and commerce and the formation of a special class of merchants, with "commerce becoming the prerogative of a particular class" (Marx and Engels, 1938: 47). Essentially describing a fractional line between production and circulation, with respect to class formation the vertical productive/unproductive dichotomy yielded fractions of both the capitalist class (who possessed rights over productive property) and the working class (who necessarily sold their labour to capital). Both this source of income, as well as the social effects of the origins of some office work (its derivation from capital accumulation) may tend to reinforce the semi—proletarian position of white—collar workers. As secondary distinctions, they provide actual contradictions which must be confronted politically and ideologically.

The state operated as a distinct sphere in the reproduction of the social formation. Deriving its means of existence from surplus value in partly a more indirect fashion, to some degree mediated through the wages and salaries paid directly by capital, the state functions more autonomously in reproducing the social formation. If their command over a specific form of surplus value places those dominant in the state in the position of a distinct fraction of capital, the exact relationship is mediated both by the forms of revenue and the task of state institutions in the society as a whole. The wages and salaries of the unproductive employees of the state are similarly derived from this form of the surplus, and while they thereby form part of the working class as broadly defined, the form of their subsistence appears more out the expense of the entire working population, and their services both provide necessary sustenance and social control making the relationship of many groupings within the state contradictory and problematic. These fractional cleavages are important for an understanding of the underlying dynamics behind class struggle and one of the structural sources of the difficulty in the coalescence of a working class. Particularly in the case of state employees, other workers feel that they are directly subsidizing their existence out of their own pockets, and if this is a mere 'appearance' relative to the mediated form of the distribution of surplus value, it has a real and immediate reality every April 30th. The vertical divisions, then, account for some of the important conditions of action and of class struggle.

However class action and consciousness is less often directed in a fashion suggested by these fractional cleavages. The gamut of employees, from janitors to

Structure and Crystallization of New Middle Class

necessary management, may have similar views vis—à—vis the 'greed' of civil servants, but class struggle is more often internal, between horizontal levels in the enterprise, between production workers and management. In trades disputes, the clerical workers who are part of the 'collective labourer' are often caught between the sides, cross picket lines, and are perceived (in a structural sense, incorrectly) by material production workers as existing at their expense. On a rational scale class does not emerge on the basis of the unity and opposition of fractions, but on the perceived common interests of employees at similar horizontal levels across the fractional lines. Sociologically, it would be predicted that occupational groupings on either side of major horizontal cleavages, such as the manual and non—manual line, would manifest greater uniformity than would be found between the vertical cleavages. Nevertheless, the latter, and particularly the state institutions, tend to be associated with some systematic differences along similar horizontal levels, and alternatively, promote systematic similarities in industrial spheres (the state worker, for example, form a 'social category') (Poulantzas, 1973).

Class Crystallization

The assertion that class is equivalent to the relations of production expresses only one part of class theory. For both Weber and Marx class was a social category which was expressed in social action. ~A common economic position was a necessary precondition for the emergence of class, but class as a social category implied much more than objective placement. In addition to economic position there must be mutual interests and mutual contacts which emerge in the context of a struggle with another class which overrides although it does not dissolve the particular interests existing within the class becoming a social force. Class consciousness and class action, then, are analytical additions to class as position but concretely form part of its existence.

The potential for the emergence of the working class as a social force is enhanced by the mechanization of work which divests the workers of their more intricate skills and, although the technological division of labour isolates them in separate routines, it unites them through increasing interdependence. The division of labour is a contradictory process in that it creates both individuated units and a social interdependence among the units since none is autonomous and all depend on others for crucial parts of the means of subsistence. The latter process, the structural creation of the preconditions for the emergence of a working class and the crystallization of class connected to the development of common interests within it, is not one which occurred once and for all in the nineteenth century with the "making of the working class" but rather is a continuous process of re—making. But the conditions in the division of labour which recreate the working class are complex and problematic. Even among

Structure and Crystallization of New Middle Class

those groups which may be deemed fully proletarian, the existence of particularistic economic interests can be more profound than common or mutual interests founded in the social relations of production.

If the division of labour, in the aggregate, hinders more than facilitates the crystalliation of a proletariat, the principles which have been used to identify the “new middle class” imply a more extreme divisiveness. This is particularly with respect to the performance of intellectual work in relatively autonomous situations. Such work tends to be individualistic and as it is institutionalised through education experiences and career structures, these particularisms are strengthened. Tendencies are operative within the ‘new middle class’ and the semi—proletarian groupings making the connection of specific Strata with any class especially precarious. The observations about the barriers for semi—proletarian groupings to join working class movements or to engage in enterprise—specific conflict, apply with additional force to the case of the ‘new middle class’

In addition to the difficulties of forging unity on the basis of common interests determined by location within one aspect of the primary contradiction, there is the question of the crystallisation of the various strata associated with the “new middle class” into this class. While the application of mental skills or authority at work separates them from the proletariat, it also separates them from each other. The principles that afford them a distinct position vis—à—vis other groups are inherently divisive. Given this fragmentation and specialisation, the conditions which lead to the social crystallisation of a ‘new middle class’ are insufficiently developed, and the development of common ideologies, programmes and collective modes of action will be difficult. The ‘new middle class’ may be less isolated than the peasantry, but it is far from being homologous.

This divisiveness suggests that there should be a great variety of ideologies and conceptions rooted in the ‘new middle class’. The old middle class also has interests which are contrary to those of the dominant class in many respects, but for the ‘new middle class’ there is a new structural foundation for this conflict. The alliances between the old middle class and the working class were of a certain character because they were based on separate relations and unique interests, and the petite bourgeoisie developed class ideologies which were distinct from the working class. With regard to the ‘new middle class’ the conditions of the alliance are different. Rather than sharing with the working class a common position negatively in relation to the same opponent, the two groupings are united with regard to the most basic relation of production. As such there is a basis for the adoption by the ‘new middle class’ of ideologies associated with the working class, particularly versions of trade unionism, associated with the need to bargain over the sale of labour power. Nevertheless, the existence of a secondary class distinction within the wage—and—salary grouping implies both that they will

Structure and Crystallization of New Middle Class

predictably impart a different character to these ideologies, and that they will produce versions of their own, such as those emphasizing technological rationality. This phenomenon is more than an ambiguous wavering between labour and capital as the notion of structural ambiguity would imply. Mann's point that the French technicians in 1968 were caught in an ideological ambivalence between an imprecise notion of unity with the working class and a "distinctive sense of their own identity ...as a middle class~ expresses that contradictory position which provides for class unity and a separate class identity, (1973).

Primary and Secondary Class Distinctions

It is being argued that class distinctions should be seen as hierarchized, with some more theoretically central than others. The antagonism of interests implied in the necessity to sell labour power to the owners of capital is the fundamental division in capitalist society. Systematic processes have tended to differentiate this large 'wage and salary grouping', and two important elements in the relations of production were specified: authority and conceptualization. These should be regarded as secondary contradictions within the framework of the primary structural determinants. (This theoretical specification does not mean that, relative to class consciousness and action, such divisions are always less important in an immediate sense. On the contrary, they can appear more important, the more so as the horizons of consciousness are limited to the term and conditions of the role of labour power and never perceive the structural alienation of separation from the product of labour.)

With respect to the secondary divisions specified, various differentiated groupings were regarded as distinct from the proletariat through their possession of delegated authority or the performance of 'mental' tasks. However, these groupings were themselves differentiated along the same lines, yielding a complex continuum of positions. If those positions, such as some clerical or technical work, are regarded as only semi—proletarian (because of the continued existence of attributes or realistic potentialities that separated them from the proletarian condition), the positions of substantial authority or relatively autonomous mental work are more clearly distinct from the proletariat — Braverman's "middle levels of employment". If we define these latter as the core of a "new middle class", it is clearly in the secondary sense implied by the hierarchy of contradictions.

The recognition of this secondary discrepancy is important for several reasons. First the numerical significance and apparent structural importance of the "new middle class" (in both the broad and narrow definition) makes it an important force in the class struggle. However it is important to locate the structural basis of its class interests and of its ambivalent response.

Structure and Crystallization of New Middle Class

Second, while both the tasks of necessary coordination and labour, and the mental and manual components of work are conceptually reconcilable through workers' control and automation, the separation can become, and under capitalist conditions, has become, antagonistic. Mental work in particular creates the basis for a specific specialized form of exclusiveness, a form of collective action associated with professionalism. The "new middle class" reproduces, in one of its characteristic ideologies, specific forms of technical rationality and bureaucratism. While in certain respects the manual/non—manual line has maintained its saliency, and the semi—proletarian strata on the non—manual line may be still somewhat more likely to identify with management, the elaboration of class theory based on the social relations of production permits some account of the structural basis of variations in consciousness and a conceptualization both of degrees of proletarianism and processes of relative proletarianization which are occurring to groups of non—manual employees. It is in these terms that some of the parameters of class struggle can be understood, for class analysis should outline not only the deepest structural basis of class conflict but more immediate processes as well.

Third, the stratum has been the special product of the development of industrial capitalism, raising the question of its place in the transition to a post—revolutionary society.

The conditions which prevented the full expression of its interests having partially been cast aside, the "new middle class" within a socialist society tends towards a more complete class crystallization. The distinction between those who own and appropriate the product and those who do not is theoretically more significant than different levels of skill which can command differential rewards. But in relation to the question raised above about the crystallization of a "new middle class"~ the conclusion has been drawn that within societies termed "state socialist", this "class" division expresses the basis upon which a new exploiting class can arise (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, 1977): the "new middle class", then, is said to represent what can be termed the Eastern European mode of production. As Marx claimed, each succeeding ruling class occupied a more substantial social base than the class it superseded. The "new middle class" represents even a larger and more heterogenous base than the capitalist class.

The fundamental problem with this view, as with the theory of post— capitalism (the inflation of an important development in the division of labour into a fundamental theoretical model which putatively advanced beyond Marxism) is that in neither case does the "new middle class"~ assume dominance over production. In state capitalism or degenerated socialism, it is necessary to identify a dominant exploitative class which may have its historical roots in the "new middle class" but progressively separates (or polarizes) out from this grouping during socialist construction, and as it does so,

Structure and Crystallization of New Middle Class

develops an antagonistic relationship vis— a— vis the “new middle class” in addition to the working class. The argument that this new dominant grouping cannot be regarded as a class because of the numerous internal divisions is important with regard to the crystallization of its class interests — especially in the context of the failure of the working class to assert its own interests which would, in fundamental ways, conflict with the dominant class -- although a unification brought about by a single party is an opposite tendency. This argument, with the exception of the unity of interests brought about by the organization of the working class, can be applied to the dominant class in capitalist society. However, regardless of the internal divisions, within each sphere the individuals act as “capitalists” and when coupled with the collective pressure of the working class, there would be some degree of correspondence of interests, though tactical differences would remain.

Several factors combine, however, to allow for the potential crystallization of the “new middle class” into a class in the state socialist systems. In the first place the property axis is fundamentally altered since individuals no longer retain absolute right to the appropriation of the product -- although the distribution of the proceeds is unequally divided by the state and control over production is vested in the hands of the dominant class. The new dominant class arises in a relatively short space of time from the “new middle class” which implies that between the two the boundary would be somewhat difficult to draw, there would be a greater degree of social mobility and correspondence of personnel between the two, and so on. The ideology of technical rationality and bureaucratism, which was associated with the “new middle class”, prevails under an emerging dominant class with the effect that the processes of the expropriation of knowledge and authority upon which such a mode is based, particularly affects them. If on the one hand the movement for crystallization distinct from the top is, to a degree, more problematic, on the other, since socialism (or state socialism) has emerged primarily in non—industrialized societies, the traditional superiority of mental attributes relative to the mass of the population places the intellectuals in an especially elitist and privileged position which is conducive to the definition of themselves as a coherent “class”.

This development is contradicted by the failure of the working class to grasp an alternative ideology (and the expropriation of official “Marxism: by the dominant class), which leaves the “new middle class” in a position where it is less socially necessary to crystallize as a “class” and develop its own formal ideologies. In one respect the correspondence between this “class” and the bureaucratic domination of society has been mentioned; however, in the context of the usurpation of authority the “new middle class” may be more fundamentally alienated in state socialism. In the absence of working class ideologies inimical to the interests of the dominant class, the “new middle class” becomes the generative source of a new “individualism” which opposes

Structure and Crystallization of New Middle Class collectivity as represented by official “working class” ideology without developing ‘working class consciousness’. In short, the conditions of work of the ‘new middle class’ in state socialism alienate them from the authority structure. In the absence of a revolutionary consciousness in the working class, however, middle class definitions of democracy predominate which may provide support for trade unionism, but will confine such proletarian opposition to reformism.

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