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978-0-521-28809-5 - Social Class and the Division of Labour: Essays in Honour of Ilya Neustadt

Edited by Anthony Giddens and Gavin MacKenzie

Excerpt

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Introduction

A concern with class analysis has long been one of the main preoccupations of British sociology. Certainly this is an area to which sociologists working in this country have made some of their most notable contributions. In recent years, however, reflecting in some degree changes that have been taking place within sociology as a whole, a fresh wave of research into problems of class inequalities and conflicts has been produced. Of particular importance, of course, is the fact that the past decade or so has seen a major revival of Marxist thought, in various forms; and this inevitably has made a deep imprint upon debates in class theory. Furthermore, in the post-positivist phase of the reconstruction of social thought, certain other issues have come to the fore that also have a direct bearing upon class analysis. These issues include basic problems about how human action should be conceptualised, and what relation should be supposed to exist between action and the 'structural' components of social institutions. In some part as a result of these developments, which indicate that all the social sciences share a common core of problems, the boundaries between sociology and other fields of social science have become much less impermeable than they used to be. The concept of the division of labour itself has once again become a unifying notion connecting the writings of sociologists and economists. A resurgence of interest in the state among sociological writers has helped to efface some of the barriers that used to separate sociology and political science. Not least important, at the same time as sociologists have recovered the importance of history, historians have been making increasing use of sociological methods and insights, thus creating a further *rapprochement* between previously distinct forms of intellectual endeavour.

The results of all this have by no means been wholly edifying. In social theory, much effort has been expended upon programmatic

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statements which promise a great deal but whose yield, especially in respect of generating substantive research, has been rather less than impressive. Something similar is true in the more limited confines of the study of class. There is certainly no shortage of abstract discussions of the concept of 'class' and related issues, often involving complicated formal categories which are at best remote from concrete problems of class analysis, at worst vacuous. We have tried to avoid such discussions in the articles collected together in this volume. Most of the contributors show themselves to be aware of current developments in social theory, but they have sought to draw upon these developments in a critical vein, and in the context of analysing quite concrete issues. The result, we think, is a book which provides an excellent introduction to contemporary work in class analysis, but which at the same time represents an important contribution to the existing literature in its own right.

Many of those who have contributed to this book, including its editors, were educated at a time at which sociology was (for the most part) dominated by 'structural-functionalism', and by a scorn for the historical study of long-term processes of social development. The influence of Ilya Neustadt over those who were his students or colleagues – together with the formidable impact made during his years at Leicester by Norbert Elias – ensured that few succumbed to these then prevalent ideas or tendencies. The work of Elias is now generally available in English, and no one today can doubt the significance of his achievements in sociology. In his teaching at Leicester, Elias attuned a whole generation of students to his ideas – which at the time remained largely unknown to those who did not enjoy personal contact with him. Neustadt wrote less than Elias, but his influence, in teaching and other contexts, was equally strong. In respect of the work incorporated in this book, Neustadt's approach was particularly important. As T. H. Marshall notes at the conclusion of his portrayal of Neustadt's career, Neustadt insisted upon the significance of the concept of the division of labour at a time when the more bland and diffuse notion of 'social differentiation' had very largely displaced it. Moreover, he emphasised forcibly that class divisions and class conflict could only be satisfactorily theorised in conjunction with an elaborated analysis of the division of labour.

What was then a heretical view has today become generally recognised to be of central importance. The 'division of labour' has become a respectable concept again – one which in the recent literature has received a considerable amount of attention. Several of the papers in this book focus directly upon the division of labour, considering

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especially Marxist views of its relation to class domination. Rattansi offers a discussion of this issue at source, in Marx's writings. His main thesis, interestingly and originally argued, is that the theme of the transcendence of the division of labour in Marx is by no means the utopian conception it has appeared to many of Marx's critics. In his early writings, Rattansi argues, Marx tended to merge the concepts of 'class' and 'the division of labour'. Hence he wrote as though the disappearance of classes, in a socialist society, would *ipso facto* entail the dissolution of the division of labour such as it is found in capitalism. Later he progressively abandoned such a view, as he came to see that large-scale industrial production imposes exigencies that are not simply and solely the outcome of class domination. He continued to accentuate the idea of the transcendence of the division of labour, but his emphasis shifted to the narrower issue of overcoming the division between mental and manual labour.

Rattansi's discussion forms a useful complement to those papers in the book which concern themselves with the division of labour as it currently exists in capitalist production. Recent analysis has been strongly influenced by Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital*. This work deservedly ranks as one of the most notable contributions to the discussion of the division of labour within Marxist traditions. However, over the seven or eight years since the book first appeared, its limitations have become more and more apparent. The articles by Giddens, Salaman and Mackenzie focus upon some of these limitations, in the course of discussing various problems of class theory. Giddens connects a discussion of the relation between action and structure to a critical commentary upon Braverman's work, coupled to themes drawn from Max Weber's classical interpretation of bureaucracy. He points out that, although written from a Marxist standpoint, Braverman's conception of the fragmentation of the labour process in capitalism leads to conclusions not dissimilar to those of Weber, in respect of the inevitability of the concentration of power in the hands of the few. These conclusions, according to Giddens, are mistaken; they derive in some part from a failure to consider the 'dialectic of control' that operates in all organisations, in which shifting imbalances of power chronically occur.

In similar vein, both Salaman and Mackenzie emphasise the invigorating effect which Braverman's work has produced – stimulating a wealth of new studies of the labour process in different contexts of capitalist development. Among the most important of Braverman's claims (although it remains a controversial one) is that class domination enters into the very nature of industrial technology, especially

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in relation to the mental/manual labour division. Braverman's book has also served to reopen questions of the character and origins of managerial control of the labour force. Accepting the significance of these contributions, like Giddens, Salaman finds their actual analysis by Braverman wanting. 'Management' is regarded as a passive category, not as a creative process involving knowledgeable agents. Moreover, position in the division of labour should be regarded as only one dimension of the structuration of class relationships, which also has to have reference to phenomena outside the industrial enterprise itself.

Mackenzie's article focusses on overlapping issues. In particular he is concerned with the issue of how 'class boundaries' should be conceptualised. Where the boundaries between classes lie, and how the delineation of different class groupings should be formulated, are major problems left by the legacy of Marx. These problems do not just concern the differentiation of 'capital' and 'wage-labour' as organised classes – 'bourgeoisie' and 'proletariat' – but bear particularly upon intermediate classes. Within the past few years several Marxist authors, including Poulantzas, Wright and Carchedi, have made attempts to identify the character of such intermediate classes in relation to capital and wage-labour. The value of their work, according to Mackenzie, is compromised by its formal, descriptive character. But rather than being dismissed, this work needs to be conjoined precisely to the sort of literature dealing with the dynamics of the labour process stimulated by Braverman and his critics. An historical approach is essential to this endeavour.

The direct study of varying forms of labour, especially in respect of assembly-line production, was, throughout his intellectual career, the prime concern of the late Ely Chinoy (the only American contributor to this volume). His discussion combines closely with those just referred to, although it is not explicitly concerned with Braverman's ideas. Chinoy concentrates particularly upon the application of the principles of 'scientific management' in the Ford Motor Company in the early part of this century. More recently management has made a series of efforts to synchronise the production line, using computers to assist in the coordination of workers and machines. But managers have come to recognise that speed and technical efficiency of production have to take second place to the quality of the end-product. Quality control cannot be built in to the production line by purely technical coordination, but depends upon securing the active involvement of the labour force with the work they do. Here lies one of the major sources of tension in assembly-line manufacture. For

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workers have abandoned 'craft values' in a context in which their labour has become increasingly routinised and mechanical.

Chinoy's discussion broaches questions of workers' attitudes to their labour, and wider issues of class consciousness. Several other papers in this book also explore facets of these problems. Lockwood's analysis, although couched in fairly general terms, provides a framework for exploring modes of compliance to the directives of those in authority. His argument has affinities with that of Michael Mann's characterisation of the legitimacy of authority in *Consciousness and Action among the Western Working Class*. This latter author emphasises that the compliance of workers to managerial authority in industry does not necessarily, or even generally, rest upon consensually shared goals. Rather, workers adopt 'pragmatic' attitudes towards their participation in industrial labour, seeing it in large degree as inevitable if not desirable. But at the same time they do not, for the most part, have an articulated conception of how things could be different. Lockwood similarly attacks 'consensus' theories of compliance to authority, developing a characteristically innovative interpretation of the neglected type in Durkheim's categorisation of forms of suicide: fatalism. 'Fatalism', Lockwood suggests, may be a concept capable of much broader application than Durkheim accords it. Chronic poverty, or fixity of status, in traditional societies may be accepted because these are seen as governed by forces over which those subject to them have no control. Much the same may be the case for those who carry out dull or oppressive work, or suffer long-standing unemployment, in capitalist societies. Fatalistic attitudes do not imply a heavy measure of direct coercion, but rather that the social circumstances in which individuals exist are seen as unchanging and unchangeable. Such a 'fatalism of belief', as Lockwood calls it, might be common in contemporary capitalist societies. Nonetheless it is to be distinguished from 'fatalistic ideologies' as such, the sort of 'ethics of fatalism' found for instance in the Indian caste system.

In spite of the now generally agreed necessity of incorporating an historical dimension into sociological analysis, many studies of class and class consciousness continue to imply that social life exists in a timeless vacuum. One of the important features of Richard Brown's paper is that he seeks to show how important work histories are in the detailed analysis of occupational categories. The notion of 'occupation' has been used by virtually all scholars who have written about the division of labour, but there are manifest inadequacies in the concept as it is ordinarily applied. Many accounts – one might again

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here instance the work of Poulantzas, Wright and Carchedi – tend to consider occupations only at one point in time. They neglect the temporal development of ‘careers’, which both intersect with, and help to constitute, broader institutional changes in class relationships over time. A single individual, for example, may occupy a succession of different positions in the division of labour in the course of his or her life-cycle. The study of work histories, Brown shows, is important both for explicating changes in class structure and in understanding forms of class consciousness. For the past and potential future ‘work biographies’ of individuals are likely to be the grounding for their attitudes towards work, and their more general consciousness, views and actions.

These considerations are germane to the analysis of relations between class, gender and the division of labour. For as Brown points out, undue focus upon the notion of occupation has obscured the significance of the labour of those who do not work in ‘gainfully paid’ jobs – particularly ‘housewives’. Allen shows in her paper how commonly women have been ignored in class theory, and in research into class relationships. Recent work has done something to remedy this deficiency, but a great deal more is still needed. Work-history research is certainly crucial to understanding the intersection between sexual and class divisions in society. The ‘interruption’ of women’s careers by the birth and bringing up of children, for example, is – both materially and ideologically – a major factor confining women to underprivileged sectors of segmented labour markets.

In referring to Mackenzie’s paper, we have already mentioned the burgeoning literature concerned with re-examining the position of ‘intermediate strata’ in contemporary capitalist societies. Three articles in this volume, which complement each other rather neatly, concentrate directly upon these categories or groupings. Scase’s discussion reiterates some of the points made by Giddens, Salaman and Mackenzie in criticism of the ‘functionalist Marxism’ of Poulantzas *et al.* But Scase is explicitly concerned with the petty bourgeoisie in the traditional sense of the term: that is to say, Poulantzas’s ‘old petty bourgeoisie’. The approach of the ‘functionalist Marxists’ is castigated because, in placing an overwhelming emphasis upon class ‘positions’ or ‘places’, they ignore the modes in which actors are able to organise their careers so as to influence what those positions or places actually *are*. The petty bourgeoisie, Scase claims, retain an important role in class relations in the capitalist societies today. In this respect he diverges from Marx’s empirical prognosis of capitalist development, just as he differs from the theoretical standpoint of some

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of Marx's recent professed followers. Marx argued that the petty bourgeoisie would dwindle away with the maturation of capitalism, since large capital ousts small capital from more and more spheres of production. But small business, in various forms, continues to survive. Its continued existence, Scase reasons, is not to be understood solely as an archaic remnant of the early phases of capitalist development. Small business provides a potential avenue of upward mobility for those who lack the educational or technical qualifications to move up within larger organisations. Moreover, large firms are often dependent upon goods or services provided through subcontracting in areas of the economy – including the 'black economy' – where large-scale enterprise is neither feasible nor profitable.

In contrast, Goldthorpe and Johnson are both concerned with sectors of the 'new petty bourgeoisie' – or 'new middle class'. Goldthorpe, however, offers yet another term, borrowed from Renner: that of 'service class'. The service class, in Goldthorpe's analysis, consists of professional, administrative and managerial employees. In common with Mackenzie, he draws attention to the difficulties which Marx and subsequent Marxists have experienced in coping conceptually with such groupings; and he too is dissatisfied with the views expressed by 'functionalist Marxists'. But he also provides an incisive critical review of other perspectives from inside and outside Marxist thought. The idea of a service class, appropriately explicated, he concludes, is the most fruitful way of grasping the connections between structural components of the class position of higher white-collar workers and their typical conduct and beliefs. The 'code of service' which tends to govern the conditions of employment of such workers, which involves a certain moral quality, differentiates them from the single-stranded economic labour contract entered into by the working class and by lower-level office employees. Those in the service class are delegated with areas of responsibility in exchange for making a moral commitment to the enterprise within which they work. This both tends to give them interests different from those who are not delegated with such responsibilities, and stimulates different forms of socio-political action. In analysing these, Goldthorpe again places some considerable emphasis upon the importance of incorporating a time-dimension that allows for the study of overlapping career histories.

Johnson's discussion of the professions concentrates not upon the incorporation of professional employees within delegated authority systems inside organisations, but rather upon the relation between professions and the state. He sets out to criticise, on the basis of

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empirical evidence, the conventional thesis that 'state intervention' and 'professional autonomy' are opposed processes. The normal view in the sociological literature on the professions – one commonly shared by professionals themselves – is that the intrusion of the state into areas of economic organisation, the law or medicine compromises the autonomy required for the exercise of professional expertise. The 'delegated authority' that thereby results (and which Goldthorpe regards as the basis of the existence of the service class) has here normally been portrayed as the transforming of professionals into mere functionaries. Johnson has various objections to raise. For one thing, this view regards the state as a pre-formed phenomenon, which then 'intervenes' into various areas of professional competence. But this is obviously a misleading stance, since such 'intervention' is part and parcel of the very institutions that comprise 'the state'. State formation and professionalisation have in fact from the start been interrelated processes. It is a myth to suppose that professional autonomy can be found within 'professionalism' itself; such autonomy exists only in and through the articulation of the state and the professions. In the case of Britain, the imperial extension of state power has been particularly important in influencing the growth of the professions.

Furthermore Johnson goes on to suggest that some of the characteristics which have frequently been attributed to 'professionals' in general may rest upon mistaken generalisations from Britain to other societies. The 'British case', in this context as in others, might be the exception rather than the rule. The peculiarities of the British also form the main theme of Ingham's article, one of two contributions which discuss the top echelons of the class structure. Ingham develops a novel approach to a problem which has received relatively little attention from either sociologists or historians, in spite of its obvious importance to the study of contemporary British society: the relation between 'the City' and industry. Those who have written on the issue have almost uniformly stressed that the ascendancy of the City – the financial sectors of the economy centred in London – over industry has given a particular stamp to class rule in Britain. Ingham accepts the general tenor of this argument, but criticises the way in which it has been formulated, particularly by Nairn and Longstreth. These authors fail adequately to say what they mean by 'the City', or use ambiguous formulations; and they mistakenly identify the role of City institutions with finance capital as traditionally conceptualised in Marxism. Partly criticising Marx, but also drawing upon aspects of Marx's writings left undeveloped by Marx himself, Ingham argues

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that the principal operations of the City are concerned with commercial and banking capital. The commercial activities of the City have been essentially bound up with the international dimension of its involvements; but its privileged position has also been protected by 'internal' characteristics of the state.

Scott's discussion forms a helpful adjunct to that of Ingham, since he places his emphasis on the study of large industrial corporations. It is this, the 'propertied class', which is the subject-matter of his analysis and which consists of those who have 'effective possession' of capital. 'Effective possession' is defined not as simple legal ownership, but as the capacity to control the strategic deployment of capital. A distinctively privileged and powerful propertied class continues to exist in British society, as in other capitalist countries. According to Scott, the so-called 'managerial revolution' has altered the character of this class, but has certainly not led to its dissolution. Individual entrepreneurs no longer own and run the large corporations; but the industrial leadership continues to be drawn from a privileged class of propertied families. This is still a dominant class, not only in the sphere of economic power – which Scott discusses at length – but in other institutions also.

This collection of essays contains two which have a practical bent, in the sense that they are concerned with the possibilities of securing political change. Hirst's article focusses upon issues of current significance in Britain, although it has wider implications; Bottomore in contrast formulates a more embracing and comparative assessment of the possible future of socialist movements in Europe. Of significance is the fact that Hirst appears to react back against views expressed in his previous work. What have characteristically been seen by sociologists as 'structural' consequences of the division of labour, he contends, are in fact to be understood as the result of specific policies followed by different collectivities or organisations. He seeks to demonstrate this by studying incomes policy and forms of action devoted to implementing 'industrial democracy'. Neither the former nor the latter – including most notably the Bullock Report – have recognised the entrenched nature of differentials of interest and activity actively fought for by different groups within the working class as a whole. Hirst goes on to criticise those both on the Right and on the Left who hold that, in the long run at any rate, unions cannot significantly influence the overall distribution of income. They have done, and continue to do so. According to Hirst, however, the resistance which the union movement has put up against incomes policies is in some part misplaced. National incomes planning, he

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argues controversially, if it were established in an equitable fashion, rather than being used to hold down the wages of those least able to resist, should be endorsed by the unions. This must involve a 'socialist-egalitarian' incomes policy, something which Hirst believes would act to strengthen the power of the organised working class, not weaken it. But such a consolidation of working-class power would also require that workers be able to extend their capacities for control *inside* enterprises. The achievement of industrial democracy, even on the relatively limited scale proposed in the Bullock Report, Hirst says, would provide a stepping-stone for more radical change effected in a democratic fashion.

Finally, Bottomore discusses the prospects of political radicalism in the contemporary period against the backdrop of an earlier parallel analysis. Ten years ago, he writes, he proposed that a major turning-point had been reached in the political development of the Western European societies. The established parties, founded mainly on class lines, seemed to have reached an end-point in their development. On the Left, the existing socialist and communist parties were being outflanked by a new upsurge of revolt, in which student movements figured prominently. On the Right, conservative and liberal parties were being challenged by the rise of new technocratic elites, committed above all to rapid economic growth. To add to these tendencies, various forms of regionalism seemed to be gaining strength, although formed of uneasy alliances of groups drawn from different parts of the political spectrum. Today, Bottomore observes, much of this has changed. The radical movements on the Left have declined, and a new conservative mood has appeared in the context of world recession, 'stagflation' and a resumption of the arms race. At the same time, however, there has been a renewal of support for Left parties on a broad front in a variety of countries – Britain, as ever, being untypical in this respect. Many would see the policies of these parties, including established Communist parties, as reformist in character, and thus far from realising the emancipatory goals to which Marx anticipated that the labour movement would aspire. But Bottomore is more optimistic. Socialists, he argues, can no longer close their eyes to the glaring imperfections of the 'actually existing' socialist societies of Eastern Europe and elsewhere. Nonetheless there is a continuing vitality to democratic socialist movements in the West which, especially if they become conjoined to other radical forces that are now appearing, remains a major source of hope for the future.

In this brief introduction, we have tried to convey an indication of