

systematic and precise empirical inquiry, then induction leading to theories. The more elegant the theory, the more advanced the science. Practical applications would of course follow. Nomothetic social science has been haunted by its inadequacies – in a comparison with physics – but sustained by its certainty that science was cumulative and unilinear.

In our doubts concerning the previous assumptions there has been implicit – it should now be clear – another view of science. If we reject the utility of the nomothetic-idiographic distinction, then we are casting doubt on the usefulness of the Newtonian view of science. We do not do this, as the idiographers did, on the basis of the peculiarity of social inquiry (humans as reflexive actors). We doubt its utility for the natural sciences as well (and indeed there has emerged in the last two decades a thrust toward a non-linear natural science, wherein stochastic processes are central).

Specifically, in terms of what we have been calling historical social science, we raise the question of whether the method of going from the concrete to the abstract, from the particular to the universal, should not be inverted. Perhaps historical social science must *start* with the abstract and move in the direction of the concrete, ending with a coherent interpretation of the processes of particular historical systems that accounts plausibly for how they followed a particular concrete historical path. The determinate is not the simple but the complex, indeed the hyper-complex. And of course no concrete situation is more complex than the long moments of transition when the simpler constraints collapse.

History and social science took their current dominant forms at the moment of fullest unchallenged triumph of the logic of our present historical system. They are children of that logic. We are now however living in the long moment of transition wherein the contradictions of that system have made it impossible to continue to adjust its machinery. We are living in a period of real historical choice. And this period is incomprehensible on the basis of the assumptions of that system.

World-systems analysis is a call for the construction of a historical social science that feels comfortable with the uncertainties of transition, that contributes to the transformation of the world by illuminating the choices without appealing to the crutch of a belief in the inevitable triumph of good. World-systems analysis is a call to open the shutters that prevent us from exploring many arenas of the real world. World-systems analysis is not a paradigm of historical social science. It is a call for a debate about the paradigm.

Class Analysis¹

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I

The notion of class analysis, in its classical Marxist form, embodies a very large claim, namely that it constitutes a uniquely powerful organizing principle of social and political analysis, and that it provides the best available method to give theoretical and empirical meaning and coherence to the vast accumulation of data of every kind which make up the historical record and the present life of society. My purpose in this essay is to argue that, contrary to much current opinion, not least in many parts of the Left, the claim is justified; but I propose to do so on the basis of a somewhat modified version of the Marxist 'model' of class analysis.

Marx himself, it may be recalled, sarcastically warned in a letter of 1877 against any attempt to use 'as one's master key a general historico-philosophical theory, the supreme virtue of which consists in being super-historical'.² The warning is well taken, but I do not believe that the kind of class analysis proposed here falls under the label 'super-historical' or 'historico-philosophical': on the contrary, it is firmly grounded in historical and contemporary reality.

For his part, Engels, writing two years after Marx's death, proclaimed that,

it was precisely Marx who had first discovered the great law of motion of history, the law according to which all historical struggles, whether they proceed in the political, religious, philosophical or some other ideological domain, are in fact the more or less clear expression of struggles of social classes. (Engels: 1950, p. 223)

This law, Engels added, in typical Engels fashion, had 'the same significance

¹ I am grateful to Anthony Giddens for some very useful comments on this essay.

² K. Marx to *Otechestvenniye Zapiski*, November 1877, in Marx and Engels: 1956, p. 379.

for history as the law of the transformation of energy had for natural science'.

Reference to 'laws' in relation to human affairs (or reference to the authority of Engels for that matter) are at present rather unfashionable. On the Right, any talk of such 'laws' in history or the social sciences is alleged to betoken an intolerably doctrinaire arrogance which points straight in the direction of the Gulag Archipelago, and much of the Marxist Left has itself been seized by great doubt about how much could properly be claimed for historical materialism as a tool of analysis. Also, class analysis has come more and more frequently to be denounced from within the Left as a simplistic 'class reductionism', quite unable to account for crucial features of social reality such as patriarchy, racism, nationalism, state-building, Communist systems, and so on. For reasons to be discussed as I proceed, I believe these strictures to be misconceived, and I wish to reiterate at the outset the conviction which informs this essay, namely that class analysis, properly understood, does constitute a theoretical construct of incomparable value.

II

The point of departure of class analysis in Marxism is the famous passage in the *Communist Manifesto* in which Marx and Engels declared that 'the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle'.

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild master and journeyman – in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large or in the common ruin of the contending classes. (Marx and Engels: 1976, p. 482)

On this view, class analysis is in effect *class struggle analysis*: it is a mode of analysis which proceeds from the belief that class struggle has constituted the crucial fact of social life from the remote past to the present. It is primarily concerned with the basis and mechanisms of that struggle, with the character of the protagonists, the forms which the struggle takes, the reasons for the differences in these forms from period to period in any one society, and between societies, the ideological constructs under which the struggle is waged and other such questions which may serve to illuminate diverse facets of social life and processes.

In the classical Marxist view, the protagonists in class struggle are the owners of the means of production on the one hand and the producers on the other, and these protagonists are locked in a conflict which is inherent, 'structurally' determined and implicit in their respective location in the process of production. The owners are ineluctably driven to try and extract the greatest amount of surplus labour which it is possible to extract from

the producers in the given historical conditions, whereas the producers are similarly driven to try and minimize that amount and to produce under the least onerous conditions possible. The decisive importance which Marx attached to this relationship between owners and producers for the whole organization and life of society is clearly brought out in another familiar passage from *Capital*.

It is in each case the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the immediate producers ... in which we find the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social edifice, and hence also the political form of the relationship of sovereignty and dependence. (Marx: 1981, p. 927)

Essentially, the relationship between owners and producers is one of *exploitation*, a term which has very strong normative connotations, but which can also be used in a technical sense to denote the appropriation of surplus labour and the allocation of the surplus product by people over whom the producers have little or no control, in a process of production over which the producers have little or no control either. Exploitation is not of course peculiar to capitalism. As Marx noted,³

capital did not invent surplus labour. Wherever a part of society possesses the monopoly of the means of production, the worker, free or unfree, must add to the labour-time necessary for his own maintenance an extra quantity of labour-time in order to produce the means of subsistence for the owner of the means of production. (Marx: 1976, p. 344)

However, and as Marx himself saw, the matter of the appropriation and allocation of surplus labour is rather more complicated than these formulations suggest. All societies need to appropriate a part of the product from the producers for such purposes as the maintenance of the young, the sick and the old, investment for further production and later distribution, the provision of collective services, and so on. In a classless society, however, appropriation would occur *only* for these purposes. In other words, no part of the product would be appropriated by virtue of ownership rights or privileged position or without the freely-given agreement of the producers. In such circumstances, the appropriation of surplus labour and the allocation of part of the product to recipients other than the producers would not be exploitation.

³ Marx also noted that 'what distinguishes the various economic formations of society – the distinction between for example a society based on slave-labour and a society based on wage-labour – is the form in which this surplus labour is in each case extorted from the immediate producer, the worker' (Marx: 1976, p. 325).

III

The Marxist emphasis on the extraction of surplus labour as the crucial aspect of social life seems to me to be entirely justified. The problem, however, is that the focus of analysis which is thereby provided is too narrow and tends to occlude, or at least to cast into shadow, a linked feature of the process of exploitation, namely *domination*. Class analysis, I propose to argue here, is basically concerned with a process of class domination and class subordination that is an essential condition of the process of exploitation; or, to put the point the other way round, exploitation, in the sense in which it has been defined here, has always been the main purpose of domination. On the other hand, exploitation in this sense has by no means been the *only* purpose of domination: patriarchy, for instance, as one form of domination, provides other advantages to its beneficiaries than the extraction of surplus labour.

The example of patriarchy suggests the reason for using the focus of domination in class analysis, for it widens the framework within which class relations and class struggle are considered and thus encompasses various aspects which the exclusive focus on exploitation tends to obscure or leave out of account. Also, this wider focus relates the phenomenon of exploitation to its wider social and political context and removes from it a certain 'economistic' narrowness which the exclusive emphasis on exploitation encourages.

In no way is this to be taken as a devaluation of the importance of exploitation. Exploitation is of crucial importance, but it is domination which makes it possible. Nor does the emphasis on domination in the least imply a departure from Marx's own perspective. On the contrary, it serves to illuminate the theme which is at the very core of Marx's thought and striving, the need to create a 'truly human society' from which relations of domination and coercion have been abolished. It is this concern with domination, and with the exploitation which it makes possible, that informs every page of *Capital*, a work which could well be called a treatise on domination under the capitalist mode of production.

In a recent work, Erik Olin Wright argues in terms which suggest that the stress on domination is somehow incompatible with the stress on exploitation. He refers to a tendency in 'neo-Marxist conceptualizations of class structure' to 'substitute domination for exploitation' and speaks of a 'shift to a domination-centred concept of class'; and he expresses the fear that 'domination-centred concepts of class tend to slide into the "multiple-oppressions" approach to understanding society ... Class, then, becomes just one of many oppressions, with no particular centrality to social and historical analysis' (Wright: 1985, pp. 56, 57).

But such consequences do not necessarily follow from the stress on domination, and they are certainly not intended to follow from it here. Exploitation remains the essential purpose of domination. But the focus on

domination does have the advantages detailed earlier and it also permits a more comprehensive and realistic appreciation and identification of the protagonists in class struggle. With this focus, the dominant class in class society is no longer solely defined in terms of the ownership of the means of production. Properly speaking, a dominant class in any class society is constituted by virtue of its effective control over three main sources of domination: the means of production, where control may involve (and has usually involved) the ownership of these means but need not necessarily do so; the means of state administration and coercion; and the main means of communication and consent.

Each of these three forms a part of one structure of domination. A class that owns or controls the means of production must also have adequate assurance, at the least, of the goodwill and protection of those who control the means of administration and coercion; and those who control the state must be able to rely on the cooperation of those who own or control the means of production. Control of the main means of communication and consent is likely to follow from control of the other two.

In this instance too, emphasis on the notion of control is in no way intended to devalue the importance of ownership: it clearly remains of fundamental importance in the life of capitalist society and pervades every aspect of it, and it remains the main source of managerial power in medium and small capitalist enterprises. But it is not an essential prerequisite for control of the main sources of power in capitalist society – corporate power and state power.

Effective control for the purpose of exploitation is perfectly possible without personal ownership: although churchmen in the Middle Ages did not own the land they controlled, this lack of personal ownership did not in the least prevent them from extracting surplus labour from the producers under their control. The same point, in a contemporary setting, applies to the top executives and managers of large corporations, who may own no more than a small part, or no part, of the firms they control. What was wrong with the 'managerial revolution' thesis was not that it pointed to a process of 'managerialization' in large-scale capitalist enterprises (although it exaggerated the rapidity of the process), but that it attributed to top executives and managers very different purposes from those of owner-entrepreneurs and managers; also managers of state enterprises are perfectly able to act as extractors of surplus labour, even though they do not own any part of the enterprises they control.

The state itself is a major extractor of surplus labour, both as employer and as tax collector; it is able to engage in the process of extraction by virtue of its control of state power, without any question of personal ownership intervening in that process. Taxation has always been and remains today a crucial aspect of the process of surplus extraction, and requires not ownership but the effective control of the means of administration and coercion.

IV

In the conditions of contemporary capitalism, economic power, meaning in effect the control of corporate power, and state power, meaning the control of the means of state administration and coercion, are institutionally separate, even though the links between the two forms of power are many and intimate. As a result of this institutional separation, what (borrowing from C. Wright Mills) will here be called the 'power elite' of advanced capitalist societies is made up of two distinct elements. On the one hand, there are the people who control the few hundred largest industrial, financial and commercial enterprises in the private sector of the economy, to which may be added those who control the media industry in the private sector (and who may of course include some of the people who control other capitalist sectors). On the other hand, there are the people who control the commanding positions in the state system – presidents, prime ministers and their immediate collaborators, the top people in the civil service, in the military and the police, in the judiciary and (at least in some systems, such as the American) in the legislature – and this element also includes people who control public or state enterprises and the media in the public sector.⁴

This power elite constitutes the top layer of the dominant class in these societies. The other, and much larger, part of that class also has two distinct elements: on the one hand, the people who own and control a large number of medium-sized firms forming a vast scatter of very diverse enterprises, dwarfed by the corporate giants yet constituting a substantial part of total capitalist activity; on the other, a large professional class of men and women (mainly men), made up of lawyers, accountants, scientists, architects, doctors, middle-rank civil servants and military personnel, senior teachers and administrators in higher education, public relations experts, and many others. They form the upper levels of the 'credentialized' part of the social structure and many are employed, full-time or part-time, by capitalist enterprises or the state, or work independently of either.

Together, the business and professional elements of this part of the dominant class make up the bourgeoisie of the advanced capitalist societies of today – what is commonly and misleadingly called the 'middle class' or 'upper middle class'. This bourgeoisie is distinguished from the power elite by virtue of the fact that it does not have anything like its power. Neverthe-

⁴ In *The Power Elite* (1956), Mills described the power elite in the United States as being composed of three different elements: the 'chief executives' of the 'hundred or so corporations which, measured by sales and capital, are the largest' (p. 126); the 'political directorate' – in effect the people in charge of the main 'command posts' of the state; and the top people in the military. In my understanding of it, I see no good reason to turn the military into a separate and quasi-autonomous element in the power elite: it would be more accurate to see it as part of the state system.

less, it is part of the dominant class because its members do exercise a great deal of power and influence in economic, social, political and cultural terms, not only in society at large but in various parts of the state as well. It is among them, and in the power elite, that are to be found the people who own a very disproportionate part of personal wealth, and it is the dominant class as a whole which is at the upper and uppermost levels of the income scale. It is also mainly from the ranks of the bourgeoisie that are recruited the members of the power elite, and it is to its ranks that return the members of the power elite who have ceased, by reason of age or demotion, to be part of it.

Obviously, the dominant class is far from homogeneous: but then, no class is. There are important differences and conflicts to be found not only between capitalist interests and the state but also within them. The capitalist class comprises different, and often conflictual, 'fractions' and groupings. Quite pronounced disagreements and clashes constantly occur between different segments of the state system: top civil servants and their political 'masters', the military and the government, the judiciary or the legislature and the executive, central and subcentral government. At least this is the case in the capitalist-democratic regimes which have in this century been characteristic of most advanced capitalist societies. These conflicts are hidden from the light of day in authoritarian regimes, but they do nevertheless endure in such regimes.

Still, despite the differences and conflicts which beset dominant classes, they usually remain sufficiently cohesive to ensure that their common purposes are effectively defended and advanced. This is particularly true of the power elite; there are more 'class traitors' in the bourgeoisie, though they remain a relatively small minority. Many of the differences in the power elite are little more than the froth of politics, news today, gone tomorrow, and are afforded much of their brief notoriety by 'commentators' in search of sensation. Other differences may be more serious and involve important policy choices. But all such differences and conflicts generally pall into relative insignificance when compared with the vast and crucial areas of agreement between most members of the dominant classes. For whereas such people may disagree on what precisely they do want, they very firmly agree on what they do not want and this encompasses anything that might appear to them to threaten the structure of power, privilege and property of which they are the main beneficiaries. The power elite and the vast majority of the bourgeoisie of advanced capitalist countries (as indeed of all other capitalist countries, whatever their stage of development) are all but unanimous on this score, to say nothing of their opposition to 'communism', a term which has been given a sufficient degree of elasticity to cover any abhorrent challenge.

Nor, it should be added, has the high degree of ideological and political congruity which is characteristic of dominant classes in advanced capitalist countries been greatly affected by the arrival into the state system of social democratic governments. Such intrusions may cause strain and difficulties,

but have never fatally impaired the partnership (with the exception of Chile) between corporate power and state power.⁵ The reason for this is very simple, namely that social democratic governments have always been prepared to retreat from their purposes and policies and to accommodate corporate power. Should a socialist government be elected and insist on carrying out the fundamental transformations in the structure of wealth and power to which it was pledged, it would find the partnership dissolved and replaced by implacable hostility and opposition, and it would need to forge a new partnership, this time with the subordinate class. The script for this 'scenario' has not so far been written: the 'scenario' itself belongs to the 1990s and possibly beyond.

However this may be, the dominant class constitutes one of the two major, 'fundamental' classes which class analysis needs to take into account. The other is the subordinate class of capitalist society, which comprises the vast majority of its population and of which the largest part is made up, at least in the conditions of advanced capitalism, of workers and their dependents – the 'working class', properly speaking, an extremely variegated, diverse class, divided on the basis of occupation, skill, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, ideology, etc.

Such divisions are clearly of great political importance and have weighed very heavily on the history of capitalist societies, let alone labour movements, and more will be said about this presently. But the point that needs to be made here is that the currently fashionable notion that 'the working class' is dwindling rests on a misconception of what the term means. The industrial, manufacturing component of the working class is indeed diminishing, but the working class as a whole, the people whose exclusive *source of income* is the sale of their labour-power (or who mainly rely on transfer payments by the state), whose *level of income* puts them in the lower and lowest 'income groups', whose *individual power and responsibility at work and beyond* is low or virtually non-existent – this class of people has increased, not diminished, over the years. The working class in this sense is made up of blue-collar and white-collar workers and their dependents, and of a variety of men and women in 'service' and distributive occupations. Whatever consciousness they may or may not have of their 'proletarian' status, they constitute a very large majority of the population.

The dominant class and the working class represent respectively the apex and the base of the pyramid characteristic of the social structure of advanced capitalist societies. Between them, there is also to be found a substantial petty bourgeoisie, and this class too is composed of two distinct elements or subclasses; first, a disparate range of small businessmen, shopkeepers, tradesmen and self-employed artisans, who are the minnows of capitalist enterprise; and second, a large and constantly growing subclass of semi-professional, supervisory men and women engaged as salaried employees in

⁵ For a discussion of the notion of 'partnership' in this context, see Miliband: 1983; 1985.

capitalist enterprises, or in the administrative, welfare, control, coercive and service agencies of the state – social workers, local government officials, and the like. Though at a different level of the social pyramid than the working class, such people too are properly speaking part of the subordinate population of advanced capitalist societies. No more than in the case of the working class does this mean that they are politically unimportant; it only means that the amount of *individual* power and responsibility that they have is very limited. Nor does the fact that they are part of the subordinate population mean that they are necessarily *conscious* of their subordinate position. The notion of consciousness raises altogether different issues than the question of their 'objective' position in society. All that needs to be said about this here is that the petty bourgeoisie engaged in small-scale enterprise has, generally speaking, been of quite pronounced right-wing disposition, whereas the sub-professional and supervisory petty bourgeoisie has constituted a new 'aristocracy of labour', a substantial part of whose members are of a leftist disposition.

To complete the picture, mention must be made of an 'underclass' at the very bottom of the pyramid, issued from the working class and in some ways still part of it, yet also distinct from it: the more or less permanently unemployed, the members of the working class who are elderly, chronically sick or handicapped, and those unable for other reasons to find their way into the 'labour market'.

Obviously, the people located at different points of the pyramid are not totally immobile: there is some movement, fairly limited, upwards, and some movement downwards, and the different levels of the pyramid are not separated by rigid lines of division. But neither social mobility nor blurred boundaries change the fact that the pyramid is a hard, solid reality and that the differences between the class situated at the upper levels of the pyramid, and the classes situated at its lower levels are very great indeed in terms of wealth, income, power, responsibility, style and quality of life and everything else that makes up the texture of existence. This may be deplored, or praised, or declared to be regrettable but inevitable, or viewed in some other such way. What cannot or should not be done is to ignore the existence of such divisions and the crucial importance they have for the life of the society in which they occur.

V

Given the social structure and mode of production and advanced capitalist societies, the tasks of class analysis are quite plain. First, class analysis involves the detailed identification of the classes and subclasses which make up these societies – in other words, the tracing of a 'social map' that is as detailed and as accurate as possible and includes the many complexities which surround the nature of class. Second, class analysis must demonstrate the precise structures and mechanisms of domination and exploitation in

these societies and the different ways in which surplus labour is extracted, appropriated and allocated. Third, and relatedly, class analysis must be concerned with the conflict between classes, pre-eminently between capital and the state on the one side and labour on the other, although it must also pay close attention to the pressures exercised by other classes and groupings, such as different sections of the petty bourgeoisie, or social movements with specific grievances and demands.

The struggles with which class analysis is concerned assume a multiplicity of forms and expressions, but they can nevertheless be placed under two general categories. On the one hand, the dominant class naturally seeks above all else to defend, maintain and strengthen the social order, and does so (with the utmost conviction and sincerity) in the name of the national interest, freedom, democracy, or whatever. This dominant class is what may properly (indeed literally) be called the leading conservative class in society, which does not of course mean that other classes may not be conservative or may not include many people wedded to the conservative cause. On the other hand, the subordinate class, or at least the activist minority within it (an important distinction), is involved in a permanent process of pressure from below which always takes one of two forms. It is exercised *either* to modify or improve the conditions in which subordination is experienced *or* to bring about the end of subordination altogether. The first is mainly concerned with improvements and reforms, local or national, large or small, within the framework of capitalism and does not seek to go beyond that framework. The second does, and is in this sense a revolutionary enterprise. The labour movements of advanced capitalist countries have for the most part sought to exercise the first of these forms of pressure. It is also possible to envisage forms of pressure which, though 'reformist' in character, nevertheless have revolutionary purposes in so far as the reforms are intended to achieve in due course the fundamental, 'revolutionary' transformation of the social order. This kind of 'revolutionary reformism' was theoretically the path traced by European social democracy before 1914, but it is not the path which it has subsequently followed.⁶

It is clearly not the case that the dominant class and its allies are conservative in the sense that they always reject all reforms. Their purpose is to defend and strengthen the existing social order and this may well involve the acceptance of reform as the price to be paid for the containment and subduance of pressure from below, where other classes and subclasses may in any case have strong conservative dispositions. None the less, class struggle and pressure from above have been, and must reasonably be expected to be, designed to achieve conservative purposes and the defeat of anti-conservative ones, whereas pressure from below must equally reasonably be expected to have as its purpose the achievement of change in the ways suggested earlier. It is the opposition and struggle generated by these contradictory purposes which is the crucial fact of social life.

⁶ On this, see for example Liebman: 1986.

This is the basic framework of class analysis, and it may be useful at this point to indicate what is entailed by the class analysis of 'pressure from above' and 'pressure from below'. The two are of course intertwined and constantly react upon each other, but they nevertheless have their own and differing fields of concern and action.

To begin with pressure from above, class analysis is concerned with the ways in which the struggle for 'hegemony', for the 'hearts and minds' of subordinate populations, is waged, or, to put the matter somewhat differently, how the ideological and political 'socialization' of subordinate populations into the existing social system occurs. A vast array of persons and institutions play a part in this process: newspapers and other publications, radio, television, the cinema and the theatre, churches, parties, associations and lobbies, schools, intellectuals and other 'managers of consent' and, not least, the state – in short, whatever in the social system makes a contribution, large or small, to the strengthening of the social order and the containment or defeat of the 'counter-hegemonic' forces which a system of domination and exploitation necessarily engenders.

Another and obvious area of investigation for class analysis is the ways in which dominant classes seek to use the political system for their own purposes. The most important such institution is the state, for it plays a unique and indispensable role in the defence and strengthening of the social order; no other institution is capable of intervening with the same effect in the life of society. However 'non-interventionist' the state may wish to be in economic life, it nevertheless plays a crucial role in this realm, not least in order to attenuate the social costs of capitalist enterprise, which it is in the nature of such enterprise to ignore. It is also the state which is ultimately responsible for the welfare and collective services which, whatever else they may be intended to achieve, also serve to ensure the maintenance and reproduction of an efficient labour-force on the one hand and the attenuation of grievances and pressure from below on the other. The state is now deeply involved in propaganda, indoctrination and the 'engineering of consent' and, crucially, it is also in charge of the vast apparatus of coercion and repression which is inevitably at work in class society.

Class analysis provides an explanation of state action in these realms in terms of the role which the state seeks to fulfil in the maintenance of the social order, which of course means the maintenance of a social order based upon class domination and exploitation. It is in these terms also that class analysis explains a phenomenon which is one of the most notable features in the development of capitalism in the twentieth century, the growth of 'statism', meaning the constant expansion of state power, the 'statization' of society. This is often attributed, following Weber, to some technologically-based tendency toward 'bureaucratization' in 'modern' society, but the 'statization' which has occurred in advanced capitalist societies is better explained in terms of class relations and the state's involvement in the maintenance and defence of the given class system.

It is also worth noting that conservative attempts in recent years, in the

form of 'Thatcherism' or 'Reaganism', to 'roll back the state' are only directed at a particular kind of 'statism', namely public enterprise, the regulation of private enterprise and welfare services. 'Rolling back the state' in these areas is best seen as a form of class struggle from above, designed to help capitalist enterprise and, through the erosion of welfare provisions, to reduce the independence and resilience of the working class. Nor in any case do any of these policies in the least reduce the vital role which the state plays in economic life by way of its financial policies and the many actions it takes on behalf of capitalist enterprise. There are facets of 'statism' that are greatly strengthened rather than weakened by 'Thatcherism' and 'Reaganism', predominantly the repressive surveillance-and-control functions of the state and the inflation of state power to the detriment of citizen rights. Here too, class analysis is an indispensable tool for the adequate understanding of this version of conservatism in an age of more or less permanent capitalist crisis.

Class analysis is also deeply concerned with the crucial and unremitting struggle from above to impose upon the producers the disciplines which are required to make possible the extraction of surplus labour, a process which occurs at the point of production and at the site of work but which depends also upon a whole range of social and political conditions. Such include a requisite degree of 'hegemonic' control, an adequate imposition of managerial authority, itself backed by the repressive power of the state, division and fragmentation in the ranks of the producers and, not least, domestic arrangements by way of unwaged domestic labour which caters for many essential needs outside work and which makes it possible for the producers to accomplish their tasks at work.

In relation to class struggle and pressure from below, we must return first of all to the distinction that was made earlier between struggles for the modification and improvement of the conditions in which subordination and exploitation are experienced, and the struggle for the abolition of subordination altogether. Marx believed that the working class must inevitably (and within a not-too-distant future) be moved to adopt the second of these alternatives. He was obviously wrong, but whether he was wrong absolutely or in his timing remains a matter of argument. At any rate, such pressure in the last hundred years, which roughly spans the period of existence of the modern labour movement, has been pre-eminently 'reformist' in character.

This is not to under-estimate the intensity of the struggles even for 'trade union' and quite limited purposes, or to overlook the fact that large parts of the working class of advanced capitalist countries have frequently voted, particularly since the Second World War, for parties pledged to bring about a wholesale transformation of these societies, albeit within the existing constitutional and legal framework. Nor is it to ignore the not infrequent occasions when, in periods of great stress and crisis, working-class movements or parts of working-class movements have assumed a quasi-

revolutionary or revolutionary character, as in the immediate aftermath of the First World War or in the European Resistance in the Second World War. However, when all such qualifications have been duly noted, the fact remains that revolutionary formations have for the most part been firmly pushed back to the periphery of working-class politics.

In these countries, the stage has been mainly occupied by agencies of the labour movement, the trade unions and political parties, whose whole mode of being has been explicitly and intensely 'reformist' – and even this may be something of an exaggeration, given the strong transformative aspect of 'reformism'. What pressure from below, intense class struggle and the threat of class struggle have achieved by way of reform has undoubtedly served to attenuate the harshness of class domination and exploitation for many parts of the subordinate population, and notably for organized labour; and it has, by way of the extension of collective and welfare services, of civic and political rights, and of influence on the climate in which power is exercised at work and beyond, served the subordinate population as a whole. But it is also the case that the structure of property, privilege and power in these societies has remained relatively safe from the assault by labour and that the pressures exercised from below against these structures has been nothing as fierce as had been confidently expected by Marx and later Marxists.

The reasons for this are of crucial interest for class analysis. So far, Marxists have tended to explain the phenomenon by invoking a whole series of factors: economic growth, reform itself, the crumbs of imperialism, the impact of the 'aristocracy of labour' on the labour movement, divisions in the working class exacerbated by capital and the state, the weight of tradition, ideological manipulation, false consciousness, the actions of labour leaders, and so on. But however important any or all of these factors might be, they would need to be supplemented by another, of massive weight, namely the influence of capitalist democracy upon labour movements. For capitalist democracy, in the hundred years or so in which it has developed in advanced capitalist countries, has proved to be a system of extraordinary flexibility, resilience and absorptive power, and has played a fundamental role in the containment and defusing of pressure from below. Quite apart from anything else, the existence of capitalist democracy has ensured that those who sought to exercise pressure from below did not for the most part feel that they had to look further than the existing constitutional and political system to achieve their purposes. The question here is not whether they were right or wrong: the limits of capitalist democracy in terms of radical reform are much more severe than 'reformism' has been willing to contemplate. But be that as it may, the predominance of 'reformist' dispositions in the working class and the labour movement of advanced capitalist countries, notwithstanding all the derelictions and shortcomings and crises that have marked the history of advanced capitalism, must surely be attributed to a political system deemed capable of affording remedy and reform. Nothing could have been more important in helping to confine pressure from below

into manageable channels and to ensure the 'routinization' and reduction of conflict.⁷

Capitalist democracy has in this context given its full weight to the influence exercised by 'reformist' labour leaders. For the framework of capitalist democracy vastly enhances the role of these leaders as advocates of 'moderation', gradualism, conciliation and compromise and lends added plausibility to their approach in the eyes of their members and followers. The organizations which these leaders control thus become charged with considerable ambiguity: on the one hand, these organizations are mobilizing agencies, 'aggregating' and 'articulating' grievances and demands; on the other hand, however, they also regularly turn themselves into demobilizing agencies, concerned to contain and even reduce pressure from below and to combat the influence of their militant and radical members. In this perspective, and however it may be judged, the role which those in effective charge of these organizations have had in fostering and enhancing the 'reformist' propensities of labour movements, and in countering the influence of the revolutionary Left, cannot be over-estimated.

I have already suggested that class analysis makes possible a rational and coherent explanation of class struggle as it is conducted both from above and from below. Given the crucial role which class struggle plays in the life of class society, this means that class analysis can provide a rational and coherent explanation of the general dynamic of social life. It also provides a fundamental, essential criterion whereby the role played in class relations and class struggle by people, institutions and ideological constructs of the most varied kind may be assessed. People, institutions and ideological constructs are affected by their social context to some degree or another, and 'social context' must be taken to have as its largest ingredient the state of class relations. But people, institutions and ideological constructs are not only affected by their social context: they also affect it, to some degree or another. The question which class analysis asks is: what role or place do people and agencies and ideas have in class relations and class struggle? It is not the *only* question which may be asked about them, but it is nevertheless an important one whose answer permits an illumination of their nature and function in class-divided societies. The answer, as in the case of agencies of labour, may be ambiguous rather than straightforward, but that too is illuminating. It may also be the case that the question does not admit of an answer, because it is of no relevance: there *are* manifestations of life in society, whether expressed in institutions or intellectual productions, which cannot reasonably be said to have any bearing on class relations, even though they are themselves affected by their social context. The experience of Communist regimes, with monopolistic party systems seeking to

⁷ I have tried to show this in relation to Britain in *Capitalist Democracy in Britain* (Miliband: 1982).

encompass and control all manifestations of social life and to suppress those deemed to be on the wrong side of the class struggle, shows well enough how fraught the question can be. But this is not a sufficient reason for not asking it, for not to ask it is to turn away from an essential aspect of social analysis. What is made of the answer is not itself determined by the nature of the question.

VI

I have so far referred to class analysis in a purely national context. But it is a mode of analysis which is as relevant to the international context in which societies have their being as to the national one.

It must first be noted that the ever-greater 'internationalization' of the economies of the capitalist world does not change the fact that the dominant classes in each capitalist country remain in being. Nor is that fact changed by the emergence of vast and powerful 'multinational' conglomerates. These corporate giants are 'multinational' in the sense that their operations extend over many countries, but they are in essence *national* firms (mainly American, followed by British, with Canadian, French, German, Japanese, Dutch and one or two others trailing a long way behind) controlled by people who form part of the dominant class of their own society. The 'internationalization' of capital must obviously affect the ways in which capital and the state in each separate country operate, but what they do internationally is dictated by precisely the same purposes which move them in relation to internal matters, namely the defence of a 'national interest' naturally conceived in terms which make it synonymous with the interests of the dominant class. However, these interests have, in the twentieth century, acquired a more pronounced global reach, not only through the internationalization of capital but on larger political grounds concerned with the emergence of 'communism' on the world scene from the time of the Bolshevik Revolution onwards.

In this perspective, class analysis involves the charting of international relations since 1917 in terms of the twin concern of dominant classes in advanced capitalist countries: first, to defend the 'national interest' against all other capitalist states and second, to prevent the spread of 'communism' anywhere in the world. It was these concerns, and notably the latter, that decisively shaped the character and substance of international relations in the years between the two world wars, and the struggle against 'communism' has been even more decisive in shaping international relations since 1945.

In this struggle, the Western powers have encountered the Soviet Union in so far as the Soviet Union, for its own purposes, has accorded help to revolutionary movements or regimes; the struggle is thus made to appear as primarily one between states, each pursuing its own 'national interest'. But this is no more than appearance: the basis of the struggle and its inner dynamic are provided by the determination of advanced capitalist countries, under the leadership of the United States, to wage a global struggle, by

economic, political, ideological and military means, against all movements bent on revolutionary change or radical reform. On this view, international relations since 1917, and particularly since 1945, have been shaped by class struggle on a world scale. It is a view which provides a more reasonable and coherent explanation of international relations in the twentieth century than alternative explanations based on traditional views of conflict between states or on the 'madness' or irrationality of people in power.

VII

How far, if at all, is class analysis relevant to Communist regimes? The question arises because all the societies over which these regimes preside have undergone a revolutionary transformation in their system of power, property and privilege, and their whole class structure has in consequence been radically changed. What is at issue is what kind of social structure has been built on the ruins of the old, and whether that structure is susceptible to class analysis.

An answer to that question must begin with the fact that a dominant class or stratum does exist in all these societies. It does not seem to me to matter much whether 'class' or 'stratum' is used to denote the people in question, notwithstanding the fierceness of the controversies which have raged over these terms.⁸ The important point is the fact of domination, exercised by virtue of the control of the means of production, the means of administration and coercion and the means of communication, vested in a relatively small number of people in the (monopolistic) party and the state. Here, too, it is necessary to distinguish between a power elite, made up of the people who occupy the leading positions in the party and the state (or more accurately the party-state), and the rest of the dominant class which, under the ultimate direction of the party-state leadership, occupy positions of high responsibility in the party, the state and society at large.

A fundamental difference between Communist regimes and capitalist ones is that it is exclusively location in the uppermost reaches of the party and the state that determines membership of the power elite — no element of

⁸ Insistence, notably by Trotsky and later Trotskyists, that the people in controlling positions in the Soviet Union were not a dominant class but a dominant stratum is largely derived from the fact that their power and position are not based on their ownership of property and capital and they cannot perpetuate themselves as a class by bequeathing such property and capital to their descendants. This would seem to conceive what constitutes a dominant class in too narrowly 'economistic' terms. Although it is true that not being able to bequeath property and capital to one's descendants is a matter of importance, there are other advantages which may be conferred upon them so as to give them a very good chance of remaining in the upper reaches of the social pyramid. The difference is still real, but not such as to preclude the usage of the term 'class'.

capitalist ownership or control enters into it. As for the rest of the dominant class, its composition is mainly determined by the functions which its members perform. The middle-sized capitalist class of capitalist societies does not here exist. It may come to be reconstituted in one or other Communist country, for instance China, but in no Communist country does it now exist as a class. Petty trading and small-scale private farming do exist, but the 'petty bourgeoisie' of these societies is nevertheless overwhelmingly made up of the same kind of people as are to be found in the non-entrepreneurial part of the petty bourgeoisie of advanced capitalist societies, the people who exercise sub-managerial, supervisory and controlling functions at the lower reaches of society and the state. Finally, there is the vast majority of the population, forming a subordinate class of workers and peasants, whose individual power, responsibility and influence at all levels are exceedingly limited and whose 'input' in the decision-making process, though far greater than adverse propaganda depicts, is also limited and carefully controlled.

Class analysis is just as relevant to this kind of social and political structure as to any other. It is concerned with the nature and composition of the different classes in society (whatever these classes may be called); with the mechanisms whereby surplus labour is extracted and allocated; and with the struggles which the system generates. This is not to say that the questions, let alone the answers, are to be couched in the same terms as in the case of capitalist societies but, rather, that such questions are eminently applicable to Communist societies and that to pose them and answer them is indispensable for the understanding of these societies.

The purposes which surplus extraction is intended to serve in Communist regimes are decisively influenced by the absence of a capitalist (and landlord) class in their social and political structures. For it means that the people in control of the party and the state have a freedom of action in economic decision-making which is altogether denied their counterparts in capitalist countries, a freedom that is further enhanced in all other realms (including the process of production) by the nature of the political system itself.

As for the purposes of surplus extraction, it is no doubt the case that the people who are located at the upper reaches of the social pyramid seek to appropriate a part of the surplus congruent with their expectations within the given historical and social context. But what they appropriate, however noteworthy in comparison with what is available to the mass of the population, is a very small, even insignificant, part of the total product. The important point is that the people in control are able to decide the general purposes to which the bulk of the surplus should be devoted; and that they are able to do so without reference to the purposes, needs and wishes of a capitalist or landlord class or, for that matter, without much reference to anybody else either. No doubt, the people in power do take note of the grievances, wishes and demands of different parts of the population as refracted through a variety of agencies such as the press, trade unions and above all the party. But what they do about the grievances, wishes and demands that do reach them is largely a matter of their own choice: the

state or, perhaps more accurately, the party leaders) in these regimes has a very high degree of autonomy.

This autonomy is used above all for the purpose naturally paramount for all dominant classes anywhere, namely the defence and strengthening of the social order over which they are in control. And in conditions of underdevelopment exacerbated by devastation due to foreign intervention and civil war, the people in power apply even greater 'pressure from above' upon the subordinate population for the achievement of their goals. In some notable instances, such as Stalin's rule in the Soviet Union in the late twenties and thirties, this amounted to 'revolution from above', with extreme state violence exercised against peasants, workers and society at large. This is a different version of class struggle from that to be found in capitalist societies, and whether it should be thus labelled is open to question. But the process nevertheless involves substantial pressure from above upon the subordinate population, usually accompanied by a considerable degree of state coercion. The purpose of this pressure is always claimed to be for the ultimate benefit of the population itself, and this in many instances is undoubtedly true. But this clearly does not obliterate the fact that it is a pressure exercised and imposed upon a population that has no great share in the decisions which are made on its behalf.

As for pressure from below in these regimes, its targets are not difficult to identify: they concern questions of wages, hours and conditions, and the 'relations of production' that govern the productive process; the availability, cost and quality of consumer goods and of welfare and collective services; bureaucracy, corruption and nepotism, and the manner in which power at all levels is exercised; the grievances and demands of ethnic, religious, political and other minorities; and a multitude of other matters of internal and international policy which may become subjects of controversy, dissent and challenge.

The questions which class analysis poses in this respect concern both the nature of the issues in contention and the manner in which conflicts are resolved or attenuated in these systems. A further question raised here by class analysis resembles that raised in regard to capitalist countries, even though the answer to it is likely to differ, namely what are the limits of reform, if any, in such systems, and who are likely to be the main protagonists of reform? One of the most hopeful features of these regimes, at least from a socialist perspective, is that pressure for reform does not come only from below, but is also engendered from above. How far and in what directions both sets of pressure go is bound to have a major impact on the future of socialism, not only in the countries concerned but far beyond them.

VIII

Something must also be said here of the challenge that has been posed to class analysis by feminists, members of racial or ethnic minorities, and

others, on the ground that class analysis is incapable of explaining sexism, racism, nationalism and other such phenomena, and that it is irrelevant – indeed an obstacle – to the understanding of related matters of crucial importance to these groups.

These strictures seem to me misconceived on a number of grounds. There is, to begin with, the rather obvious but frequently overlooked fact that women, blacks and members of other minorities are also members of a class and are inevitably situated at some point of the social structure of their societies. Women, on this view, are part of the working class, as workers or as wives of workers, or of course as both; or they are members of the dominant class, also by virtue of their profession or business position, or by marriage. In one way or another, the point is also true for blacks and all other relevant groups in society.

It is perfectly legitimate for women, blacks and others to say and to feel with great intensity that they are, *above all*, women, blacks, or whatever, and that *this* beyond all else is what gives them their identity and defines their 'social being'. But their sense of a particular identity, however important in a number of different ways, not least politically, does not reduce the importance of class as an intrinsic part of their 'social being' – and, I would argue, as a *decisive* part of their 'social being'. It is reasonable and necessary to see 'social being' as a complex and contradictory entity in which many different identities coexist and often clash, and the closer the analysis gets to separate individuals the more complex and varied 'social being' is bound to reveal itself to be. All social analysis in this sense, and not only class analysis, has an inevitably 'reductionist' character. Even so, it remains the case that location in the social structure is crucial in determining the ways in which people experience discrimination, exploitation and oppression. The fact that they experience these as women, blacks, etc., does not in the least alter the validity of the point. Bourgeois women, and bourgeois blacks, do experience discrimination, and may be variously oppressed and exploited. But they experience discrimination, oppression and exploitation differently from women workers or black workers; and a black woman worker experiences them as a black, as a woman and as a worker. This testifies to the fact that 'social being' is indeed a multiple and complex set of elements, a kind of social DNA. But it is nevertheless class which suffuses and most deeply affects all other elements.

It has, however, been argued, notably by feminists but also by members of racial or ethnic minorities, that to speak of class domination and class subordination, and thus to divide society 'horizontally', is to obscure or altogether conceal the fact that women and blacks and others are not only subject to discrimination and oppression by members of the dominant class and the bourgeoisie but, in the various forms which sexism and racism assume in the working class and in the labour movement, by members of the subordinate class also. There is a lot in this, even though there are many forms of oppression, discrimination and exploitation available to employers that are not available to workers. But while there is no question

that sexism and racism are to be found in the subordinate class, they are closely related to the nature of class society and are in this sense perfectly susceptible to class analysis.

The relation of sexism and racism to class society can be understood in two distinct ways: first, much of the discrimination which male white workers seek to exercise against women and blacks can easily be traced to what might be called economic motives, and must be seen as an expression of their class position and their desire to enhance or maintain their bargaining position *vis-à-vis* employers in the face of what they conceive to be a threat to that position. This is not intended as a justification but as an explanation. 'Social closure', on this view, has strong economic sources and is closely related to the competition between workers that capitalism imposes upon them. An instance of the phenomenon which does not involve women or blacks but a different set of protagonists is provided by the hostility which opposes Protestant to Catholic workers in Northern Ireland. It is tempting to see this struggle as a 'sectarian' one, based purely upon religious and ethnic grounds. But it is not particularly 'class reductionist' or an exaggerated form of 'economic determinism' to suggest that a basic cause of the antagonism is the attempt by Protestant workers to safeguard their already precarious and even dire material situation from what they take to be a major threat from an even more deprived minority, with both sides distinguished by religion, tradition, culture, historic memories and mutual grievances.

Undoubtedly, this economically-generated antagonism is rationalized and expressed in terms which are far removed from their economic roots. These terms soon acquire solidity and substance and therewith autonomy, and thus become powerful ideological constructs in their own right. People subscribe passionately to these constructs and come to define much of their 'social being' in the constructs' terms. Thus, Protestant workers come to see their Catholic counterparts not only as competitors but as the carriers of a particular kind of religious poison and as a threat to a cherished religious and national identity. They further rationalize their prejudices and fears by denouncing Catholic workers as lazy, shiftless and stupid. The process is a familiar one in many situations. The cord which attaches economic position to ideological construct is a very long one and runs through very rugged terrain. It is often buried deep, and it may snap altogether. But in relation to working-class manifestations of sexism, racism, etc., class situation cannot reasonably be left out of account.

The second point is closely related to the first, but distinct from it. It may well be said that there is prejudice and hatred and exclusion even where there is no plausible 'economic' source for them, for instance in the case of male violence against women, exercised by working-class as well as bourgeois men and against bourgeois as well as working-class women. This is true and important. But here too, it does not seem unduly 'reductionist' to argue that these are pathological expressions of the deep 'injuries of class', the multiple alienations and psychological deformations which are produced

by class societies, with all the cruelties, brutalities, repressions and traumas which they engender. Men (and women) seek ways out of their 'private' troubles and problems, and do so in ways which are often irrational or sick or perverse. Adherence to fascist ideas and movements is the extreme manifestation of this in the twentieth century, but there are many other individual and collective manifestations to be found. The explanation of these phenomena requires the careful exploration of the social context in which they occur, of the social blockages which produce them and of the social pressures which they are expected, however misguidedly, to resolve. In other words, it requires class analysis.

To think otherwise requires resort to explanations which proceed from such notions as a given, ineluctable 'human nature' which makes human beings the creatures that they are and that they cannot ultimately help being. It requires reliance on some primal malediction which has ordained that aggression, domination and violence should be inscribed in the human condition, or in the male condition. To argue thus is to succumb to a dangerous and self-defeating irrationalism which is the enemy both of serious analysis and of rational and humane solutions to the real problems confronting the populations of class societies.

Nothing of this is intended to suggest that a formal proclamation of the abolition of class society, or even the actual beginning of its abolition, can at once end the processes of discrimination, exploitation and oppression which have always been part of the social life of class society and which have therefore acquired a formidable strength. The eradication of these evils is bound to be a prolonged enterprise, but there is every reason to think that the creation of a classless society, democratic, egalitarian and cooperative, would greatly attenuate these evils in a cumulative process that would eventually lead to their complete eradication.

In such a society, no aggregate of people would have such control over the means of domination as to turn itself into a dominant class. That control would be vested in society itself by way of mechanisms and institutions capable of ensuring the democratic administration of power and of preventing, by the same token, the resurrection of structures of domination. What is enshrined in the Marxist vision of a classless society, free from domination, is the conviction not that the achievement of such a society is easy, but that it is possible.

Nor does the history of the last hundred years tell us that such a vision is illusory. On the contrary, and without indulging in any vacuous eschatology, it tells us, I would argue, that pressure from below, despite all obstacles and setbacks, grinds away relentlessly, out of the conditions which produce it, at the prevailing structures of domination. It is the immense and global strength of this process which turns the achievement of a world free from domination and exploitation from a vision into a project.

Class analysis could only be made irrelevant by the coming into being of a classless society. There is a very long way to go before this is achieved. But it is likely to be achieved less slowly if more people, notably in the

subordinate population, come to have an accurate view of social reality and of the conflicts which are at the centre of that reality. Class analysis, better than any other mode of analysis, makes such an understanding possible.

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Critical Theory¹

AXEL HONNETH

It is now half a century since critical theory emerged under the direction of a single man and as the work of a circle of intellectuals; but it was not until the student movement turned back to the writings of the Institute for Social Research (*Institut für Sozialforschung*) that critical theory was recognized as a unified theoretical project. Since then it has occupied the intellectual imagination: historical research has retraced the history of that intellectual circle around Horkheimer from its beginnings in Frankfurt to its spread, via France, to the United States;² spurred on by the disillusioning accounts of its early members, philological analyses have brought to light the internal inconsistencies, indeed the whole disparity of the circle;³ above all, younger authors, motivated by changes in the *Zeitgeist*, have continued to discover new themes which have thus far remained unnoticed in the old writings;⁴ finally, however, the critical discussion that the Frankfurt School has stimulated for over twenty years has also revealed materially relevant deficiencies and theoretical aporias in the original project.⁵ This process has in some cases led to the admission of a fundamental weakness in critical theory (see, e.g., Brandt: 1986).

Thus, for all the continual, indeed increasing, interest that critical theory

¹ Translated by John Farrell. I wish to thank Rolf Wiggerhaus for helpful comments.

² See, among others, Dubiel: 1984; Jay: 1973; Wiggerhaus: 1986. In addition, the following provide comprehensive surveys: Bottomore: 1984; Brandt: 1981; Gmünder: 1985; Held: 1980; Jeyer: 1982; Kilminster: 1979; Slater: 1977; Tar: 1977.

³ Institute members' accounts of their experiences at the institute exist primarily in interview form: see Habermas (1978) and Löwenthal (1980); an extract from Löwenthal is translated in Dubiel (1981). The first systematic investigations of the internal differences within the institute's circle are presented in Brandt (1981), Breuer (1985), Habermas (1986b) and Jay (1982).

⁴ See, for example, Hörisch: 1980; see also Dews: 1984.

⁵ Above all I am thinking of Benhabib (1981), Habermas (1984, ch. 4, section 2), Held (1980, part 3), Honneth (1985, part 1) and Wellmer (1971).