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The Class Structure of Advanced Capitalist Societies

All Marxists agree that manual workers directly engaged in the production of physical commodities for private capital fall into the working class. While there may be disagreement about the political and ideological significance of such workers in advanced capitalism, everyone acknowledges that they are in fact workers. There is no such agreement about any other category of wage-earners. Some Marxists have argued that only productive manual workers should be considered part of the proletariat.[1] Others have argued that the working class includes low-level, routinized white-collar employees as well.[2] Still others have argued that virtually all wage-labourers should be considered part of the working class.[3] If this disagreement were just a question of esoteric academic debates over how best to pigeon-hole different social positions, then it would matter little how these issues were eventually resolved. But classes are not merely analytical abstractions in Marxist theory; they are real social forces and they have real consequences. It matters a great deal for our understanding of class struggle and social change exactly how classes are conceptualized and which categories of social positions are placed in which classes. Above all, it matters for developing a viable

1. For example, Nicos Poulantzas in "On Social Classes", *New Left Review* 78, and in *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, NLB, London 1975.
2. For example, Al Szymanski, "Trends in the American Working Class", *Socialist Revolution* No. 10.
3. For example, Francesca Freedman, "The Internal Structure of the Proletariat," *Socialist Revolution* No. 26.

socialist politics how narrow or broad the working class is seen to be and how its relationship to other classes is understood.

This chapter will explore the problem of understanding class boundaries in advanced capitalist society. Rather than review the wide range of approaches Marxists have adopted in defining classes, I will focus primarily on the work of Nicos Poulantzas, in particular on his book *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*.[3a] This work is, to my knowledge, the most systematic and thorough attempt to understand precisely the Marxist criteria for classes in capitalist society. While there are many points in Poulantzas's argument with which I disagree, his work has the considerable merit of sharply posing the problem of defining classes in advanced capitalism and of providing some stimulating solutions. A critical discussion of Poulantzas's work can, therefore, provide a very useful starting-point for the development of an explicit theory of classes in contemporary capitalism.

The first section below presents an outline exposition of Poulantzas's theory of the structural determination of class. Poulantzas's basic conclusion is that only manual, non-supervisory workers who produce surplus-value directly (productive labour) should be included in the proletariat. Other categories of wage-labourers (unproductive employees, mental labour, supervisory labour) must be placed in a separate class—either the "new" petty bourgeoisie, or in the case of managers, the bourgeoisie itself. This exposition of Poulantzas will be followed in the second section by a general assessment and critique of his argument. The third section presents the preliminary outlines of an alternative conceptualization of class boundaries, that hinges on the concept of *contradictory locations within class relations*. I will argue that not all positions in the social structure can be seen as firmly rooted in a single class; some positions occupy objectively contradictory locations between classes. The analytical task is to give such positions a precise theoretical meaning and to relate them systematically to questions of class struggle. The final section of the chapter links the concept of contradictory class locations to class struggle by developing a distinction between class interests and class capacities.

3a. For studies of classes not discussed here, see Bibliography, p. 255ff.

Poulantzas's Theory of the Structural Determination of Class

The following presentation of Poulantzas's ideas will necessarily be schematic and incomplete. I will discuss only the essential elements of his views on class boundaries and not deal with a variety of other important issues which he raises (such as class fractions, the relationship of classes to state apparatuses, etc.). While the exposition will lose many of the nuances of Poulantzas's analysis, I hope that the basic contours of his argument will stand out. Critical comments will be kept to a minimum in this section.

General Framework

Poulantzas's analysis of social classes rests on three basic premises. 1. *Classes cannot be defined outside of class struggle.* This is a fundamental point. Classes are not "things", nor are they pigeon-holes in a static social structure. "Classes", Poulantzas writes, "involve in one and the same process both class contradictions and class struggle; social classes do not firstly exist as such and only then enter into class struggle. Social classes coincide with class practices, i.e. the class struggle, and are only defined in their mutual opposition."[4] Poulantzas does not mean by this proposition that classes can only be understood in terms of class *consciousness*. Class struggle, in Poulantzas's analysis, does not refer to the conscious self-organization of a class as a social force, but rather to the antagonistic, contradictory quality of the social relations which comprise the social division of labour. Class struggle exists even when classes are disorganized. 2. *Classes designate objective positions in the social division of labour.* These objective positions, Poulantzas stresses, "are independent of the will of these agents".[5] It is crucial not to confuse the analysis of the structure of these objective class positions with the analysis of the individuals (*agents* in Poulantzas's terminology) who occupy those positions. While both analyses are important, Poulantzas insists that "the question of who occupies a given position, i.e. who is or becomes a bourgeois, proletarian, petty bourgeois, poor peasant,

4. *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, p. 14.
5. Ibid.

etc., and how and when he does, *is subordinate to the first aspect*—the reproduction of the actual positions occupied by the social classes".[6] Poulantzas refers to the reproduction of these objective positions within the social division of labour as the "structural determination of class". These first two propositions taken together imply that in order to define classes it is necessary to unravel the objective positions within the antagonistic social relations comprising the social division of labour. 3. *Classes are structurally determined not only at the economic level, but at the political and ideological levels as well.* This is perhaps the most distinctive (and problematic) part of Poulantzas's analysis. While it is true that "the economic place of the social agents has a principal role in determining social classes",[7] their position in ideological and political relations of domination and subordination may be equally important: "It must be emphasized that ideological and political relations, i.e. the places of political and ideological domination and subordination, are themselves part of the structural determination of class: there is no question of the objective place being the result only of economic place within the relations of production, while political and ideological elements belong only to [class struggle]."[8] Political and ideological factors cannot be relegated to the transformation of a "class-in-itself" into a "class-for-itself", but lie at the heart of the very determination of class positions.[9] Given these premises, the basic theoretical strategy

6. "On Social Classes", pp. 49–50.
7. *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, p. 14.
8. Ibid., p. 16. In this particular passage, Poulantzas uses the expression "class position" rather than "class struggle" at the end. By class position in this context, Poulantzas refers to the concrete situation of a class in a specific historical conjuncture. Thus, for example, under certain historical circumstances, the labour aristocracy may assume the class position of the bourgeoisie, without actually changing its objective place in the class structure. This is a confusing use of the word "position" and Poulantzas himself is not always consistent in the way he uses it (note the quote under proposition 2 above). At any rate, throughout this discussion I will use the expression "class position" to refer to objective class location.
9. Poulantzas writes: "The analyses presented here have nothing in common with the Hegelian schema with its class-in-itself (economic class situation, uniquely objective determination of class by the process of production) and a class-for-itself (class endowed with its own 'class consciousness' and an autonomous political organization = class struggle), which in the Marxist tradition is associated with Lukács." (ibid.)

Poulantzas adopts for analysing class boundaries centres on elaborating the economic, political and ideological criteria which determine objective class positions within the social division of labour. We will first examine how Poulantzas does this for the working class and the new petty bourgeoisie, and then for the bourgeoisie.

Structural Determination of Working Class and New Petty Bourgeoisie

In the course of capitalist development the traditional petty bourgeoisie—independent artisans, small shopkeepers, etc.—has steadily dwindled. In its place there has arisen what Poulantzas calls the "new petty bourgeoisie", consisting of white-collar employees, technicians, supervisors, civil servants, etc. Under conditions of advanced capitalism, the crucial question for understanding the structural determination of the working class, Poulantzas argues, centres on analysing the boundary between the working class and this new segment of the petty bourgeoisie.

Poulantzas's argument proceeds in two steps. First, he discusses the economic, political and ideological criteria which separate the proletariat from the new petty bourgeoisie. The basic economic criterion he advances is the distinction between productive and unproductive labour. The basic political criterion is the distinction between non-supervisory and supervisory positions. The core ideological criterion is the division between mental and manual labour. Secondly, Poulantzas discusses why this "new" petty bourgeoisie belongs to the same class as the traditional petty bourgeoisie. He argues that, although they appear quite different at the economic level, both the old and new petty bourgeoisie bear the same ideological relationship to the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, and this common ideological relationship is sufficient to merge them into a single class. The first argument explains why certain categories of wage-labourers should be excluded from the working class; the second explains why they should be considered members of a common class, the petty bourgeoisie. We will examine the first of these arguments in some detail, the second more briefly.

Economic Criteria

Poulantzas argues that the distinction between productive and unproductive labour defines the boundary between the working class and the new petty bourgeoisie at the economic level. All workers are productive labourers and all unproductive labourers are new petty bourgeois (as we shall see, some productive labourers are also petty bourgeois). Poulantzas thus decisively rejects wage-labour *per se* as an appropriate criterion for the working class: "It is not wages that define the working class economically: wages are a form of distribution of the social product, corresponding to market relations and the forms of "contract" governing the purchase and sale of labour power. Although every worker is a wage-earner, every wage-earner is certainly not a worker, for not every wage-earner is engaged in productive labour."[10]

Poulantzas defines productive labour in a somewhat more restrictive way than most Marxist writers: "Productive labour, in the capitalist mode of production, is labour that produces surplus-value *while directly reproducing the material elements that serve as the substratum of the relation of exploitation: labour that is directly involved in material production by producing use-values that increase material wealth.*"[11] The conventional definition of productive labour by Marxists does not explicitly restrict it to labour directly implicated in material production. Poulantzas, however, argues that "labour producing surplus-value is broadly equivalent to the process of material production in its capitalist form of existence and reproduction".[12] He insists that this definition is consistent with Marx's usage of the concept of productive labour, since Marx always associated surplus-value creation with commodity production, and commodity production (according to Poulantzas) is always material production.

Given this definition of productive labour under capitalism, Poulantzas argues that unproductive wage-earners must be excluded from the ranks of the proletariat because they lie outside the basic capitalist relation of exploitation. In discussing commercial employees as an example of unproductive

10. Ibid., p. 20.
11. Ibid., p. 216. Italics in original.
12. Ibid., p 221.

labour, Poulantzas writes: "Of course, these wage-earners are themselves exploited, and their wages correspond to the reproduction of their labour-power. 'The commercial worker . . . adds to the capitalist's income by helping him to reduce the cost of realizing surplus-value, inasmuch as he performs partly unpaid labour.' Surplus labour is thus extorted from wage-earners in commerce, but these are not directly exploited in the form of the dominant capitalist relation of exploitation, the creation of surplus-value."[13] The working class is defined by the fundamental class antagonism within capitalism between direct producers, who are separated from the means of production and produce the social surplus product in the form of surplus-value, and the bourgeoisie, which owns the means of production and appropriates surplus-value. Unproductive wage-earners, while clearly not members of the bourgeoisie, do not contribute to the production of the surplus product. Thus they are not directly exploited in the form of the dominant capitalist relation of exploitation and so, Poulantzas argues, cannot be included in the working class.

Political Criteria

As Poulantzas stresses time and time again, economic criteria alone are not sufficient to define the structural determination of class. In particular, political and/or ideological criteria exclude certain categories of productive wage-earners from the working class. The use of political criteria is especially important in Poulantzas's analysis of the class position of managerial and supervisory labour. Within the process of material production, supervisory labour is unquestionably productive because of its role in coordinating and integrating the production process. But within the *social* division of labour, supervisory activity represents the political domination of capital over the working class: "In a word, the despotism of the factory is precisely the form taken by the domination of the technical division of labour by the social, such as this exists under capitalism. The work of management and supervision, under capitalism, is the direct reproduction, within the process of production itself, of the political relations between the capitalist class and the working class."[14]

13. Ibid., p. 212.

How then does Poulantzas reconcile these competing criteria? At the economic level, supervisory labour in commodity production is exploited in the same way that manual labour is exploited; but at the political level, supervisory labour participates in the domination of the working class. Poulantzas solves this problem by turning to the distinction between the *social division of labour* and the *technical division of labour*. While he never explicitly defines the differences between the two, the general sense is that the technical division of labour represents structural positions derived from the particular technologies used in production (or forces of production), whereas the social division of labour is derived from the social organization of production (or relations of production). Now, it is a basic proposition of Marxist theory that "in the actual organization of the labour process, the social division of labour, directly dependent upon the relations of production, dominates the technical division".[15] Poulantzas then argues that the position of supervisors as exploited productive labour reflects their role in the purely technical division of labour, whereas their position of political domination of the working class defines their role in the social division of labour. Given this assertion, he concludes that supervisors' "principal function is that of extracting surplus-value from the workers", and on this basis they must be excluded from the working class altogether.[16]

Supervisors, however, are also excluded from the bourgeoisie, for while they politically dominate the working class they are also politically dominated by capital itself. This specific position within political relations of domination and subordination—subordinated to capital while dominating the proletariat—defines the political criteria for the new petty bourgeoisie.

Ideological Criteria

The working class is not only exploited economically and dominated politically, it is also dominated ideologically. The central

14. Ibid., pp. 227–8.
15. Ibid., p. 225.
16. Ibid., p. 228.

axis of this ideological domination within the social division of labour is the division between *mental* and *manual* labour.[17] Poulantzas argues that the mental/manual division excludes the working class from the "secret knowledge" of the production process, and that this exclusion is necessary for the reproduction of capitalist social relations. "Experts" of various sorts at all stages of the production process help to legitimize the subordination of labour to capital, by making it appear natural that workers are incapable of organizing production themselves. The division between mental and manual labour thus represents the ideological prop for the exclusion of workers from the planning and direction of the production process.[18] Experts are the direct carriers of this ideological domination; thus, like supervisors, they are excluded from the working class.

This ideological criterion is especially important in determining the class position of certain categories of engineers and technicians. Engineers and technicians are generally productive wage-earners, and although many of them occupy positions within the supervisory structure (and thus are new petty bourgeois because of political criteria), there are subaltern technicians who do not directly supervise anyone. Nevertheless, Poulantzas argues, because of the primacy of the social division

17. In defining the mental/manual labour division, Poulantzas writes: "We could thus say that every form of work that takes the form of knowledge from which the direct producers are excluded, falls on the mental labour side of the capitalist production process, irrespective of its empirical/natural content; and that this is so whether the direct producers actually do know how to perform this work but do not do so (again not by chance), or whether they in fact do not know how to perform it (since they are systematically kept away from it) or whether again there is simply nothing that needs to be known." (Ibid., p. 238.) Poulantzas is thus very careful not to define mental labour as "brain work" and manual labour as "hand work". While there is a rough correspondence between these two distinctions, the mental/manual division must be considered an aspect of the social division of labour and not a technical fact of whether muscle or brain is primarily engaged in the labour process.

18. It is important to note that ideological domination, in Poulantzas's framework, has nothing to do with the consciousness of workers. Ideology is a material practice, not a belief system within the heads of workers. To say that the division of labour between mental and manual activities constitutes the ideological domination of the working class means that the material reality of this division excludes workers from the knowledge necessary for the direction of the production process. Of course, such an exclusion has consequences on consciousness—workers may come to believe that they are utterly incapable of gaining the necessary knowledge to organize production—but the ideological domination is real irrespective of the beliefs of workers.

of labour over the technical division, and because within the social division of labour even subaltern technicians (as mental labour) occupy a position of ideological domination over the working class, they must be excluded from the proletariat and considered part of the new petty bourgeoisie. The mental/manual division is central to the determination of the class position of all mental labourers, not just technicians, engineers and the like. White-collar workers in general participate, if only in residual ways, in the elevated status of mental labour, and thus participate in the ideological domination of the working class. Even low-level clerks and secretaries, Poulantzas insists, share in the ideological position of mental labour and thus belong to the new petty bourgeoisie rather than the proletariat.[19]

As in the case of political criteria, capital dominates the new petty bourgeoisie ideologically. The division between mental and manual labour simultaneously supports the ideological domination of manual labour by mental labour and the ideological subordination of mental labour to capital. Experts may participate in the "secret knowledge" of production, but that knowledge is always fragmented and dominated by the requirements of capitalist production and reproduction.

The Class Unity of the New and Traditional Petty Bourgeoisie

Poulantzas admits that it might seem strange to categorize the new and traditional petty bourgeoisie in a single class. He even agrees that the traditional petty bourgeoisie "does not belong to the capitalist mode of production, but to the simple commodity form which was historically the form of transition from the feudal to the capitalist mode".[20] How then can two groupings

19. This does not mean that Poulantzas regards the mental/manual division as operating uniformly on all categories of wage-labourers within the new petty bourgeoisie. He stresses that the mental/manual division is reproduced within the new petty bourgeoisie itself, and that many new petty bourgeois are themselves subordinated to mental labour within the category of mental labour: "The mental labour aspect does not affect the new petty bourgeoisie in an undifferentiated manner. Certain sections of it are affected directly. Others, subjected to the reproduction of the mental/manual division within mental labour itself, are only affected indirectly; and while these sections are still affected by the effects of the basic division, they also experience a hierarchy within mental labour itself." (Ibid., p. 256).

20. Ibid.. pp. 285–6.

which are rooted in such utterly different economic situations be amalgamated into a single class? Poulantzas argues that this class unity is a consequence of the relationship of both the traditional and the new bourgeoisie to the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat: "If the traditional and the new petty bourgeoisie can be considered as belonging to the same class, this is because social classes are only determined in the class struggle, and because these groupings are precisely both polarized in relationship to the bourgeoisie and the proletariat."[21] This common polarization with respect to the bourgeoisie and the proletariat has the consequence of forging a rough ideological unity between the traditional and the new petty bourgeoisie. It is this ideological unity, Poulantzas maintains, which justifies placing both the traditional and the new petty bourgeoisie in the same class: "The structural determination of the new petty bourgeoisie in the social division of labour has certain effects on the ideology of its agents, which directly influences its class position . . . these ideological effects on the new petty bourgeoisie exhibit a remarkable affinity to those which the specific class determination of the traditional petty bourgeoisie has on the latter, thus justifying their attribution to one and the same class, the petty bourgeoisie."[22]

The core elements of this common petty-bourgeois ideology include reformism, individualism, and power fetishism. *Reformism*: Petty-bourgeois ideology tends to be anti-capitalist, but regards the problems of capitalism as solvable through institutional reform rather than revolutionary change. *Individualism*: "Afraid of proletarianization below, attracted towards the bourgeoisie above, the new petty bourgeoisie often aspires to promotion, a 'career', to 'upward mobility'."[23] The same individualism characterizes the traditional petty bourgeois, but takes the form of mobility through his becoming a

21. Ibid., p. 294.
22. Ibid., p. 287. Note that here Poulantzas is talking about the ideology *of* a class rather than the position of the class in the social division of labour at the ideological level. While it may be true that the traditional petty bourgeoisie occupies the place of mental labour in the mental/manual division (i.e. the old petty bourgeoisie is not separated from the "secret knowledge" of production even though many petty bourgeois artisans would be classified *technically* as manual labourers), Poulantzas is more concerned here with certain features of the ideology of agents within the petty bourgeoisie.
23. Ibid., p. 291.

successful small businessman. *Power Fetishism*: "As a result of the situation of the petty bourgeoisie as an intermediate class . . . this class has a strong tendency to see the state as an inherently neutral force whose role is that of arbitrating between the various social classes."[24] While Poulantzas admits that in certain respects the ideologies of the two petty bourgeoisies are different, he insists that the unity is sufficiently strong as to warrant considering them a single class.

The Structural Determination of the Bourgeoisie

Whereas in his discussion of the boundary between the working class and the new petty bourgeoisie Poulantzas focuses on political and ideological criteria, in the discussion of the bourgeoisie he concentrates on the strictly economic level. His basic argument is that the bourgeoisie must be defined not in terms of formal legal categories of property ownership, but in terms of the substantive dimensions which characterize the social relations of production. Two such dimensions are particularly important. *Economic Ownership*: This refers to the "real economic control of the means of production, i.e. the power to assign the means of production to given uses and so to dispose of the products obtained".[25] Such economic ownership must not be confused with legal title to productive property: "This ownership is to be understood as real economic ownership, control of the means of production, to be distinguished from legal ownership, which is sanctioned by law and belongs to the superstructure. The law, of course, generally ratifies economic ownership, but it is possible for the forms of legal ownership not to coincide with real economic ownership."[26] *Possession*: This is defined as "the capacity to put the means of production into operation".[27] This refers to the actual control over the physical operation of production. In feudal society, the peasant generally retained possession of the means of production while the feudal ruling class maintained economic ownership; in capitalist society, on the other hand, the bourgeoisie has both economic ownership and

24. Ibid., p. 292.
25. Ibid., p. 18.
26. Ibid., p. 19.
27. Loc. cit.

possession of the means of production. The working class is separated from control not only over the product of labour, but over the very process of labour itself.

These two dimensions of social relations of production —economic ownership and possession—are particularly important in analysing the class position of managers.[28] Poulantzas argues that since these agents fulfil the *functions* of capital, they occupy the *place* of capital. Thus they belong to the bourgeoisie, regardless of any legal definitions of ownership: "It is the place of capital, defined as the articulation of relationships that bear certain powers, that determines the class memberships of the agents who fulfil these 'functions'. This refers us to two inter-connected aspects of the problem: (a) the powers involving either utilization of resources, allocation of the means of production to this or that use, or the direction of the labour process, are bound up with the relationships of economic ownership and possession, and these relationships define one particular place, the place of capital; (b) the directing agents who directly exercise these powers and who fulfil the 'functions of capital' occupy the place of capital and thus belong to the bourgeois class even if they do not hold formal legal ownership. *In all cases, therefore, the managers are an integral section of the bourgeois class.*"[29]

Poulantzas recognizes that the precise relationship between economic ownership and possession is not immutably fixed in capitalism. In particular, the process of centralization and concentration of capital characteristic of the development of monopoly capitalism generates a partial "dissociation" of economic ownership and possession. Especially in the developed monopoly corporation, where very heterogeneous production units are often united under a single economic ownership, managers of particular units will generally have possession of the means of production of that unit without directly having economic ownership.[30] Nevertheless, Poulantzas insists that the "dis-

28. When Poulantzas uses the term "managers", he is explicitly discussing those managerial personnel who directly participate in economic ownership and/or possession. When he discusses lower-level positions within the managerial hierarchy, he uses expression like "the work of management and supervision", or simply "supervisors".

29. Ibid., p. 180. Italics added.

30. Poulantzas provides an extremely interesting discussion of the trans-

sociations that we have analysed between the relationships of economic ownership and possession (i.e. the direction of the labour process) do not in any way mean that the latter, exercised by the managers, has become separated from the place of capital".[31] Capital remains a *unitary structural position* within class relations even if the *functions* of capital have become differentiated. It is this structural position which fundamentally determines the class location of managers as part of the bourgeoisie.

Poulantzas has very little to say about the specific ideological and political criteria defining the bourgeoisie, other than that they occupy the position of ideological and political domination in the social division of labour. The most important context in which Poulantzas explicitly treats such criteria is in the discussion of the heads of state apparatuses. Such positions belong in the bourgeoisie, Poulantzas argues, not because they directly occupy the place of capital at the economic level, but because "in a capitalist state, they manage the state functions in the service of capital".[32] The class position of such agents is thus not defined directly by their immediate social relations of production, but rather indirectly by the relationship of the state itself to the capitalist class.

Assessment and Critique of Poulantzas's Analysis

The following critique of Poulantzas's analysis will parallel the foregoing exposition.[33] First, the logic of his analysis of the

formations of the dissociation of economic ownership and possession in the course of the development of monopoly capitalism (ibid., pp. 116–130). He argues that during the initial stages of monopoly concentration, economic ownership became concentrated more rapidly than the labour process actually became centralized (i.e. under unified direction). The result was that during this initial phase of concentration, monopoly capital itself was characterized by economic ownership of the means of production with only partial powers of possession. It was not until what Poulantzas calls the restructuring period of monopoly capitalism that economic ownership and possession were fully reintegrated within monopoly capital itself.

31. Ibid., p. 181.

32. Ibid., p. 187.

33. This assessment of Poulantzas's analysis of classes will focus on the actual criteria he uses to understand classes in contemporary capitalism, rather than

boundary between the working class and the new petty bourgeoisie is examined. The discussion focuses on two criticisms: 1. that there is little basis for regarding the distinction between productive and unproductive labour as determining the boundary of the working class at the economic level; 2. that Poulantzas's use of political and ideological factors effectively undermines the primacy of economic relations in determining class position. Secondly, Poulantzas's claim that the traditional and new petty bourgeois are members of the same class is criticized on two grounds: 1. the ideological divisions between the two categories are at least as profound as the commonalities; 2. while ideological relations may play a part in the determination of class position, they cannot neutralize divergent class positions determined at the economic level. Finally, there is a brief examination of Poulantzas's treatment of the boundary of the bourgeoisie. The main criticism made here is that not all managers should be considered an integral part of the bourgeoisie, even if they participate in certain aspects of relations of possession.

The Boundary between Working Class and New Petty Bourgeoisie

It will be helpful in our discussion of Poulantzas's perspective to present schematically the criteria he uses in analysing the structural determination of classes. Table 2.1 presents the criteria by which he defines in the most general way the working class, the traditional and new petty bourgeoisie and the capitalist class. Table 2.2 examines in greater detail the various combinations of criteria which define different sub-categories within the new petty bourgeoisie. It is important not to interpret the categories in these typologies as constituting discrete, empirical "groups". This would certainly be a violation of

on the epistemological assumptions which underlie his analysis. I will thus not deal with the problem of his general concept of "class struggle" and his categorical rejection of "consciousness" as a useful category in a Marxist analysis. While it is important to deal with these issues (indeed, most reviews of Poulantzas's work are preoccupied with these questions rather than the substance of his argument), I feel that it is more useful at this point to engage Poulantzas's work at a lower level of abstraction.

Table 2.1 General Criteria for Class in Poulantzas's Analysis

	Economic criteria			Political criteria		Ideological criteria	
	Exploiter	*Exploited**					
	Appropriates Surplus-Value	Surplus Labour Extorted	Surplus-Value Extorted	*Domination*	*Subordination*	*Domination*	*Subordination*
Bourgeoisie	+	−	−	+	−	+	−
Proletariat	−	+	+	−	+	−	+
New petty bourgeoisie	−	+	−/+	+/−	+	+/−	+
Old petty bourgeoisie	−	−	−	−	+	+	+

+ criterion present +/− criterion usually present, but sometimes absent
− criterion absent −/+ criterion usually absent, but sometimes present

*To say that 'surplus labour' is extorted from a wage-labourer, but not surplus-value, means that the worker performs unpaid labour for the capitalist, but does not produce actual commodities for exchange on the market. The worker is thus not formally productive, but nevertheless is exploited.

Table 2.2 Various Combinations of Criteria for the New Petty Bourgeoisie

	Economic criteria			Political criteria		Ideological criteria	
	Exploiter	*Exploited*					
	Appropriates Surplus-Value	Surplus Labour Extorted	Surplus-Value Extorted	*Domination*	*Subordination*	*Domination*	*Subordination*
Unproductive labour							
Supervisors in circulation and realization	−	+	−	+	+	+	+
Subaltern mental labour	−	+	−	−	+	+	+
*Unproductive manual labour**	−	+	−	−	+	−	+
Productive labour							
Supervisors in material production	−	+	+	+	+	+	+
Technicians and engineers in material production (who are not also supervisors)	−	+	+	−	+	+	+

*This category is not explicitly discussed by Poulantzas, but it is clearly a possibility (e.g. a janitor in a bank).

Poulantzas's view of social classes. The purpose of the typologies is to highlight the relationships among the various criteria, not to turn the analysis of classes and class struggle into a static exercise in categorization.

Let us now turn to the question of Poulantzas's use of the productive/unproductive labour distinction in his analysis of the boundary of the working class, and then to the logic of his use of political and ideological factors as criteria for class. Once these two tasks are completed, we will examine some statistical data on the size of the proletariat in the United States using Poulantzas's criteria.

Productive and Unproductive Labour

There are three basic difficulties in Poulantzas's discussion of productive and unproductive labour: 1. problems in his definition of productive labour; 2. the lack of correspondence between the productive/unproductive labour distinction and actual positions in the labour process; 3.—and most significantly—the lack of fundamentally different economic interests between productive and unproductive workers.[34]

Productive labour, to Poulantzas, is restricted to labour which both produces surplus-value and is directly involved in the process of material production. This definition rests on the claim that surplus-value is only generated in the production of physical commodities. This is an arbitrary assumption. If use-values take the form of services, and if those services are produced for the market, then there is no reason why surplus-value cannot be generated in non-material production as well as the production of physical commodities.[35]

The second difficulty with Poulantzas's use of productive/unproductive labour concerns the relationship of this distinction to positions in the social division of labour. If actual positions generally contain a mix of productive and unproductive activities, then the distinction between productive and unproductive labour becomes much less useful as a criterion for the class determination of those positions. A good example is grocery-store clerks. To the extent that clerks place commodities on shelves (and thus perform the last stage of the transportation of commodities), then they are productive; but to the extent that they operate cash registers, then they are unproductive. This dual quality of social positions as both productive and unproductive is not restricted to the circulation of commodities, but exists directly within the process of material production itself. Consider the case of the material production of the packaging for a commodity. Packaging serves two distinct functions. On the one hand, it is part of the use-value of a commodity. One can hardly drink milk without placing it in a transportable container. But packaging is also part of realization costs under capitalism, since much of the labour embodied in packaging goes into producing advertising. Such labour cannot be considered productive, because it does not produce any use-values (and thus cannot produce surplus-value). This is not a question of any historical normative judgement on the goodness of the labour. Labour which produces the most pointless luxuries can still be productive. But labour which merely serves to facilitate the realization of surplus-value is not, and at least part of the labour-time that is embodied in packaging falls into this category.[36]

34. Many of the ideas for this section on productive and unproductive labour come directly from James O'Connor's very important essay "Productive and Unproductive Labor", in *Politics and Society*, Vol. 5, No. 2, and from numerous discussions within the San Francisco Bay Area *Kapitalistate* collective.

35. Marx's famous comparison of teaching factories and sausage factories makes this precise point: "The only worker who is productive is one who produces surplus-value for the capitalist, or in other words contributes towards the self-valorization of capital. If we may take an example from outside the sphere of material production, a schoolmaster is a productive worker when, in addition to belabouring the heads of his pupils, he works himself into the ground to enrich the owner of the school. That the latter has laid out his capital in a teaching factory, instead of a sausage factory, makes no difference to the relation." (*Capital*, Vol. I, Penguin/NLR, London 1976, p. 644). It would be hard to imagine a clearer statement that Marx did not restrict the concept of productive labour to labour directly involved in material production. It is surprising that Poulantzas never discusses this quotation, especially since he does cite Marx heavily to support his own use of the concept of productive labour.

36. Admittedly, such advertising-packaging labour is socially necessary labour time under capitalism and contributes to the costs of production of commodities. But this can be said about most realization labour, not just realization labour that becomes physically embodied in a material aspect of the commodity. Advertising labour should therefore be categorized as a *faux frais* of capitalist production, along with many other kinds of unproductive labour. For a fuller discussion of how to count unproductive labour in costs of production, see pp. 151–3 in chapter 3 below. For a discussion of advertising labour, see Baran and Sweezy's analysis of the interpenetration of sales and production in monopoly capitalism: *Monopoly Capital*, New York 1966, chapter 6.

While Poulantzas does admit that some labour has this dual productive/unproductive character, he sidesteps this problem in his analysis of classes by saying that labour is tendentially one or the other. In fact, a large proportion of labour in capitalist society has both productive and unproductive aspects, and there is no reason to assume that such mixed forms of labour are becoming less frequent. The productive/unproductive labour distinction should thus be thought of as reflecting two dimensions of labour activity rather than two types of labourers.

The most fundamental objection, however, to Poulantzas's use of the productive/unproductive distinction goes beyond questions of definition or the conceptual status of the distinction. For two positions within the social division of labour to be placed in different classes on the basis of economic criteria implies that they have fundamentally different class *interests* at the economic level.[37] Let us assume for the moment that the productive/unproductive labour distinction generally does correspond to different actual positions in the social division of labour. The key question then becomes whether this distinction represents a significant division of class interests. If we assume that the fundamental class interest of the proletariat is the destruction of capitalist relations of production and the construction of socialism, then the question becomes whether productive and unproductive workers have a different interest with respect to socialism. More precisely, do unproductive workers in general lack a class interest in socialism? One possible argument could be that many unproductive jobs would disappear in a socialist society and thus unproductive workers would be opposed to socialism. Aside from the problem that this argument confuses occupation with class, many jobs that are quite productive under capitalism would also disappear in a socialist society, while many unproductive jobs in capitalist society —doctors employed by the state for example—would not.

It could also be argued that since unproductive workers produce no surplus-value, they live off the surplus-value produced

37. The expression "fundamental" or "ultimate" class interests refers to interests involving the very structure of social relations; "immediate" class interests, on the other hand, refers to interests within a given structure of social relations. Expressed in slightly different terms, immediate class interests are interests defined within a mode of production, whereas ultimate class interests are interests defined between modes of production (see pp. 88–91 below).

by productive workers and thus indirectly participate in the exploitation of those workers. Taking the argument one step further, it is sometimes claimed that unproductive workers have a stake in increasing the social rate of exploitation, since this would make it easier for them to improve their own wages. This kind of argument is perhaps clearest in the case of state workers who are paid directly out of taxes. Since taxation comes at least partially out of surplus-value,[38] it appears that state workers live off the exploitation of productive labour. There is no question that there is some truth in this claim. Certainly in terms of immediate economic interests, state workers are often in conflict with private sector workers over questions of taxation. The bourgeois media have made much of this issue and have clearly used it as a divisive force in the labour movement. However, the question is not whether divisions of immediate interests exist between productive and unproductive workers, but whether such divisions generate different objective interests in socialism. Many divisions of immediate economic interest exist within the working class—between monopoly and competitive sector workers, between black and white workers, between workers in imperialist countries and workers in the third world, etc. But none of these divisions implies that the "privileged" group of workers has an interest in perpetuating the system of capitalist exploitation. None of these divisions changes the fundamental fact that all workers, by virtue of their position within the social relations of production, have a basic interest in socialism. I would argue that this is true for most unproductive workers as well.

Poulantzas agrees that, in general, both productive and unproductive workers are exploited; both have unpaid labour extorted from them. The only difference is that in the case of productive labour, unpaid labour time is appropriated as surplus-value; whereas in the case of unproductive labour, unpaid labour merely reduces the costs to the capitalist of appropriating part of the surplus-value produced elsewhere. In both cases, the capitalist will try to keep the wage bill as low as possible; in both cases, the capitalist will try to increase productivity by getting workers to work harder; in both cases, workers will be dispossessed of control over their labour process.

38. See pp. 154–5 in Chapter 3.

In both cases, socialism is a prerequisite for ending exploitation. It is hard to see where a fundamental divergence of economic interests emerges from the positions of unproductive and productive labour in capitalist relations of production. Certainly Poulantzas has not demonstrated that such a divergence exists. He has stated that the formal mechanisms of exploitation are different for the two types of workers; but he has not shown why this formal difference generates a difference in basic interests and thus can be considered a determinant of a class boundary.[39]

Another way of looking at this issue is from the point of view of capital. No one has ever suggested that the distinction between productive and unproductive capital represents a class boundary between the capitalist class and some other grouping. Typically, the productive/unproductive capital distinction is treated as one element defining a fractional boundary within the bourgeoisie (such as between banking and industrial capital). However, it could be argued, in much the same fashion as Poulantzas argues for the working class, that unproductive capital lies "outside the dominant capitalist relation of exploitation" and thus agents occupying the place of unproductive capital should not be considered members of the capitalist class. This argument, of course, would be absurd, because it is obvious that whatever short-run conflicts of interests there might be between productive and unproductive capital, their fundamental class interests are the same. The same can be said for the distinction between productive and unproductive labour.[40]

39. A concrete example may help to illustrate this argument. By every definition of unproductive labour, a janitor in a bank is unproductive. No surplus-value is produced in a bank and thus the labour of all bank employees is unproductive. A janitor in a factory, however, is productive, since cleaning up a work area is part of the socially necessary labour time in the actual production of commodities. Is it reasonable to say that these two janitors have a different class interest in socialism? Unless this is the case, it is arbitrary to place one janitor in the working class and the other in the new petty bourgeoisie. (See G. Carchedi, "On the Economic Identification of the New Middle Class", *Economy and Society*, Vol. IV (1975), No. 1, p. 19, for a similar critique of unproductive labour as a criterion for class.)

40. This critique of Poulantzas's use of the productive/unproductive labour distinction as a class criterion does not imply that the distinction has no relevance for Marxist theory in general. In particular, the distinction between productive and unproductive labour may play a central part in the analysis of the accumulation process and crisis tendencies in advanced capitalism. (See Chapter 3).

Political and Ideological Criteria

Poulantzas insists that while ideological and political criteria are important, economic criteria still play the principal role in determining classes.[41] If we look at Charts 1 and 2, this does not appear to be the case. As can be seen from the charts, the working class represents the polar opposite of the bourgeoisie: on every criterion they have opposite signs. *Any* deviation from the criteria which define the working class is enough to exclude an agent from the working class in Poulantzas's analysis. Thus, an agent who was like a worker on the economic and political criteria, but deviated on the ideological criteria, would on this basis alone be excluded from the proletariat (this is the case for subaltern technicians). In practice, therefore, the ideological and political criteria become co-equal with the economic criteria, since they can *always* pre-empt the structural determination of class at the economic level. (This is quite separate from the question of the correctness of the economic criteria themselves as discussed above.) It is difficult to see how, under these circumstances, this perspective maintains the primacy of economic relations in the definition of classes.

The treatment of ideological and political criteria as effectively coequal with economic criteria stems, at least in part, from Poulantzas's usage of the notion of the "technical" division of labour. Poulantzas very correctly stresses that the social division of labour has primacy over the technical division. But he incorrectly identifies the technical division of labour with economic criteria whenever he discusses the role of political and ideological factors. For example, in the discussion of technicians Poulantzas writes: "We have . . . seen the importance of the mental/manual labour division for the supervisory staff and for

41. In reading this critique of Poulantzas's use of political and ideological criteria in the definition of classes, it is important to remember the political and ideological context in which Poulantzas has developed his analysis. In a personal communication, Poulantzas writes: "I think that one of our most serious politico-theoretical adversaries is *economism*, which *always* pretends, as soon as we try (with all the theoretical difficulties we encounter here) to stress the importance of the politico-ideological, that we 'abandon the primacy of economics'." Poulantzas is absolutely correct in attacking economism and in attempting to integrate political and ideological considerations into the logic of a Marxist class analysis. The difficulty, as we shall see, is that he does not develop a clear criterion for the use of ideological and political criteria, and thus in practice they assume an almost equal footing with economic relations.

engineers and technicians. This played a decisive role in so far as, by way of the primacy of the social division of labour over the technical, it excluded these groupings from the working class despite the fact that they too perform 'capitalist productive labour'."[42] Poulantzas in effect equates the performance of productive labour with the technical division of labour. But if the "dominant capitalist relation of exploitation" constitutes the essential definition of productive labour, then it is unreasonable to treat productive labour as strictly a technical category. More generally, rather than viewing economic criteria as being rooted in the technical division of labour and political-ideological criteria in the social division, both should be considered dimensions of the social division of labour. If this is granted, then it is no longer at all obvious that ideological and political criteria should always pre-empt economic criteria in the structural determination of class. On the contrary: if economic criteria within the social division of labour are to be treated as the principal determinants of class, then they should generally pre-empt the ideological and political criteria.

Aside from undermining the economic basis of the theory of class, Poulantzas's use of political and ideological criteria has other difficulties. Especially in his discussion of political criteria, it is sometimes questionable whether these criteria are really "political" at all. The core political criterion Poulantzas emphasizes in his discussion of the new petty bourgeoisie is position within the supervisory hierarchy. Now, apart from the issue of supervision as technical coordination, there are two ways in which supervision can be conceptualized. Following Poulantzas, supervision can be conceived as the "direct reproduction, within the process of production itself, of the political relations between the capitalist class and the working class".[43] Alternatively, supervision can be seen as one aspect of the structural dissociation between economic ownership and possession at the economic level itself. That is, possession, as an aspect of the ownership of the means of production, involves (to use Poulantzas's own formulation) control over the labour process. In the development of monopoly capitalism, possession has become dissociated from economic ownership. But equally, pos-

42. *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, p. 251.
43. Ibid., p. 228.

session has become internally differentiated, so that control over the entire labour process (top managers) has become separated from the immediate control of labour activity (supervision). Unless possession itself is to be considered an aspect of political relations, there is no reason to consider supervision a reflection of political relations within the social division of labour rather than a differentiated element of economic relations.[44]

In Poulantzas's use of ideological criteria, it is never clear exactly why the mental/manual division should be considered a determinant of an actual class boundary, rather than simply an internal division within the working class. It is also not clear why this particular ideological dimension was chosen over a variety of others as the essential axis of ideological domination/subordination within the social division of labour. For example, sexism, by identifying certain jobs as "women's work" and of inferior status to men's work, is also a dimension of ideological domination/subordination within the social division of labour. This puts men as a whole in a position of ideological domination, and yet this hardly makes a male worker not a worker. The same can be said of racism, nationalism and other ideologies of domination. All of these create important divisions within the proletariat; but, unless they correspond to different actual relations of production, they do not constitute criteria for class boundaries in their own right.

The Size of the Proletariat Using Poulantzas's Criteria

The upshot of Poulantzas's use of economic, political and ideological criteria is that the working class in the United States becomes a very small proportion of the total population. Of course, the validity of a conceptualization of class relations can hardly be judged by the number of people that fall into the working class. Nevertheless, since it is of considerable political importance how large or small the working class is seen to be, it

44. It is one thing to say that supervision has a political dimension and another to say that supervision is itself political relations within production. The former seems correct and is analogous to saying that possession and even economic ownership have political dimensions. The latter considerably expands the notion of the "political" and must, of necessity, make possession of the means of production itself part of the "reproduction of political relations within production".

is worth attempting to estimate the distribution of the population into classes using different criteria for class position.

While census data are of relatively little use in estimating the size of the working class, since they are not collected in terms of Marxist categories, there are other sources of data which are more useful. In particular, the University of Michigan Survey Research Center conducted a survey in 1969 on working conditions throughout the United States which included a number of questions which make it possible to reach a reasonably good estimate of the size of the working class using a variety of criteria. The survey contains data on: the respondent's occupation and the industry in which he/she works; whether or not the respondent has subordinates on the job whom he/she supervises; whether or not the respondent is self-employed, and if so, how many employees, if any, the respondent has.[45] On the basis of these questions, we can estimate the size of the working class according to Poulantzas's criteria if we make some rough assumptions about the relationship of occupational titles to the mental/manual labour division and the relationship of industrial categories to the productive/unproductive labour distinction.

For present purposes, we will use the following definitions: 1. *Mental Labour*: professionals, technicians, managers (by occupational title), clerks and salespeople. 2. *Manual Labour*: craftsmen, operatives, labourers, transportation and services (i.e. janitors, barbers, cooks, etc.). 3. *Unproductive sectors*: wholesale and retail trade, finance, insurance, real-estate, services and government. 4. *Productive sectors*: agriculture, fishing, mining, construction, manufacturing, transportation and communications.

This set of categories is not perfect, both because of limitations of the data and because the complex reality of class relations can only be approximated by statistical data. By Poulantzas's definition of mental labour, there are certainly some craftsmen who should be considered mental labourers (i.e. they are not separated from the "secret knowledge" of production and use it in their labour process). There are also positions in trade and government which are clearly productive by any definition, and some positions in productive sector industries which are unproductive. Nevertheless, these categories can give us a pretty good idea of the size of the proletariat based on Poulantzas's analysis.

45. See my "Class Structure and Income Inequality", unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of California, Berkeley (available from University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan), for a detailed discussion of the survey.

The results appear in Tables 2.3–2.5. Table 2.3 presents the proportion of the total economically active population (i.e. people working twenty hours a week or more) that fall into each combination of the criteria for class. (None of the results differs significantly if the analysis is restricted to full-time workers.) The working class—non-supervisory, manual wage-earners in the productive sector—constitutes less than 20 per cent of the American labour force. The new petty bourgeoisie, on the other hand, swells to a mammoth 70 per cent of the economically active population. Table 2.4 gives these same results for men and women separately. Less than 15 per cent of the economically active women in the American population are working-class according to Poulantzas's criteria, while among men the figure is still only 23 per cent.[46] Finally, Table 2.5 gives the proportion of the population which is working-class using a variety of different combinations of Poulantzas's criteria. If the productive/unproductive labour distinction is dropped, but the other criteria kept, the working class increases to over 30 per

46. A reasonable objection could be raised that the estimates according to Poulantzas's criteria are unrealistically low because I have used such a broad definition of supervision. Undoubtedly, some individuals say that they "supervise others on the job" when in fact they are simply the chief of a work team and have virtually no actual power within the labour process. As a result of the vagueness of the criterion for supervision, the estimates in Tables 1 and 2 indicate that well over a third of the labour force are supervisors. A second set of data enables us to adopt a more refined criterion for supervision. (However, the data set in question, the ISR Panel Study of Income Dynamics, is much less of a representative sample than the survey used in the above Tables, and thus is less adequate to gain a picture of the overall shape of the class structure.) In this second survey, individuals who said that they were supervisors were also asked if they had "any say in the pay and promotions of their subordinates". Approximately 65 per cent of all male blue-collar supervisors said that they did *not* have any say in pay and promotions (the data are not available for female supervisors). If we assume that all of these individuals should be classified as workers by Poulantzas's criteria, then the proportion of males in the working class increases from 23 per cent in Table 2 to about 33 per cent. Undoubtedly, the true proportion is somewhere in between these two estimates. In any event, even using this narrower definition of supervision, the working class remains a decided minority in Poulantzas's framework.

Table 2.3 Distribution of the Active Labour Force by Class Criteria (United States national random sample taken in 1969)

	Self-Employed		*Wage-Earners*		
	Em-ployers	Petty Bourgeoisie	Super-visors	Non-supervisors	TOTALS
Mental Labour					
Unproductive Sector	3·3%	1·9%	15·6%	16·5%	37·2%
Productive Sector	2·5%	0·4%	4·4%	4·5%	11·9%
Manual Labour					
Unproductive Sector	0·3%	0·3%	5·3%	11·2%	17·2%
Productive Sector	1·3%	1·8%	10·7%	19·7%	33·6%
TOTALS	7·5%	4·5%	36·1%	51·9%	100·0%
Number in Sample	110	65	526	758	1459

SOURCE: 1969 Survey of Working Conditions, Institute of Social Research, University of Michigan (for a detailed discussion of the sample, see my "Class Structure and Income Inequality", unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of California, Berkeley. Available from University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan).

DEFINITIONS:

Mental Labour: professionals, technicians, managers (by occupational title), clerks, sales
Manual Labour: craftsmen, operatives, labourers, transportation, services (i.e. janitors, etc.)
Unproductive Sectors: wholesale and retail trade, finance, insurance, real estate, services, government
Productive Sectors: agriculture, mining, fishing, construction, manufacturing, transportation, communications

Table 2.4 Distribution of Active Labour Force by Class Criteria for Men and for Women (1969)

MEN	*Self-Employed*		*Wage-Earners*		
	Em-ployers	Petty Bourgeoisie	Super-visors	Non-supervisors	TOTALS
Mental Labour					
Unproductive Sector	4·0%	1·7%	14·3%	9·0%	29·0%
Productive Sector	4·0%	0·6%	5·6%	3·0%	13·2%
Manual Labour					
Unproductive Sector	0·4%	0·2%	5·6%	8·7%	14·9%
Productive Sector	2·1%	2·7%	15·4%	22·7%	42·9%
TOTALS	10·5%	5·3%	40·8%	43·4%	100·0%
Number in Sample	98	49	380	404	931

(See Table 2.3 for definitions of the categories)

WOMEN	*Self-Employed*		*Wage-Earners*		
	Em-ployers	Petty Bourgeoisie	Super-visors	Non-supervisors	TOTALS
Mental Labour					
Unproductive Sector	2·2%	2·0%	18·1%	30·9%	53·1%
Productive Sector	0·0%	0·2%	2·4%	7·1%	9·6%
Manual Labour					
Unproductive Sector	0·2%	0·4%	5·1%	15·2%	20·9%
Productive Sector	0·0%	0·0%	1·8%	14·6%	16·3%
TOTALS	2·4%	2·6%	27·4%	67·7%	100·0%
Number in Sample	12	13	129	344	508

(See Table 2.3 for definitions of the categories)

Table 2.5 The Size of the American Working Class by Different Criteria, 1969

Criteria for the working class	*Percentage of the economically active population which is working class by given criteria*		
	TOTAL	MEN ONLY	WOMEN ONLY
All wage-earners	88·0%	83·6%	95·1%
All wage-earners who are not supervisors	51·9%	43·4%	67·7%
Blue-collar wage-earners (including blue-collar supervisors)	46·8%	52·4%	36·7%
Blue-collar, non-supervisory wage-earners	31·0%	31·4%	29·8%
Productive, non-supervisory manual labour (the working class in Poulantzas's analysis)	19·7%	22·7%	14·6%

SOURCE: Same as Table 2.3

cent of the population. If the manual/mental labour distinction is dropped, but the supervisory labour criterion kept, the proportion rises to over 50 per cent of the population (67 per cent for women). We will deal more thoroughly below with the question of alternative criteria for class. The important point in the present context is that it makes a tremendous difference which criteria are used to define the proletariat, and that using Poulantzas's criteria reduces the American working class to a small minority.

The Class Unity of the New and Traditional Petty Bourgeoisie

The relationship of economic to political and ideological criteria is even more important in Poulantzas's argument about the class unity of the old and new petty bourgeoisie than it is in his analysis of who should be excluded from the working class in the first place. At the economic level not only are the old and new petty bourgeoisie characterized by different economic situations, but those situations are in many ways fundamentally opposed to each other. In particular, the old petty bourgeoisie is constantly threatened by the growth of monopoly capitalism, while the new petty bourgeoisie is clearly dependent upon monopoly capital for its reproduction. At the political level their interests are also opposed: the new petty bourgeoisie in general has an interest in the expansion of the state; the old petty bourgeoisie is generally opposed to big government and large state budgets.

In order for these opposing interests of the old and new petty bourgeoisie at the economic and political levels to be neutralized by the ideological level, the ideological bonds between the old and new petty bourgeoisie would have to be very powerful indeed. In fact, Poulantzas provides a partial view of the ideologies of the old and new petty bourgeoisie, and it is equally plausible to characterize them as opposed at this level as well as at the economic and political levels. While it is true that individualism characterizes the ideology of both the new and old petty bourgeoisie, the individualism of the two categories is extremely different. The individualism of the old petty bourgeoisie stresses individual autonomy, be your own boss, control your own destiny, etc. The individualism of the new petty bourgeoisie, on the other hand, is a careerist individualism, an individualism geared towards organizational mobility. The archetypal new petty bourgeois is the "organization man" whose individualism is structured around the requirements of bureaucratic advancement; the archetypal traditional petty bourgeois is the "rugged individualist", who makes his/her own way outside of the internal demands of organizations. To call both of these "petty-bourgeois individualism" is to gloss over important distinctions.

The basic problem with Poulantzas's discussion of the old and new petty bourgeoisie, however, does not concern these ideological divisions between them. Even if the two categories could be said to have identical ideologies, it would still be very questionable on this basis to call them a single class. In what sense can the economic level be considered the "principal" determinant of class relations if two groups of agents with contradictory positions at the economic level—in fact, who exist in different modes of production at the economic level—can, on the basis of ideology alone, be grouped into a single class? In the end, the procedure Poulantzas adopts makes ideology itself the decisive criterion for class.

The Class Boundary of the Bourgeoisie

Table 2.6 presents the various combinations of criteria Poulantzas uses to define the bourgeoisie. The most valuable aspects of his discussion are the emphasis on the need to go below legal categories of ownership and the analysis of the historical transformations and dissociations of economic ownership and possession.

Poulantzas's discussion of the class position of managers, however, is inadequate. When a manager occupies a position in the relations of production that is characterized by *both* economic ownership and possession, it is certainly reasonable to categorize the manager as part of the bourgeoisie. The problem arises when a manager occupies a position characterized by possession but not economic ownership. Poulantzas's solution to this situation is to argue that, in spite of the structural differentiation of different functions of capital, the positions

Table 2.6 Detailed Criteria for the Bourgeoisie and for Differentiation of Bourgeoisie and Petty Bourgeoisie

	ECONOMIC CRITERIA			POLITICAL CRITERIA			IDEOLOGICAL CRITERIA	
	Legal Ownership	*Economic Ownership*	*Possession*	*Direct Producer*	*Domination*	*Subordination*	*Domination*	*Subordination*
Traditional Entrepreneurial Capitalists	+	+	+	−	+	−	+	−
Top Corporate Executives	−	+	+	−	+	−	+	−
Managers	−	−	+	−	+	−	+	−
Heads of State Apparatuses	−	−	−	−	+	−	+	−
Traditional Petty Bourgeoisie	+	+	+	+	−	+	+	+

remain unitary parts of capital as such. Thus, occupying any such position is sufficient to define the manager as bourgeois. This is an arbitrary solution. It is equally plausible to argue that exclusion from economic ownership defines non-capitalists in capitalist society, and thus managers who are "mere" possessors of the means of production should be excluded from the bourgeoisie. A third possibility—which will be developed more fully below—is to argue that there are positions in the social division of labour which are *objectively contradictory*. Managers who are excluded from any economic ownership would constitute such a category, even if they retain partial possession of the means of production.

A second problem with Poulantzas's analysis of the bourgeoisie is that he tends to regard economic ownership and possession as all-or-nothing categories. A position either does or does not have real economic control of the means of production (economic ownership), or does or does not have the capacity to put those means of production into operation (possession). In fact, many managerial positions must be characterized as having limited forms of both ownership and possession. Some managers may have substantial control over one small segment of the total production process; others may have fairly limited

control over a broader range of the production process. While it is clear that an agent whose control is so attenuated that he/she merely executes decisions made from above should be excluded from the bourgeoisie, there is considerable ambiguity how middle-level managers of various sorts should be treated. Poulantzas's apparent solution is to argue that "In all cases, therefore, the managers are an integral section of the bourgeois class".[47] Again, an alternative solution is to treat contradictory cases as contradictory cases rather than to collapse them artificially into one class category or another.

An Alternative Conceptualization of Class Boundaries

Perhaps the most serious general criticism of Poulantzas's perspective centres on his treatment of ambiguous positions within the class structure. In his analysis of the working class, *any* deviation at all from the pure working-class criteria in Chart 1 is sufficient for exclusion from the proletariat; in his analysis of the bourgeoisie, on the other hand, it is necessary to deviate on *all* criteria in order to be excluded from the capitalist class. In neither case is the possibility allowed that positions within the social division of labour can be objectively contradictory.[48]

Contradictory Locations within Class Relations

An alternative way of dealing with such ambiguities in the class structure is to regard some positions as occupying *objectively contradictory locations within class relations*. Rather than eradicating these contradictions by artificially classifying

47. Ibid., p. 180.

48. Poulantzas at one point does suggest the possibilities of ambiguous cases when he writes: "The mental/manual labour division is reproduced as a tendency, in the sense that it does not provide a typological classification into rigid compartments for this or that particular agent, and that what matters for us here is its social functioning in the existence and reproduction of social classes." (Ibid., p. 256.) This theme, however, is never developed or given any theoretical specificity in its own right. At most, Poulantzas suggests that there may be some ambiguity in the application of a particular criterion for class position, but not that there may be ambiguities created by contradictions among criteria.

every position within the social division of labour unambiguously into one class or another, contradictory locations need to be studied in their own right. This will be the primary objective of the rest of this chapter.[49] (In a sense, of course, all class positions are "contradictory locations", in that class relations are intrinsically antagonistic, contradictory social relations. The point is that certain positions in the class structure constitute doubly contradictory locations: they represent positions which are torn between the basic contradictory class relations of capitalist society. Rather than refer to these positions with a cumbersome expression such as "contradictory locations within the basic contradictory class relations", I will for convenience simply refer to them as "contradictory class locations".)

So far, our discussion of class structure has centred around the elaboration of various criteria for class. This has perhaps been somewhat misleading. When the word "criteria" is used, there is usually an implication that the purpose of the analysis is the construction of formal, abstract typologies. Ambiguities in the class structure then appear as classification problems in the typology, as failures of analytical imagination rather than as objective characteristics of the society itself. The concept of contradictory locations within class relations, however, does not refer to problems of pigeon-holing people within an abstract typology; rather it refers to objective contradictions among the real processes of class relations. To fully grasp the nature of the class structure of capitalist societies, therefore, we need first to understand the various processes which constitute class relations, analyse their historical transformation in the course of capitalist development, and then examine the ways in which the differentiation of these various processes has generated a number of contradictory locations within the class structures of advanced capitalist societies.

To anticipate the conclusion of the analysis, three clusters of

49. Carchedi's analysis (op. cit. and "Reproduction of Social Classes at the Level of Production Relations", *Economy and Society*, Vol. IV, No. 4, pp. 362–417) of the new middle classes bears a certain resemblance to the present discussion of contradictory locations within class relations. Carchedi defines the new middle classes as positions which perform both the "global function of capital" and the "function of the collective worker" and thus "are only identifiable in terms of contradiction". For a discussion and critique of Carchedi's analysis, see Wright, "Class Structure . . .", op. cit. appendix to chapter 2.

positions within the social division of labour can be characterized as occupying contradictory locations within class relations (see Fig. 2.1): 1. *managers and supervisors* occupy a contradictory location between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat; 2. certain categories of *semi-autonomous employees* who retain relatively high levels of control over their immediate labour process occupy a contradictory location between the working class and the petty bourgeoisie; 3. *small employers* occupy a contradictory location between the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie. Our first task is to analyse how these contradictory locations emerge out of the dynamics of class relations in advanced capitalist society.

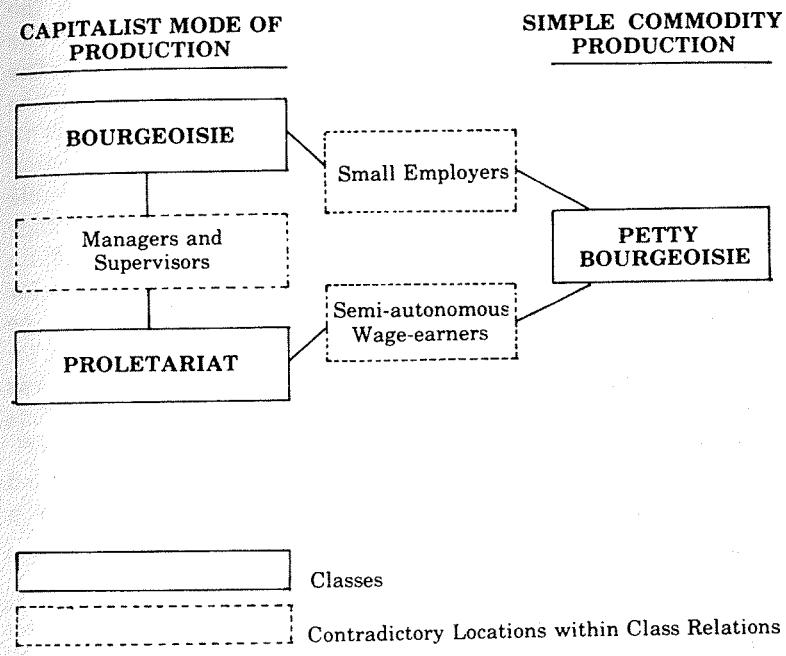

Figure 2.1 The Relationship of Contradictory Class Positions to Class Forces in Capitalist Society

The Processes of Class Relations

Three interconnected structural changes in the course of capitalist development can help us to unravel the social processes underlying class relations in advanced capitalism:[50] the progressive loss of control over the labour process on the part of the direct producers; the elaboration of complex authority hierarchies within capitalist enterprises and bureaucracies; and the differentiation of various functions originally embodied in the entrepreneurial capitalist.[51] Since each of these developments has been thoroughly studied elsewhere, I will only briefly review them here in order to give more substance to the social processes used in the rest of the analysis.

1. *Loss of control over the labour process by workers.* The saga of the progressive dispossession of the direct producers in the course of capitalist development has been told many times. The point that needs stressing here is that the loss of control over the labour process is not an all-or-nothing phenomenon, but has occurred gradually over a long period of time and exists in varying degrees even today. In the earliest capitalist production process, the direct producers generally maintained considerable control over the labour process. Often, especially in cottage industries, they even owned all or part of their immediate means of production. Such a situation made it much easier for the direct producers to control the pace of their labour and the length of their working day, thus making it more difficult for capitalists to raise the rate of exploitation. The net result was that workers' control over their own labour acted as a serious constraint on the accumulation process in early capitalism.[52]

Much of the history of class struggle between capitalists and workers, especially in the 19th century, can be seen as a

50. See ibid., chapter 2 for a considerably more elaborate discussion of these processes of class relations.

51. The point of studying these three historical transformations is less to understand their historical origins as such, than to use structural re-orderings of the capitalist system as a way of gaining insights into the social processes underlying class relations in contemporary capitalism. The epistemological assumption is that a number of distinct social processes are congealed in the class relation between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie and that an analysis of the historical transformations of that class relation is a way of gaining knowledge about the underlying processes themselves.

52. See Chapter 3, p. 170.

struggle over the terms of the control of the labour process.[53] As Stephen Marglin has argued, one of the major impulses for the creation of factories was the desire to undermine worker control.[54] At a minimum factory owners had much greater control over the length of the working day, and generally over other aspects of the labour process as well.

Once workers were gathered within factories, the assault on their remaining control of the labour process continued in the form of technical innovations which fragmented the production process and progressively "deskilled" the labour force.[55] Capitalists could force workers to work in the factory for ten hours by the clock, but as long as the worker maintained real autonomy in the labour process it was difficult for the capitalist to be sure of getting anywhere near ten hours of actual labour from the worker. The close supervision of the labour process is much easier when tasks are simple and routinized and their pace is determined by machinery rather than the worker. Thus, capitalists look for innovations which tend to reduce skill levels and reduce the autonomy of workers on the job. The culmination of this process was the mass production assembly line regulated by principles of Taylorism, in which the worker lost all autonomy and became virtually a human component of machinery itself.

The reverse tendency also exists within capitalism. As technology changes, new skills are needed and new categories of jobs are created in which the worker may have greater immediate control over the labour process. Furthermore, in recent decades the crude scientific management advocated by Taylor has been replaced at least partially in some corporations by "human relations" approaches to the problem of worker productivity. One part of such new approaches is, in principle, the "enrichment" of jobs and the enlargement of the sphere of decision-making under the control of the worker.

Both of these counter-tendencies to the general process of deskilling and the erosion of worker autonomy in the labour

53. See especially Katherine Stone, "The Origins of Job Structures in the Steel Industry", *Review of Radical Political Economics*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Summer 1974.

54. "What Do Bosses Do?", *Review of Radical Political Economics*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1974.

55. See Harry Braverman, *Labour and Monopoly Capitalism*, New York 1974.

process, however, still reflect the salience of control over the labour process as a dimension of class relations. While new skills are continually being created, it is also true that there is constant pressure to reduce the skill levels needed to perform a given task. Thus, for example, when computers were first being developed, the actual operators of computer hardware tended to be engineers. Gradually over the past twenty years this job has been "deskilled" until, at present, computer operators are technicians with only one or two years of post-high school training.

As for the various experiments with worker participation, such enlarged autonomy is almost always confined within very narrow limits and is always seen as a way of getting workers to work more productively. That is, control is relinquished—and generally peripheral control at that—only when it is more than compensated for by increasing production. Thus, in a report to the Conference Board[56] entitled "Job Design for Motivation", Harold Rush writes: "The current emphasis [in job design] is on gaining internal motivation from the employee so that he performs his tasks with more dedication and commitment, as contrasted with coercion, robot-style control, and machine-like pacing. . . . The design and redesign of jobs may be said to have a single purpose, though it is a purpose with a double edge: to increase both employee motivation and productivity."[57]

Greater worker control of the labour process, or what is often called "worker participation", is one important form of this redesigning of jobs to increase productivity. In a second Conference Board report entitled "Worker Participation: New Voices in Management", John Roach writes: "A Conference Board survey of top level executives in 50 countries indicates that participation concepts are winning increased acceptance as approaches to improving productivity, motivating job satisfaction, and resolving labour-management problems both

56. The Conference Board is a nonprofit business research organization which is, in its own words, "an institution for scientific research in the fields of business economics and business management. Its sole purpose is to promote prosperity and security by assisting in the effective operation and sound development of voluntary productive enterprise." Members of the Conference Board are drawn from the top executives of the largest corporations in the United States and generally the views of the Conference Board can be interpreted as reflecting the "vanguard" position of the American capitalist class.

57. Harold Rush, "Job Design for Motivation: Experiments in Job Enlargement and Job Enrichment", *Conference Board Report* No. 515, New York 1971.

within and outside traditional collective bargaining processes. Indeed, responses from the international panel suggest that a widening emphasis on participation is adding a broad new dimension to the operation of free enterprise in the Western World. That is not to say that management has decided it should share any of its board-room prerogatives with unions, works councils, or other worker representatives. On the contrary, the general mood of the 143 executives cooperating in the Board's survey is that management must resist attempts to usurp its ultimate authority to make the big decisions."[58]

Far from contradicting the importance of control of the labour process as a dimension of class relations, the sporadic trends towards increased worker participation reveal the underlying logic of this dimension. Capital tries to extract as much actual labour out of the worker during the work day as possible (this would hardly be denied by any capitalist). Control over the labour process is a basic means of accomplishing this. Under certain historical conditions, for example when a large proportion of the industrial work force are newly proletarianized petty bourgeois (artisans, peasants, etc.) with little experience of factory discipline and without proper work habits, strict and despotic control of the labour process may be the most effective structure of control from the capitalist point of view. Under contemporary conditions, a partial relaxation of direct control may accomplish the same end.[59] In any event, social relations of control over the labour process remain a basic dimension of class relations.

2. *The differentiation of the functions of capital*. No development in capitalist social relations has been used more often as "proof"

58. John Roach, "Worker Participation: New Voices in Management" *Conference Board Report* No. 564, New York 1973.

59. This is not to suggest that the capitalist simply decides what structure of control of the labour process is most advantageous for increasing the rate of exploitation, and then proceeds to adopt that form of control. In the 19th century there was often considerable resistance on the part of craft labour to efforts at deepening capitalist control over the labour process, and at the present many of the experiments in enlarged worker participation, especially in Europe, have been the result of pressures from workers rather than initiatives from capitalists. Control of the labour process is a constant object of class struggle (or perhaps more precisely: it is a dimension of class struggle), and the actual patterns of control which emerge should be seen as the outcome of such struggle and not simply manipulative devices used by capitalists.

that Marx's image of class structure is outmoded than the so-called "separation of ownership and control" in the modern corporation. Of course, no one can deny the considerable growth of managerial hierarchies in the modern corporation and the general decline of the traditional family-owned firm in favour of the joint-stock company (although, as Zeitlin forcefully argues, there are considerable data to indicate that the proponents of the "managerial revolution" thesis have grossly exaggerated these changes).[60] The issue is not whether professional managers play a bigger role in running corporations today than 100 years ago, but how such positions should be structurally interpreted in terms of a theory of class relations.

The apparent separation of ownership and control in the large corporation hides a complex process involving a whole series of structural transformations and differentiations. Two such transformations are of particular importance for our discussion: the functional differentiation between economic ownership and possession, and the partial dissociation between legal ownership and economic ownership. In the 19th century, all three of these dimensions of ownership were embodied in the entrepreneurial capitalist. As part of the process of the concentration and centralization of capital, these three dimensions of ownership have tended to become at least partially differentiated.

The partial separation of economic ownership (control over the flow of investments into production, or more concretely, control over *what* is produced) from possession (control over the production process, or control over *how* things are produced) is a consequence of the concentration and centralization of capital within the accumulation process. Increasing concentration and centralization has encouraged the differentiation of economic ownership and possession for two reasons: first, and most obviously, as the scale of both ownership and production increases, it becomes less and less practical for the same individuals to be equally involved in both functions. Competitive pressures will tend to push capitalists to hire professional managers to deal with specific aspects of production and eventually to help coordinate the production process as a whole. Secondly, as

60. Maurice Zeitlin, "Corporate Ownership and Control: the Large Corporation and the Capitalist Class", *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 79, 1974.

Poulantzas has emphasized, there is a tendency in monopoly capitalism for the concentration and centralization of economic ownership to develop more rapidly than the concentration and centralization of possession, i.e. for a diverse collection of production processes to be formally united under a single economic ownership. In such circumstances it becomes impossible for the two functions of capital—ownership and possession—to be completely united in a single position.

Capitalist development has also been characterized by a gradual dissociation between formal legal ownership and real economic ownership. This is the famous phenomenon of the dispersion of stock ownership in the large corporation. The fact of such dispersion has been the core datum used by supporters of the managerial revolution thesis to argue that the control of the corporation has moved from property owners to professional managers. Marxists have generally drawn quite different conclusions. Building on the arguments of Hilferding, De Vroey writes: "Concerning the second aspect of the separation of ownership and control, i.e., the dissociation between legal ownership and ownership as a relation of production, the Marxist interpretation is as follows: the dispersion of stock among a large number of small owners is accepted as a matter of fact, and explained as a means to mobilize the ever increasing amount of capital needed for accumulation. But rather than seeing the dispersion of stock as an obstacle to concentrated control, Marxism interprets it in exactly the opposite way: as a means for reinforcing the actual control of big stockholders, who thus succeed in commanding an amount of funds out of proportion to their actual ownership. Paradoxically, dispersion of stock thus favors the centralization of capital."[61] For the managerial revolution proponents to prove their case, therefore, it is not enough to show that stock is widely dispersed. They must show that real economic ownership is in the hands of managers, i.e., that they actually control the accumulation process as a whole. The emphasis on economic ownership as opposed to formal legal ownership should not be taken to imply that legal title to stocks and other forms of property is irrelevant to understanding class relations. On the contrary: as long as capitalist relations of

61. Michael DeVroey, "The Separation of Ownership and Control in Large Corporations", *The Review of Radical Political Economics*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1975.

production remain embedded in the legal superstructure of private property, formal legal ownership is in general a *necessary* condition for economic ownership. The point of the distinction between economic and legal ownership is that formal title is not a *sufficient* condition for actual participation in the control of the investment and accumulation process.[62]

3. *The development of complex hierarchies.* The same process of concentration and centralization of capital that generates the basic differentiation of economic ownership and possession, also generates various forms of internal differentiation within each of these dimensions of ownership. First let us look at relations of possession. Relations of possession concern the direction and control of the capitalist production process. Such direction involves two analytically separable aspects: first, control of the physical means of production; second, control of labour. Even in the earliest capitalist enterprise, there was some structural differentiation between these two aspects. Foremen were typically excluded from any real control of the physical means of production, yet played an important role in the supervision of workers. As the capitalist enterprise expanded, additional layers of supervision were added, leading eventually to the complex hierarchy of social control within the monopoly corporation. Capitalist development has also produced an elaborate hierarchy within the other aspect of possession, control over the physical means of production. At the highest levels of the hierarchy, top managers control the entire apparatus of production.[63] Below them, various middle levels of management

62. The debate on the relationship between legal ownership and real economic ownership becomes especially important in the analysis of class relations in societies where all property is legally owned by the State (such as the USSR or China). The most vigorous defenders of the thesis that legal ownership is of entirely secondary significance tend to be those who wish to demonstrate that such countries are essentially capitalist. I will not address the questions of class in such state-owned economies. In the West, legal ownership cannot be relegated to a purely epiphenomenal status. Legal title to property remains the essential vehicle for controlling resources in capitalist societies and thus shaping the entire accumulation process. Not all individuals who own stock are part of the bourgeoisie, but all occupants of bourgeois class locations own substantial quantities of stock (or other forms of property in the means of production).

63. "Level" refers principally to the scope of control attached to a particular position, rather than the formal location within an organizational hierarchy (although the two would generally tend to coincide). The word "control" in this

participate in the control of segments of the production process. At the bottom, certain categories of workers maintain some real control over their immediate production process (i.e. over *how* they do their jobs).

A similar line of reasoning can be developed for economic ownership. In the earliest capitalist enterprise, economic ownership was not organized hierarchically. A single figure was essentially responsible for the entire accumulation process. In the modern corporation, however, different levels of economic ownership can be distinguished. Full economic ownership refers to participation in the control of the overall investment and accumulation process. Typically, the highest executives in the corporation and certain members of the board of directors would occupy this position. Under most circumstances, full economic ownership implies a substantial level of formal legal ownership as well. Below this level there are executives and managers who participate in decisions concerning investments in either sub-units of the total production process (e.g. branches) or partial aspects of the entire investment process (e.g. marketing). Finally, minimal economic ownership involves control over *what* one produces in one's immediate labour process, even though one has no control over what is produced in the production process as a whole.[64] These various hierarchical levels within the relations of economic ownership and relations of possession are summarized in Table 2.7.

On the basis of this brief sketch of historical developments

context should not be taken to imply that the *individual* who occupies a particular social position controls the means of production as an individual. Rather the word designates a social relationship between the position and the means of production. To say that top managers "control the entire apparatus of production" does not mean that any one individual by him/herself controls the entire apparatus, but rather that the individual occupies a position which participates in the control of the entire apparatus of production.

64. Such residual economic ownership constitutes genuine ownership to the extent that genuine control over the disposition of resources—what is produced—exists. Of course, in most corporate settings such minimal ownership is highly constrained by higher level ownership relations, both in the sense that the range of possible uses of resources is limited by higher up decisions and in the sense that the magnitude of resources available for use may be strictly determined from above. When such control over what is produced becomes so marginal as to be irrelevant to the overall accumulation process, then it ceases to make sense to talk about even residual forms of economic ownership.

Table 2.7 Hierarchical Levels within Ownership Relations

	Relations of Economic Ownership (control over *what* is produced)	*Relations of Possession* (control over *how* things are produced) Control of means of production	Control over labour power	*Legal Ownership*
Full control	Control over the overall investment and accumulation process	Control over the entire apparatus of production	Control over the entire supervisory hierarchy	Sufficient stock to ensure influence on investments and accumulation
Partial control	Participation in decisions concerning either sub-units of the total production process or partial aspects of the entire investment process	Control over one segment of the total production process	Control over one segment of the supervisory hierarchy	Sufficient stock to ensure financial stake in profits of corporation (stock is a significant part of income)
Minimal control	Control over *what* one produces in one's immediate labour process	Control over one's immediate instruments of production; over *how* one does one's own job	Control over the direct producers, over immediate subordinates but not part of the hierarchy as such	Marginal stock ownership (stock is an insignificant part of income)
No control	Complete exclusion from participation in decisions about what to produce	Negligible control over any aspect of the means of production	No ability to invoke sanctions on other workers	No stock ownership

within capitalist relations of production, it is possible to isolate three central processes underlying the basic capital-labour relationship: control over the physical means of production; control over labour power; control over investments and resource allocation. The first two of these comprise what Poulantzas has called possession; the third is essentially the same as economic ownership. Again, it must be stressed that these three processes are the real stuff of class relations in capitalist society; they are not merely analytic dimensions derived from *a priori* reasoning.[65]

The fundamental class antagonism between workers and capitalists can be viewed as a polarization on each of these three underlying processes or dimensions: capitalists control the accumulation process, decide how the physical means of production are to be used, and control the authority structure within the labour process. Workers, in contrast, are excluded from the control over authority relations, the physical means of production, and the investment process. These two combinations of the three processes of class relations constitute the two basic antagonistic class locations within the capitalist mode of production.

When the capitalist system is analysed at the highest level of abstraction—the level of the pure capitalist mode of production—these are the only class positions defined by capitalist relations of production.[66] When we move to the next lower level

65. The non-arbitrariness of the choice of these three dimensions of class relations is reflected in their correspondence to the three elements in the formal value equations of Marxist political economy (total value = C + V + S). The control over the physical means of production represents relations of control over constant capital; control over labour implies relations of control over variable capital; and control over investments and accumulation implies relations of control over surplus value. (This correspondence was suggested by Michael Soref).

66. There is a strong tradition within Marxism which limits the definition of classes to this most abstract level. Such simple polarization views of class insist that except for the residues of classes from pre-capitalist modes of production, all positions within capitalist society fall either within the capitalist class or the working class. Typically, in such analyses all wage-earners are considered workers. The basic weakness of simple polarization views of the class structure is that they assume that the simplicity of class relations at the level of abstraction of the mode of production can be directly translated into a corresponding simplicity at the level of concrete societies. The added complexities of concrete social structures are taken to be of purely secondary importance. They may contribute to divisions within classes, but they in principle can have

of abstraction—what is generally called the level of the "social formation"—other class positions appear.

They appear, first of all, because real capitalist societies always contain subordinate modes of production other than the capitalist mode of production itself. In particular, simple commodity production (i.e., production organized for the market by independent self-employed producers who employ no workers) has always existed within capitalist societies. Within simple commodity production, the petty bourgeoisie is defined as having economic ownership and possession of the means of production, but having no control over labour power (since no labour power is employed). The relationship of the petty bourgeoisie to the polarized class positions of the capitalist mode of production is illustrated in Table 2.8.

A second way in which additional class positions appear when we leave the abstraction of the pure capitalist mode of production is that the three processes which constitute capitalist social relations of production do not always perfectly coincide. This non-coincidence of the dimensions of class relations defines the contradictory locations within class relations.

The Analysis of Contradictory Locations within Class Relations

We will explore two different kinds of contradictory locations: 1. contradictory locations between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, i.e. locations defined by contradictory combinations of the three processes underlying class relations within the capitalist mode of production; 2. contradictory locations between the petty bourgeoisie and both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, i.e. locations situated between the capitalist mode of production and simple commodity production.[67] Table 2.9

no effects on the criteria for class boundaries. This is a fundamentally incorrect way of understanding the relationship between abstract and concrete levels of analysis. Abstract relations do not obliterate the importance of concrete complexities, but rather render them theoretically intelligible. As we will see below, contradictory class locations can be understood only with reference to the basic polarized class relations of the capitalist mode of production, and yet they cannot be reduced to those polarized class positions.

67. We will not discuss contradictory locations that occur because an individual simultaneously occupies two class positions within social relations of

Table 2.8 Unambiguous Locations within Class Relations

	PROCESSES UNDERLYING CLASS RELATIONS		
	Economic Ownership	*Possession*	
	Control over investments and the accumulation process	Control over physical means of production	Control over the labour power of others
Bourgeoisie	+	+	+
Proletariat	–	–	–
Petty bourgeoisie	+	+	–

+ Full Control – No Control (See Table 2.7 for precise definitions)

presents the basic relationship between the unambiguous locations illustrated in Table 2.8 and the contradictory locations. In addition to the three social processes discussed above, this chart also contains three juridical categories: legal ownership of property, legal status as the employer of labour power, and legal status as a seller of labour power. These three juridical processes have been included because they so often are treated as the determinants of class position. It must be kept in mind in referring to them that the juridical criteria are of strictly secondary importance; the fundamental issue remains the patterns of contradictory locations defined by the three substantive processes of class relations.

Contradictory Locations Between the Proletariat and the Bourgeoisie

One thing is immediately obvious from Table 2.9. The contradictory quality of a particular location within class relations is a variable rather than all-or-nothing characteristic. Certain

production. For example, a craftsman who works in a factory on weekdays may operate as a self-employed petty-bourgeois artisan on weekends and evenings. While such dual class membership may be important in certain historical circumstances, it does not pose the same kind of analytical problem as positions which are themselves located in a contradictory way within class relations.

Table 2.9 Contradictory Locations Within Class Relations

	Substantive social processes comprising class relations			Juridical categories of class relations		
	Economic Ownership	*Possession*		*Legal Ownership*		*Wage Labour*
	Control over investments, resources	Control over the physical means of production	Control over the labour power of others	Legal ownership of property (capital, stocks, real estate etc.)	Legal status of being the employer of labour power	Sale of one's own labour power
Bourgeoisie						
Traditional capitalist	+	+	+	+	+	–
Top corporate executive	+	+	+	Partial	–	Minimal
Contradictory location between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie						
Top managers	Partial	+	+	Minimal	–	Partial
Middle managers	Minimal	Partial	Partial	–	–	+
Technocrats	Minimal/	Minimal	Minimal	–	–	+
Foremen/line supervisors	–	–	Minimal	–	–	+
Proletariat	–	–	–	–	–	+
Contradictory location between the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie						
Semi-autonomous employees	Minimal	Minimal	–	–	–	+
Petty bourgeoisie	+	+	–	+	–	–
Contradictory location between the petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie						
Small employers	+	+	Minimal	+	Minimal	–

Full control Partial: Attenuated control Minimal: Residual control – No control
(See Table 2.7 for precise definitions)

positions can be thought of as occupying a contradictory location around the boundary of the proletariat; others as occupying a contradictory location around the boundary of the bourgeoisie.

The contradictory location closest to the working class is that of foremen and line supervisors. Foremen typically have little real control over the physical means of production, and while they do exercise control over labour power, this frequently does not extend much beyond being the formal transmission belt for orders from above. It is difficult to say whether during the course of capitalist development over the past century, the class location of foremen has moved closer to or further from the working class. On the one hand, the early foreman often participated directly in the production process alongside workers and even defended workers against arbitrary treatment by the boss. On the other hand, the foreman in the nineteenth-century factory often had much greater personal discretion and personal power than today. In the nineteenth century, authority within the capitalist factory was typically organized in much the same way as an army. There was a simple chain of command and the authority at each level was absolute with respect to the level below. Such a system Marx aptly termed "factory despotism", and foremen in such a factory had at least the potential of being petty despots. As the capitalist enterprise grew in scale and complexity, the authority structure gradually became more bureaucratized. As Weber would put it, foremen increasingly became the administrators of impersonal rules rather than the dispensers of personal fiats.

Richard Edwards, in a study of work norms in bureaucratically structured capitalist organizations, describes this shift in authority relations as follows: "What distinguishes modern enterprises from their earlier and cruder prototypes—and in particular, what distinguishes bureaucratic organization from simple hierarchy—is that in bureaucratically organized enterprises, the exercise of power becomes *institutionalized*. External, arbitrary, personal commands from the boss are replaced by established rules and procedures: 'rule of law' replaces 'rule of personal command'. Work activities become directed by rules. Supervisors at all levels, no longer directing the worker's activities by personal instruction, merely

enforce the rules and evaluate (reward or penalize) their subordinates according to pre-established criteria for adequate work performance. More and more, the work structure is designed so that administrative control can replace executive control."[68] The development of the capitalist enterprise has thus pushed foremen in two opposing directions: they have moved further from workers by becoming less involved in direct production, and they have moved closer to workers by gradually having their personal power bureaucratized. Superficially at least, it would seem that the first of these tendencies probably dominated during the first part of this century, while the second tendency probably dominates today. In any event, when the control of supervisors over labour power becomes so attenuated that the supervisor lacks even the capacity to invoke negative sanctions, then the position really merges with the working class proper and should no longer be thought of as a contradictory location. This would be the case, for example, of the chief of a work team who has certain special responsibilities for coordinating activities of others in the team, but lacks any real power over them.

At the other end of the contradictory location between workers and capitalists, top managers occupy a contradictory location at the boundary of the bourgeoisie. While top managers are generally characterized by limited participation in economic ownership, they differ little from the bourgeoisie in terms of relations of possession. Again, at the very top of the managerial hierarchy, corporate executives essentially merge with the capitalist class itself.

The most contradictory locations between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are occupied by middle managers and what can loosely be termed "technocrats". Technocrat in this context refers to technicians and professionals of various sorts within the corporate hierarchy who tend to have a limited degree of autonomy over their own work (*minimal* control over what they produce and how they produce it) and a limited control over subordinates, but who are not in command of pieces of the productive apparatus. Middle managers, on the other hand, control various pieces of the labour process; they have control

68. *Alienation and Inequality: Capitalist Relations of Production in Business Enterprises*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of Economics, Harvard, p. 102.

not only over immediate subordinates but over part of the authority hierarchy itself. Both middle managers and technocrats have, in Harry Braverman's words, one foot in the bourgeoisie and one foot in the proletariat. In discussing new technical occupations and middle management, Braverman writes: "If we are to call this a 'new middle class', however, as many have done, we must do so with certain reservations. The old middle class occupied that position by virtue of its place outside the polar class structure; it possessed the attributes of neither capitalist nor worker; it played no direct role in the capital accumulation process, whether on one side or the other. This 'new middle class', by contrast, occupies its intermediate position not because it is outside the process of increasing capital, but because, as part of this process, it takes its characteristics from *both sides*. Not only does it receive its petty share of the prerogatives and rewards of capital, but it also bears the mark of the proletarian condition."[69] Unlike line supervisors and foremen on the one hand, and top managers on the other, middle managers and technocrats do not have a clear class pole to which they are attached. The contradictory quality of their class location is much more intense than in the other cases we have discussed, and as a result it is much more difficult to assess the general stance they will take within class struggle.

Contradictory Locations between the Petty Bourgeoisie and Other Classes

The analysis of the contradictory locations between the petty bourgeoisie and other classes poses a somewhat different problem from the contradictory locations between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, since it involves locations between different modes of production rather than within a single mode of production.

The contradictory location between the petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie is conceptually simpler than between the petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The distinctive feature of capitalist production is the appropriation of surplus-value through the exploitation of workers in the labour process. In simple commodity production, on the other hand, there is no exploitation; whatever surplus is produced is generated by the

69. Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, p. 467.

petty-bourgeois producer and his/her family. In general, of course, the surplus is likely to be very small and thus little if any accumulation is likely to occur. When a petty-bourgeois producer employs a single helper, there is an immediate change in the social relations of production, for the labour of a worker can now be exploited. Still, the surplus-value appropriated from a single employee is likely to be very small; most importantly, it is likely to be less than the surplus product generated by the petty-bourgeois producer him/herself. This is especially likely since frequently in petty-bourgeois production a considerable amount of labour is contributed by unpaid family members. As additional employees are added, the proportion of the total surplus product that is generated by the petty-bourgeois family declines. At some point it becomes less than half of the total surplus product, and eventually becomes a small fraction of the total surplus. At that point, the petty-bourgeois producer becomes firmly a small capitalist. There is no *a priori* basis for deciding how many employees are necessary to become a small capitalist. This number would vary considerably for different technologies employed in production and for different historical periods. In any event, between such a small capitalist and the pure petty-bourgeois producer lies the contradictory location between the capitalist class and the petty-bourgeoisie.

The contradictory location between the petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat can perhaps best be understood by returning to the historic process of proletarianization of the petty bourgeoisie. The central dynamic underlying this transformation was the need of capital to increase its control over the labour process. Each step of the transformation involved a deeper penetration of capitalist domination into the labouring activity of direct producers, until in the classic form of scientific management, the direct producer has no control whatsoever over his/her work. This process is constantly being re-enacted within capitalism; it is not a process which was somehow completed at the beginning of this century.

Today there are still categories of employees who have a certain degree of control over their own immediate conditions of work, over their immediate labour process. In such instances, the labour process has not been completely proletarianized. Thus, even though such employees work for the self-expansion

of capital and even though they have lost the legal status of being self-employed, they can still be viewed as occupying residual islands of petty-bourgeois relations of production within the capitalist mode of production itself. In their immediate work environment, they maintain the work process of the independent artisan while still being employed by capital as wage labourers. They control *how* they do their work, and have at least some control over *what* they produce. A good example of this is a researcher in a laboratory or a professor in an elite university. Such positions may not really involve control over other people's labour power, yet have considerable immediate control over conditions of work (i.e. research). More generally, many white-collar technical employees and certain highly skilled craftsmen have at least a limited form of this autonomy in their immediate labour process. Such minimal control over the physical means of production by employees outside of the authority hierarchy constitutes the basic contradictory location between the petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

While there is some debate on the question, it seem likely that in the course of capitalist development over the past fifty years, this particular kind of contradictory location has been somewhat reduced. It is certainly true that white-collar employees have increased as a proportion of the labour force, but as Braverman has forcefully shown, this expansion of white-collar employment has been combined with a constant proletarianization of the working conditions of white-collar labour. It remains to be shown whether the net effect of these two tendencies—the expansion of white-collar employment and the proletarianization of white-collar work—has increased or decreased the contradictory locations between the working class and the petty bourgeoisie. At any rate, it seems almost certain that the large majority of white-collar employees, especially clerical and secretarial employees, have—at most—trivial autonomy on the job and thus should be placed within the working class itself.

How much autonomy is really necessary to define a position as occupying the contradictory location between the working class and the petty bourgeoisie? Surely the criterion of absolutely any autonomy whatsoever is too broad. While the historical data on the labour process are rather meagre, it is

unlikely that more than a small fraction of the working class was ever characterized by the classic image of the fully proletarianized worker, totally under the control of the capitalist through a minutely subdivided labour process governed by principles of scientific management. Most workers, most of the time, have been able to maintain at least some residual control over their immediate labour process. Similarly, it would be inappropriate to restrict the concept of "semi-autonomy" to positions which, like university professors, have extremely high levels of control over the pace of work, the scheduling of work, the content of work, etc. Clearly, then, a certain amount of arbitrariness will inevitably enter into any attempt rigorously to define the semi-autonomous employee class location.[70]

Provisionally, the minimum criterion for semi-autonomy which I will adopt is that such positions must involve at least some control both over what is produced (minimal economic ownership) as well as how it is produced (minimal possession). This means that positions such as laboratory technicians would not be included in the semi-autonomous category since such positions would generally not involve any control over what kind of experiments were done in the lab, even though a technician might have very considerable control over other conditions of work (pace, breaks, techniques used, etc.). A research scientist, on the other hand, would often not simply have autonomy over how he/she performed an experiment, but over what experiments were performed. Research scientists, therefore, would be firmly within the semi-autonomous employee category.[71]

70. A similar problem exists with the other contradictory locations. How many employees are necessary to transform a small employer (the contradictory location between the petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie) into a proper capitalist? How residual must the authority of a foreman be before he/she should be considered a worker? How much participation in investment decisions is necessary before a top manager should be thought of as part of the bourgeoisie itself? In every case, therefore, there will be ambiguous locations right at the boundaries of polarized classes, and a certain arbitrariness will occur whenever formal criteria are applied to such positions. The semi-autonomous employee category, however, poses additional problems because of the ambiguities in the very concept of "autonomy".

71. There is an important relationship between Poulantzas's discussion of mental labour and this discussion of semi-autonomous employees. Poulantzas defines mental labour as labour which involves "secret knowledge" of the production process, in the sense of having knowledge about the organization and

Several other contradictory locations could be discussed. For example, the owners of fast food and gas station franchises could be seen as occupying a contradictory location between the petty bourgeoisie or small employers and managers. While they maintain some of the characteristics of self-employed independent producers, they also become much more like functionaries for large capitalist corporations. Professors with large research grants which enable them directly to hire research assistants, secretaries, etc., could be thought of as occupying a contradictory location between the semi-autonomous employees and small employers. Other special cases could be given, but the most important contradictory locations are the ones discussed above.

The Size of Contradictory Locations

On the basis of the same data we used to analyse the size of the working class using Poulantzas's criteria, we can make some rough estimates of the size of the various contradictory locations within class relations. The results are presented in Figure 2.2. The criteria used to operationalize the high and low estimates for each category are given in Table 2.10.

Unfortunately, the survey that was available did not contain any precise information on the autonomy of workers in the sense we are using that concept. The survey did, however, contain a number of questions on subjective evaluations of job characteristics. Respondents in the survey were asked to indicate whether a series of job descriptions characterized their own job "a lot", "somewhat", "a little" or "not at all". Two of these descriptions bear on the question of job autonomy:

"A job that allows you a lot of freedom as to how you do your work."

"A job that allows you to make a lot of decisions on your own."

These questions are obviously subjective, since it was left up

coordination of the production process as a whole. Poulantzas also emphasizes that to be mental labour (in his sense of the term) it is not enough to simply have such knowledge; it is necessary to actually use it within the production process (see footnote 17 above). Semi-autonomous employees are, in these terms, employees with such knowledge of the production process as a whole, who have the capacity to use such knowledge on their jobs. This is what it means to have minimal control over what is produced and how it is produced.

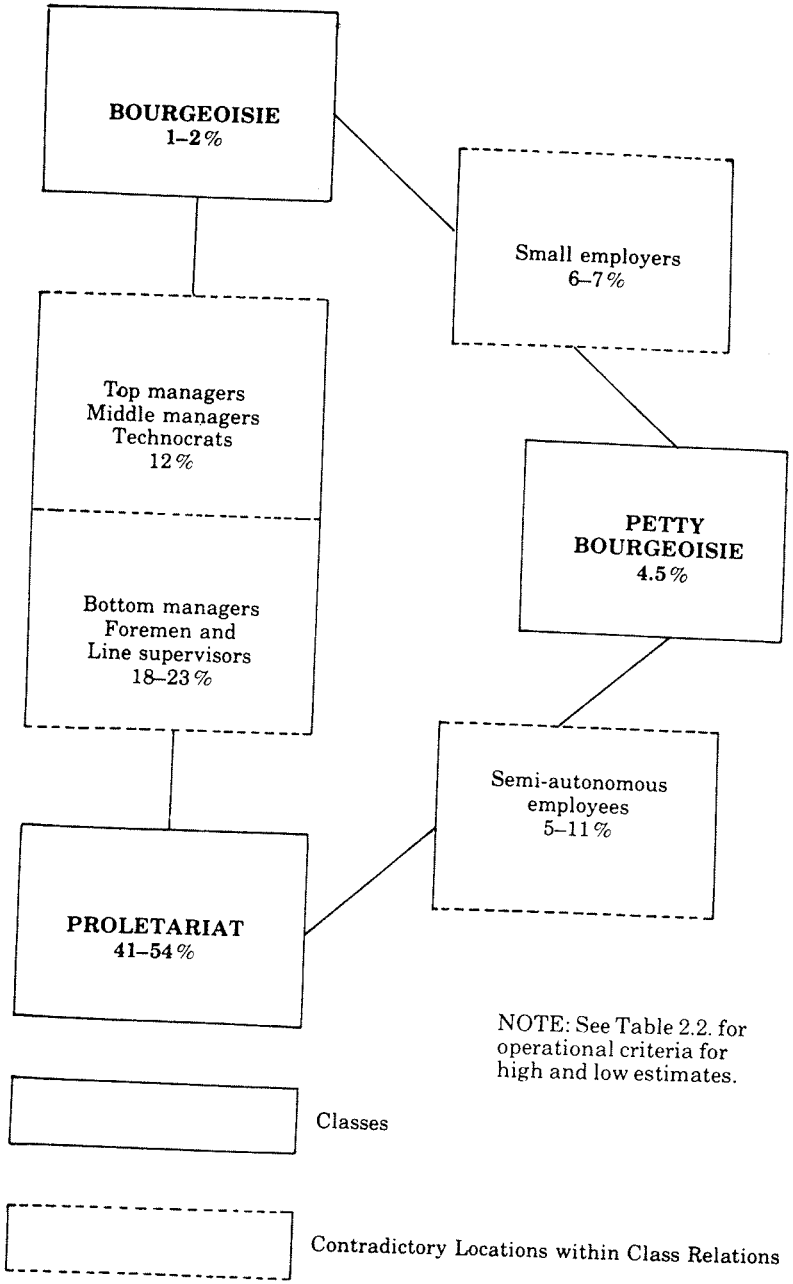

Figure 2.2 Distribution of the Economically Active Population into Contradictory Class Locations (1969)

to each respondent to define what "a lot" means, what "freedom" means, what "decisions" means, and so on. The fact that 46 per cent of the respondents say that having a lot of freedom characterizes their job "a lot", and 49 per cent say that making a lot of decisions describes their job "a lot" reflects the subjective quality of the questions. For the purposes of the present analysis, I will assume that individuals within positions which are genuinely semi-autonomous will answer "a lot" to *both* of these subjective job descriptions. The high estimate of the contradictory location between the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie (11 per cent of the economically active population) includes all non-supervisory employees who score high on both of these descriptions. The low estimate adds information about the respondent's occupation to this subjective criterion of job autonomy. The U.S. Department of Labour has constructed a "Dictionary of Occupational Titles" (D.O.T.) which codes all occupations in terms of the typical relationship to data, things and people which characterizes that occupation. The low estimate of the semi-autonomous employee category (5 per cent of the economically active population) includes all non-supervisory employees who scored high on the subjective autonomy questions and whose occupation is classified as having a complex relation to data and things in the D.O.T. (see Table 2.10 for more detailed explanation). Because of the extreme vagueness of the subjective autonomy question, this low estimate is probably closer to the correct proportion.

The figures for the contradictory location between the working class and the bourgeoisie are also only rough estimates. Since all we know is whether or not the respondent supervises people, we have certainly included some positions which involve virtually no real control over labour power and thus should belong to the working class proper. We have also included some top executives in the contradictory location who should really have been placed in the bourgeoisie. In any event, this latter problem involves a very small proportion of the total population, perhaps 1–2 per cent of all managers. No questions were asked in the survey which enable us accurately to distinguish between top managers, middle managers and technocrats, and line supervisors and foremen. We can use occupational titles to make some crude estimates. We will assume that all super-

Table 2.10 Criteria Used in High and Low Estimates for Sizes of Classes

	High estimate	*Low estimate*
Semi-autonomous Employees	All non-supervisory employees who score high on both questions concerning subjective autonomy.[a]	Those non-supervisory employees who score high on the subjective autonomy questions and whose occupation is classified as having a complex relation to data and things by DOT classification[b]
Small Employers	Less than 50 workers	Less than 10 workers
Managers/Supervisors Top/middle managers	Professionals, technicians and managers (by occupational title) who say they supervise people on their job	
Bottom managers/ supervisors	All supervisors not classified as top/middle managers	Excludes operatives and labourers
Workers	All non-supervisory employees plus semi-autonomous employees whose occupations are classified as non-complex by the DOT, plus supervisors whose occupations are operatives or labourers	Non-supervisory employees who score low on either subjective autonomy question

[a] Jobs which the respondent claims are characterized "a lot" by *both* of the following descriptions:
1) "a job that allows a lot of freedom as to how you do your work"
2) "a job that allows you to make a lot of decisions on your own"

[b] The Dictionary of Occupational Titles codes occupations in terms of their relationship to data and to things in the following way: *relationship to things*: 0. setting up; 1. precision working; 2. operating-controlling; 3. driving-operating; 4. manipulating; 5. tending; 6. feeding-offbearing; 7. handling; 8. no significant relationship to things.
relationship to data: 0. synthesizing; 1. coordinating; 2. analysing; 3. compiling; 4. computing; 5. copying; 6. comparing; 7–8. no significant relationship to data.
An individual whose occupation scored 0–2 on data and 0–2 or 8 on things, or who scored 0–2 on things and 7–8 on data, was classified as having a "complex" job.

visors who say that they are professionals, managers or technicians are probably technocrats, middle managers or top managers. All the rest we will assume are line supervisors or foremen. The high estimate for this bottom category includes all supervisors who are not classified in the top-middle management position; the low estimate excludes operatives and labourers, most of whom are probably heads of work teams rather than actual foremen. On the basis of these estimates, approximately 12 per cent of the economically active population falls into the middle manager/top manager contradictory location between the working class and the bourgeoisie, while somewhere between 18 per cent and 23 per cent occupy the contradictory location at the boundary of the working class. If we take ten employees as the cut-off point for small capitalists, then the contradictory location between the petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie consists of about 6 per cent of the population. If we take fifty employees as the cut-off, then this increases to 7 per cent.

Overall, on the basis of these statistics, the working class (i.e. non-supervisory, non-autonomous employees) in the United States consists of between 41 and 54 per cent of the economically active population. At the boundaries of the working class are another 25–35 per cent of the population, depending upon which estimates are used. The total potential class basis for a socialist movement, consisting of the working class and those contradictory locations closest to the working class, is thus probably somewhere between 60 per cent and 70 per cent of the population.

Class Interests and the Definition of Class Positions

To briefly recapitulate the argument so far, we have analysed the class relations of capitalist society in terms of three processes underlying social relations of production: control of labour power, control of the physical means of production and control of investments and resources. The central class forces of capitalist society—the bourgeoisie and the proletariat—can be understood as representing polar class positions within each of these three processes. The petty bourgeoisie, on the other hand, is defined by the second and the third of these processes within simple commodity production. We then defined contradictory

locations within class relations as situations in which these three processes did not perfectly correspond to the basic class forces within the capitalist mode of production or to the petty bourgeoisie in simple commodity production. This led to the analysis of three contradictory locations: managers and supervisors occupy a contradictory location between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat; small employers occupy such a position between the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie; and semi-autonomous employees occupy a contradictory location between the petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

Thus far, no mention has been made of positions in the social structure which are not directly defined by the social relations of production and would thus not be explicitly encompassed by the criteria so far elaborated. Such positions would include housewives, students, pensioners, people permanently on welfare. If one wanted to adopt a fairly narrow conception of relations of *production*, the class location of people employed in the administrative, repressive and ideological apparatuses of the state would also not be directly defined by the criteria discussed above. What then is the relationship of such positions to the structural categories defined directly by the social relations of production? In order to answer this question it is necessary to introduce another distinction into the discussion: the distinction between *fundamental* and *immediate* class interests.

Immediate and Fundamental Class Interests

It is important to be quite clear about how we will use the term "interests" before we discuss the distinction between immediate and fundamental levels of class interests. To make a claim about objective class interests is to make a claim about *potential* objectives of class actors.[72] It makes no sense at all to talk about "interests" which can *never* become actual objectives of real struggles. Not all potential objectives of class actors, however, can be considered class interests. We therefore need to be able to

72. To talk about the objectives of the class struggle is very similar to talking about the *subjective motives* or the class *consciousness* of class actors. In general, I prefer to use the expression "objectives" since it does not have the psychologistic overtones of either subjective motives or consciousness. Nevertheless, to talk about real objectives of struggle is to talk about a certain constellation of subjective motives/consciousness in the actors.

distinguish between objective *class* interests and other kinds of interests (potential objectives). Class interests in capitalist society are those potential objectives which become actual objectives of struggle in the absence of the mystifications and distortions of capitalist relations. Class interests, therefore, are in a sense hypotheses: they are hypotheses about the objectives of struggles which would occur if the actors in the struggle had a scientifically correct understanding of their situations. To make the claim that socialism is in the "interests" of the working class is not simply to make an ahistorical, moralistic claim that workers ought to be in favour of socialism, nor to make a normative claim that they would be "better off" in a socialist society, but rather to claim that if workers had a scientific understanding of the contradictions of capitalism, they would in fact engage in struggles for socialism.[73] In these terms, the very definition of class is systematically linked to the concept of class struggle: to define a position as located within the working class is to say that such a position can potentially sustain socialist objectives in class struggles.

Within this general conception of class interests it is possible to distinguish between what can be termed immediate and fundamental interests. Immediate class interests constitute interests within a given structure of social relations; fundamental interests centre on interests which call into question the structure of social relations itself.[74] That is, immediate

73. This is a somewhat oversimplified account of interests. Mystification is not the only factor which obstructs the translation of objective interests into subjective motives within the class struggle. The repressiveness of the state may equally block the organization of struggle around various class interests. The critical point is that to posit class interests is to posit actual subjective orientations towards struggle which would emerge in the absence of such impediments. It should also be noted that while this concept of interests does involve an implicit notion of the rationality of class actors (under specified objective conditions), it has little to do with the utilitarian notions of people as rational, utility-maximizing *individuals*. There is no claim that subjective motives will emerge because individuals *qua* individuals personally have a scientific understanding of their class situation. *Class* interests can only be defined in terms of the potential subjective motives of collectivities, not simply individuals.

74. The distinction between immediate and fundamental interests is not necessarily equivalent to a temporal distinction between short-run and long-run interests. While it is often the case that struggles over the very structure of society are "long-run" struggles, the critical issue is what the objective of struggle is, not the time horizon for that struggle.

interests are interests defined within a given mode of production (i.e. interests which take the mode of production as a given), while fundamental interests are defined between modes of production (i.e., they call into question the mode of production itself). The immediate economic interests of the working class, for example, are defined largely by market relations. Struggles for wages, better living conditions, better education opportunities and so forth all constitute struggles for objectives defined within the basic structure of capitalism. Struggles for socialism, on the other hand, challenge the premises of capitalist relations and reflect the fundamental interests of the working class.[75]

Immediate interests are not "false" interests; they are "incomplete" interests. The struggle over wages reflects a correct understanding by workers of their immediate conditions of existence within capitalism; the *restriction* of struggles to questions of wages, however, reflects an incomplete understanding of the nature of capitalist society as a whole, for it fails to grasp the possibility of transcending the entire system of capitalist exploitation through socialism.

Immediate and fundamental interests do not exist apart from each other; they are dialectically linked. On the one hand, because immediate interests are real, because they impinge directly on the day-to-day existence of workers in capitalist society, it is utopian to conceive of class struggle organized around fundamental interests which does not as well deal with immediate interests. On the other hand, the working class is much more divided at the level of immediate interests than at the level of fundamental interests. Skilled workers are generally in much more favourable market conditions than

75. Because of the manifest conflicts generated by market relations, many sociologists have taken the market to be the central basis for class differentiation. This is especially true for Max Weber who defines classes primarily in terms of market position: "But always this is the generic connotation of the concept of class: that the kind of chance in the market is the decisive moment which presents a common condition for the individual's fate. 'Class situation' is, in this sense, ultimately 'market situation'." (*Economy and Society*, ed. by Guenther Roth, New York: 1968, p. 928.) This general stance has been extended by Anthony Giddens (*Class Structure of the Advanced Societies*, London 1973), who explicitly defines "middle" classes in terms of a market capacity rooted in the possession of educational skills. In all such treatments, classes are defined primarily in terms of immediate interests at the economic level.

unskilled workers and thus often have different immediate interests from other workers. Because of labour market segmentation, male workers may have different immediate interests from female workers, black workers from white workers. Because immediate interests divide the working class, and because they do not directly call into question the structure of capitalist relations, the durability of capitalism depends, in part, on the extent to which struggles over fundamental interests are displaced into struggles over immediate interests.

This contradiction between the immediate and fundamental interests of the working class pervades debates on the left: socialist struggles must take seriously immediate interests, and yet struggles over immediate interests tend to undermine socialist struggles. This contradiction cannot be wished away; it is inherent in the class relations of capitalist society itself. Only in a revolutionary situation do the struggles over immediate and fundamental interests begin fully to coincide (indeed, this might be part of the definition of a revolutionary situation: a situation in which the struggle for objectives within the dominant mode of production directly reinforces struggles over the mode of production).[76]

The Class Location of Positions not Directly Determined by Production Relations

With this understanding of the distinction between immediate and fundamental interests, we can now approach the problem of the class location of various positions in the social structure which are not directly determined by production relations. As a general proposition, the class location of such positions is determined by their relationship to the fundamental interests of classes defined within the social relations of production. Let us see what this means for a number of specific categories of positions defined outside of production relations.

76. One way of interpreting André Gorz's notion of "non-reformist reforms" is to view them as reforms at the level of immediate interests which, even in non-revolutionary situations, tend to reinforce struggles over fundamental interests. This does not mean that there is no tension between such reforms and fundamental interests; but it does imply that within the range of possible reforms compatible with capitalist social relations, some are much more coincident with fundamental interests of the working class than others.

1. *Housewives.* A variety of strategies have been adopted to deal with the class location of housewives. In some accounts, domestic production is treated as a subsidiary mode of production in its own right, in which the male occupies the position of exploiter and the female, the position of exploited. In other accounts, household production is treated as the final state of capitalist production itself, and the housewife as an unpaid worker who is indirectly subordinated to capital.[77]

A much more straightforward way of dealing with this question is to examine the fundamental interests of housewife positions. In particular, in what sense do the fundamental *class* interests of the housewife of a worker differ from those of the worker himself? One might want to claim that she has different interests as a woman, but do her class interests differ in any meaningful way? Does she have any less of a fundamental interest in socialism? Unless one is willing to argue that working class housewives have different interests with respect to socialism, then it is clear that they fall within the working class. This does not in any way imply that the sexual division of labour is unimportant, that women are not oppressed within that division of labour, but simply that the sexual division of labour does not create a division of fundamental *class* interests between husbands and their housewives.[78]

2. *Students.* Like housewives, students are not directly engaged in production relations. The class locations of students, therefore, must be defined by the class location into which they will move upon the completion of their studies. Student positions, in

77. For a review of alternative strategies of a class analysis of housewives, see Terry Fee, *Review of Radical Political Economics*, Summer 1976.

78. This treatment of the class location of housewives is sometimes viewed as sexist, since it assigns the class position of the housewife on the basis of the class location of the husband. If we treat the family as the essential unit of analysis, and ask: how is the family articulated with production relations, then it is clear that the class location of the housewife is not defined via her husband but via the family unit of which they both are a part. It is, indeed, a reflection of the sexism of capitalist society that the division of labour within such a family unit often sends the man out to work and leaves the woman in the home. But it is not sexist to identify the class location of the woman in terms of the way in which the family is inserted into capitalist relations of production. The only way of identifying how the family is so inserted is then to examine the class location of the husband.

this sense, should be thought of as pre-class positions, as positions which are linked with greater or lesser certainty to specific class destinies. Daniel Bertaux has suggested that the appropriate way of dealing with such positions is as parts of class-*trajectories*: a life-time structure of positions through which an individual passes in the course of a work career.[79] Student slots constitute the first stage of such trajectories, and their class location must be defined by the class content of the trajectory as a whole. It is the fundamental class interests of such trajectories, rather than the class *origins* of the student which defines their class location.

3. *Pensioners.* Pensioners pose the opposite problem from students. They occupy post-class locations rather than pre-class locations. But like students, their class can only be understood in terms of the trajectories of class positions to which they are linked.

4. *The unemployed; welfare recipients.* Temporarily unemployed people—the reserve army of the unemployed—pose no special problem for a class analysis. Like students and pensioners, they are tied to trajectories of class positions, and this defines their basic class location. The category of permanently unemployed, on the other hand, is more problematic. In classical Marxism, such positions were generally identified as "lumpenproletariat", the underclass of society. This is not an entirely satisfactory way of classifying such positions, for it suggests that they have fundamentally opposed interests to the working class, and thus would play at best an ambivalent role in socialist struggles.

79. Daniel Bertaux, *Destins Personnels et Structures de Classe*, Paris 1977. In a personal correspondence, Bertaux has suggested that all class positions should be understood as trajectories rather than "empty places". This implies that there is a certain indeterminacy in a given individual's class location at any moment in time, since with few exceptions, a given slot may be linked to multiple potential trajectories. One of the critical aspects of a class structure, in these terms, is the degree of such indeterminacy, how it is spread out over the life-cycle, how it is distributed in the population. It must be noted that this is not a simple recasting of the old problem of social mobility (although there is a certain relationship to the problem of mobility). Rather, the argument is that many job changes which look like mobility are not mobility at all, but merely different phases of a single trajectory. The only genuine mobility would be situations in which individuals move from one trajectory to another.

At the level of immediate interests, to be sure, there is certainly a tremendous gulf between the working class and the permanently unemployed, at least in the United States, since welfare payments come directly out of taxes and workers see those taxes as coming out of their own labour. At the level of fundamental interests, the question becomes much more ambiguous. If we adopted a purely normative stance towards interests, then it would be easy to say that the permanently unemployed would undoubtedly "benefit" from socialism. But the same could be said of feudal peasants, slaves, and even many small shopkeepers; yet such positions would not thereby fall into the working class.[80] The question is not whether on the basis of ahistorical, utilitarian criteria an individual who is permanently unemployed would benefit from socialism, but whether socialism is a potential objective of struggle for such positions. That is, are those positions linked to capitalist relations of production in such a way that they potentially produce socialist working class consciousness? I cannot adequately answer this question. While it is certainly the case that the conditions of the permanently unemployed can engender an anti-capitalist consciousness, it is less clear whether they would systematically generate or sustain a socialist consciousness. As a purely provisional solution to this problem, the permanently unemployed can be considered a marginalized segment of the working class.

5. *Employees in political and ideological apparatuses*. The final category of positions not directly defined by production relations are positions located entirely within what has traditionally been called the "superstructure": policemen, preachers, professors, etc. How can we understand the fundamental class interests of such positions? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to expand our discussion of class interests from purely economic class interests (socialist vs. capitalist organization of

80. The vaguer concept of "the people" or sometimes "the masses" is sometimes used to include all oppressed classes which, at least in a utilitarian-economic sense, would benefit from a socialist transformation. The working class, however, is clearly a narrower concept, defined by a specific structural location within capitalist society. That structural location does not merely give workers a material benefit from socialism, but provides the structural suppport for a socialist consciousness (i.e., for the historical emergence of the subjective interest in a socialist transformation).

production) to political and ideological class interests (socialist vs. capitalist organization of the state and ideology). Once this is done, we can analyse the relationship between different locations within the political and ideological apparatuses to these interests.

The fundamental interest of the capitalist class at the political and ideological level is to prevent the working class from acquiring state power and ideological hegemony. In different periods of capitalist development this implies different concrete class objectives, but throughout the history of capitalism it has implied the maintenance of hierarchical and bureaucratic structures within the political and ideological apparatuses.[81] Such bureaucratic structures are essential in protecting the capitalist state from potential working class domination.

The fundamental interests of the working class at the political and ideological level are, in a dialectical manner, to obtain state power and establish ideological hegemony. This implies a qualitative restructuring of the capitalist state—what is polemically referred to as "smashing" the state—in ways which allow the working class as a class to exercise state power. While the precise contours of such a reorganization are impossible to specify in advance, the minimum requirement is that they be radically democratic and antibureaucratic.

Different positions within the bureaucratic structures of the political and ideological apparatuses of capitalist society clearly have different relationships to these fundamental bourgeois and proletarian class interests. Schematically, positions within the political and ideological apparatuses can be grouped into three functional categories in terms of these antagonistic class interests:

a. *bourgeois positions* involving control over the creation of state policies in the political apparatuses and the production of ideology in the ideological apparatuses. Examples would include the top bureaucratic positions in the state, churches, universities, and other such institutions.

b. *contradictory locations* involving the execution of state policies and the dissemination of ideology. Examples would include a beat policeman and a high school teacher.

81. See Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of the centrality of bureaucratic structures for bourgeois political domination.

c. *proletarian positions* involving complete exclusion from either the creation or execution of state policies and ideology. Examples would include a clerk or janitor in a police station and a typist in a school.[82]

In the analysis of positions within the ideological apparatuses, the central issue is the social relations of control over the apparatuses of ideological production *per se*, not simply the participation in the production of ideology. A news reporter, for example, is to a greater or lesser extent involved in producing ideology, but is generally completely excluded from the control over the news apparatus as a whole, and would thus not occupy the bourgeois position within the news media. In these terms, it would be possible further to elaborate this schema of class locations within the ideological apparatuses by introducing the notion of petty bourgeois positions (self-employed, independent intellectuals who control their process of ideological production) and "semi-autonomous" positions (positions which have some control over their immediate production of ideology, but do not control the apparatus of ideological production at all). A novelist might fall into the former category, an assistant professor into the latter. For present purposes, however, I will use the simpler schema of bourgeois, contradictory locations and proletarian positions within the ideological apparatuses.[83]

Extended Definitions of Classes

On the basis of this discussion of fundamental class interests, we can now give a more elaborate definition of classes within capitalist society. The working class can be defined as those positions which:

82. In practice, these three levels within the political and ideological apparatuses can be operationalized in much the same way that the social relations of production at the economic level were operationalized. That is, the working class position in both cases involves exclusion from control over resources, physical means of production/administration, and labour power. The contradictory location involves exclusion from any basic control over resources, but generally does involve some amount of control over physical means of production/administration and labour of others. Finally the bourgeois position in both the political/ideological apparatuses and the economy involves substantial amounts of control over resources, physical means of production/administration and labour.

83. While it is fairly easy to define a petty-bourgeois position at the ideological level (independent intellectuals), it is much less clear how to define a petty bourgeois location at the political level. This suggests, possibly, a critical difference between political and ideological levels of social structures: the political level is much more tightly organized within the framework of capitalist relations than is the ideological.

(a) occupy the working class position within the social relations of production, i.e., wage labour which is excluded from control over money capital, physical capital and labour power; or,
(b) are linked directly to the working class through immediate family or class trajectories; or,
(c) occupy working class positions within political and ideological apparatuses, i.e., positions which are excluded from either the creation or execution of state policy and ideology.

In a complementary manner, the bourgeois class can be defined as those positions which:
(a) occupy the bourgeois position within the social relations of production, i.e., positions of control over money capital, physical capital and labour power; or,
(b) are linked directly to the bourgeoisie through families or class trajectories; or,
(c) occupy bourgeois positions within the political and ideological apparatuses, i.e., positions which involve the control over the creation of state policy and the production of ideology.

Finally, contradictory class locations between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat can be defined as those positions which:
(a) occupy a contradictory location within the social relations of production, i.e., positions which involve a non-coincidence of relations of control over money capital, physical capital and labour power; or,
(b) are linked directly to contradictory locations through families or class trajectories; or,
(c) occupy a contradictory location within the political and ideological apparatuses, i.e., execute but do not create state policy, or disseminate but do not control the production of bourgeois ideology.

Class Structure and Class Struggle

It is all very well and good to clarify the structure of positions defined by social relations of production and to link these to

other positions in the social structure. Marxism, however, is not primarily a theory of class structure; it is above all a theory of class struggle. It is therefore essential to analyse the relationship between class struggle and class structure, in particular between contradictory class locations and class struggle.

We have already briefly touched on part of this question in our discussion of class interests. Fundamental interests, it will be recalled, were ultimately defined by the potential objectives of class struggle (objectives which call into question the mode of production itself). But how should we conceptualize the ways in which class structure actually shapes class struggle? To deal with this question we need to introduce one final distinction into the discussion: the distinction between class *interests* and class *capacities*.

Class Interests and Class Capacities

At the heart of Marx's analysis of class relations is the thesis that the working class not only has an interest in socialism, but also has the capacity to struggle for and to organize a socialist society. This is precisely what distinguishes "scientific socialism" from various forms of "utopian socialism". Scientific socialism does not simply posit a moral imperative for a socialist society, but also identifies the social agents capable of creating such a society.

How then can we understand theoretically this notion of class capacity, of the capacity of a class to realize its class interests? Class capacities are defined by the *social relations within a class* which to a greater or lesser extent unite the agents of that class into a class formation. Class interests were analysed in the previous section as the potential objectives of classes within the class struggle. Class interests were, in these terms, the link between class structure (i.e., the structure of social relations *between* classes) and class struggle. Similarly, class capacities constitute the link between class formation (i.e., the structure of social relations *within* classes) and the class struggle: capacities constitute the potential basis for the realization of class interests within the class struggle.[84]

84. Throughout this discussion, the actual structure of social relations within a class will be referred to as "class formation"; the consequences of those social relations for class struggle will be referred to by the expression "class capacities". This use of the term "class formation" is quite similar to that employed by Adam Przeworski in his paper "The Process of Class Formation from Karl Kautsky's *The Class Struggle* to Recent Debates", *Politics and Society* (forthcoming), 1977. Przeworski argues that class formation is a continual process of the organization, disorganization and reorganization of classes. But what is a "formed" class or a class organization if not a structure of social relations within a class which generates a capacity for the struggle over class objectives?

The diverse social relations which objectively link together the agents within a common class location can be divided into two general categories: those links which are generated directly by the structural developments of capitalist society, and those links which are constituted by the conscious organization of the members of that class. The first of these can be called the *structural capacities* of a class, the second, the *organizational capacities* of a class.

The structural capacity of the working class which has received the most attention by Marxists can be termed the capacity of the *collective worker*. The collective worker is a concept which taps the fundamental changes in the labour process which have occurred in the course of capitalist development. The story has been told many times. In the earliest stages of capitalism workers were dispersed in cottage industries or very small shops in which each individual worker was responsible for the fabrication of an entire commodity. As capitalism expanded and developed, workers became increasingly concentrated in large factories in which a very complex division of labour has created considerable interdependence among individual workers. Commodities are no longer produced by individual workers but by the "collective worker". As a result, the objective links among workers within the labour process—their structural capacity within production—have been strengthened and deepened. Marx for one felt that this development was of decisive importance for enabling the working class to struggle effectively against capital and eventually to revolutionize capitalist society.[85]

85. To say that the collective worker constitutes the structural capacity of the working class within production does not imply that workers within highly collective, industrial labour processes will necessarily be the most militant or radical in a given period. There are obviously many other factors which determine actual activity within the class struggle aside from the capacity for

The capitalist class, of course, is not oblivious to the implications of the growing concentration of labour within the production process. As Katherine Stone has so effectively demonstrated in the case of the steel industry in the United States, the capitalist class has consciously attempted to undermine the solidarity created by the social relations among workers within production through the creation of job hierarchies, structures of privileges and promotions, etc.[86] To the extent that such strategies weaken the social relations among workers within production, they undermine the structural capacity of the working class (in a sense job hierarchies and the like can be thought of as constituting a structural incapacity of the working class).

The structural capacity of the working class is not determined only within the production process. One can also talk about the structural capacity (and incapacity) of the working class which is rooted in community, i.e., the social relations among workers outside of production. Under certain circumstances, such community based linkages may be at least as important as social relations among workers within production. The kind of class solidarity which emerges in mining towns is probably a good example of this. Ethnic solidarity may also, under certain circumstances, serve to reinforce the class-based social relations within the community.[87]

The relationship between the structural capacity of workers within production and within community is extremely impor-

struggle. The fact that in the 19th century many of the most intense class struggles were waged by craft labour resisting proletarianization certainly demonstrates that it is impossible to make a simple equation between the collective worker and actual struggles. The point is not that the structural capacities of classes necessarily predict class *behaviour* within the class struggle, but rather that they condition the possibilities for successfully realizing class interests within those struggles.

86. "The Origins of Job Structures in the Steel Industry", cited above.

87. Al Gedicks shows how in the copper mining communities of Northern Michigan at the turn of the century, community and ethnic solidarity served to reinforce the social relations among workers generated within production: the result was an extremely militant and cohesive movement among miners in the period. "Ethnicity, Class Solidarity and Labor Radicalism among Finnish Immigrants in Michigan Copper Country", *Politics and Society*, Vol. 6, No. 4, 1976, and *The Radical Finns of Northern Minnesota: A Study in the Development of Working-Class Politics*, Ph.D Dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of Wisconsin, 1978.

tant. It can be argued that while capitalist development in the United States over the past century has led to an increasing concentration and differentiation of labour within production, with an accompanying increase in the structural capacity of the working class within production, there has been a corresponding dispersion and disintegration of working class communities. Suburbanization, increasing home-ownership (at least until recent years), geographical mobility, and other factors have all contributed to a loosening of ties among workers outside of production, and thus to a weakening of the non-production based structural capacity of the working class.[88]

The structural capacities of classes can be thought of as structuring the possibilities for the self-organization of classes.[89] The organizational capacities of classes, on the other hand, constitute the actual linkages among members of a class created by and through consciously directed class organizations. Unions, for example, constitute an organizational structure of social relations among workers consciously directed towards the realization of immediate economic interests. The strength and forms of unions depend, in part at least, on the development of the underlying structural capacities of the working class (the collective worker), and thus we can treat the structural capacities as shaping, or setting limits upon, the organizational capacities.

Organizational capacities play a pivotal role in understanding class struggle and social change. As Przeworski has argued, the class struggle is in the first instance a struggle over the very existence of organized classes before it is a struggle between organized classes.[90] To the extent that the working class can be prevented from transforming structural capacities into organizational capacities, the capitalist class is capable of

88. See Daniel Luria, *Suburbanization, Home-ownership and Working-Class Consciousness*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of Economics, University of Massachusetts, 1976.

89. Marx's famous analysis of peasants as a "sack of potatoes" in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* represents an analysis of the relationship between structural and organizational capacities of classes. Marx argues that the physical isolation of peasants—their structural incapacity—makes it impossible for them to form themselves into a class—that is, to develop a viable organizational class capacity.

90. "The Process of Class Formation from Karl Kautsky's *The Class Struggle* to Recent Debates."

containing the pervasive contradictions of capitalism; to the extent the working class is able to forge enduring organizational capacities around fundamental interests, the very existence of capitalism is potentially threatened.[91]

Class Structure, Class Formation and Class Struggle

We are now in a position to introduce the concept of class struggle into the analysis. Class struggle will be conceived as the complex social processes which dialectically link class interests to class capacities. This relationship is symbolically represented in Figure 2.3, using the modes of determination discussed in Chapter 1. While the diagram should be read as a dialectical totality, nevertheless it will be useful to go through each of the connections in the diagram in turn.

1. *The relationship of class structure to class struggle.* The class structure sets the broadest limits of variation on class struggle in at least two senses. First, the class structure defines the *potential* actors in the class struggle (for example, without peasants it is impossible to have land seizures as a form of class struggle). Secondly, the class structure defines the range of potential *objectives* of class struggle (for example, until the emergence of large-scale industrial capitalism, nationalization as an objective of the class struggle was not a viable possibility).

2. *The relationship of class formation to class struggle.* A given class structure determines only the broadest possible limits of variation of class struggle. A wide variety of social processes

91. Poulantzas's well-known analysis of the dual functions of the capitalist state—to disorganize the working class and organize the bourgeoisie—can be interpreted in terms of the relationship between structural capacities and organizational capacities of classes. The critical problem that the capitalist class faces with respect to the working class, Poulantzas argues, is the potential organization of the working class created by the internal developmental tendencies of capitalism. It is essential, therefore, that mechanisms be established which prevent the structural capacities of the working class from being transformed into organizational capacities. Many of the characteristics of the capitalist state accomplish just this. The creation of the juridical citizen, the individualized process of political participation, the organization of political conflict around commodity relations rather than production relations, and so on, all serve to atomize the working class and (partially) block the translation of structural into organizational capacities.

function as selective forces on class struggle within those limits. Class capacities constitute one of the most decisive selection determinations of class struggle. The underlying structural capacities of classes and the specific organizational forms shaped by those structural capacities have a tremendous impact on forms of class struggle. The form of economic class struggle, for example, is heavily influenced by the forms of trade unionism (organizational class capacity of the working class at the economic level). When unions are organized by competing political tendencies (communist unions vs. socialist unions vs. christian unions), trade union struggles are much more likely to be directed at the state and coordinated with party struggles, rather than simply directed at the immediate capitalists involved in a conflict. When unions are organized on an industrial basis as in certain sectors in the United States, on the other hand, union activity is likely to be much more focused on the immediate employer. Perhaps an even more telling example of the relationship of class capacity to class struggle concerns the political organizational capacity of the working class. The organization of the working class through electoral parties has a pervasive impact on class struggle. Under most conditions, this has resulted in a systematic displacement of class struggles from fundamental interests to immediate interests, since parliamentary competition pushes parties to advocate in practice only those programmes which are compatible with the overall reproduction of capitalism. In the final chapter of this book we will discuss whether such displacement is an inevitable consequence of parliamentary politics, but the historical record of such displacement is certainly impressive.

3. *The relationship of class struggle to class structure and class formation.* Class struggle is not a "dependent variable" shaped by external causes; rather, it enters into the very process by which it is itself determined. Specifically, both the class structure and the organizational capacities of classes are objects of class struggle and are transformed by class struggle. The entire process of primitive accumulation in early capitalism should be viewed as class struggle over class structure: the emerging capitalist class attempting to expand the size of the proletariat through various means (enclosures, immigration, poor laws,

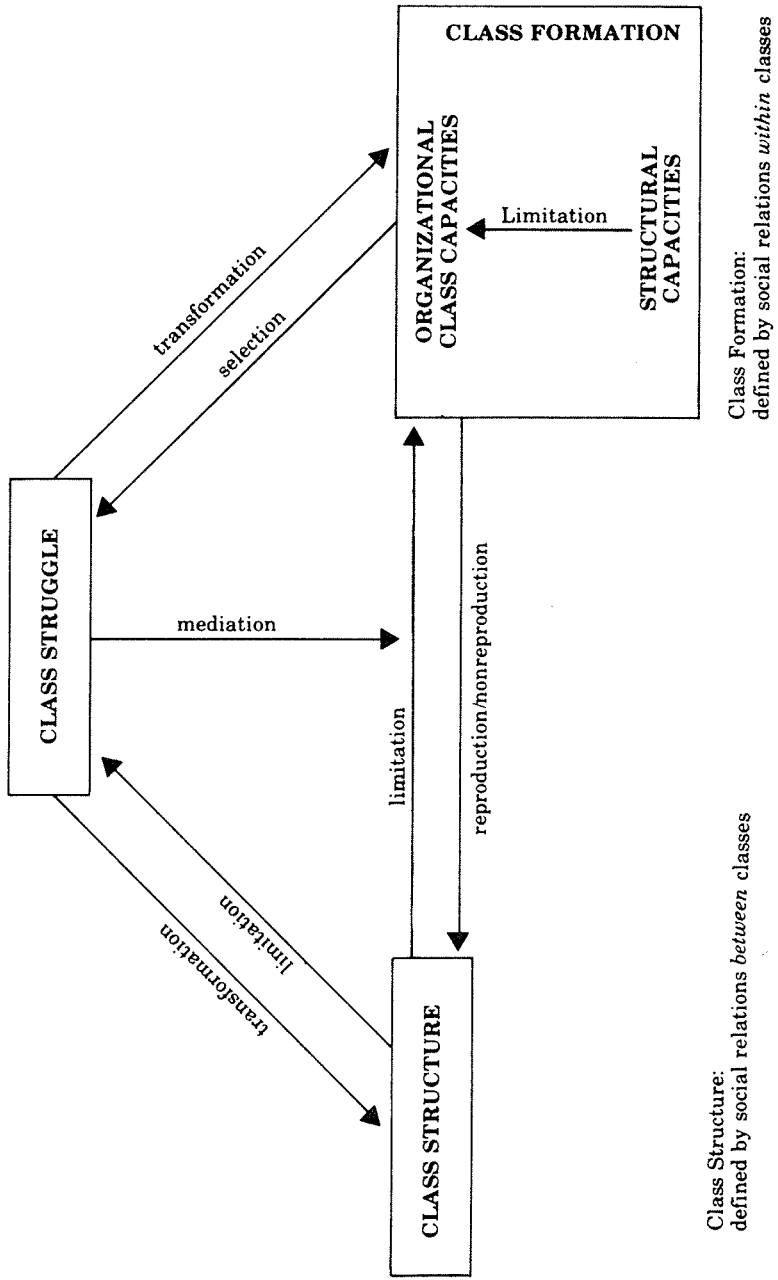

Figure 2.3 Model of Determination of Class Structure, Class Formation and Class Struggle

etc.); the threatened urban and rural petty bourgeoisie attempting to resist such proletarianization. Similarly, organizational capacities are objects of class struggle. The fights for union rights and the franchise were the earliest forms of such struggles by the working class; the struggles for workers' councils and neighbourhood councils in advanced capitalism are contemporary forms. In each of these cases the organizational capacity for the working class to engage in struggle is itself transformed by class struggle.

4. *The interrelationship of class structure and class formation.* Just as class structure sets objective limits of variation on forms of class struggle, so it sets limits of variation on the forms of class capacities. What is particularly important in this relationship, however, is the role of class capacities in reproducing/nonreproducing the class structure itself. Not all forms of class capacity which are structurally possible in capitalism are reproductive of capitalist class relations. To the extent that working class organizational capacities are organized around fundamental interests, those capacities are likely to become non-reproductive of the class structure itself. If the working class is to be organized at all, it is thus critical to the capitalist class that it be organized around immediate interests. Many of the characteristics of the capitalist state can be seen as accomplishing precisely this (see footnote 91).

5. *Class struggle as mediating the relationship between class structure and class formation.* The ways in which class struggle mediates the relationship between class structure and class capacities are of the utmost importance. A given class structure does not generate a unique configuration of class capacities. Class struggle enters into the determination of class capacities in two ways. One has already been mentioned: class struggle directly transforms existing class capacities. But class struggle also mediates the very way in which class structure affects class capacities.

What precisely does this mean? Class structure is defined by the social relations between classes, class capacities by the social relations within classes. When we say that class structure establishes limits on class capacities, what we mean is that it

establishes limits on the ways in which social relations are formed among positions within the class structure. One way of looking at this process is to imagine that every position in the class structure has a certain probability of being organized into a given class formation. The concept of "limits", in these terms, refers to the patterns of these probabilities as they are determined directly by the class structure. Of particular importance is the fact that many positions in the class structure have essentially a zero-probability of being mapped into certain class formations: bourgeois positions, for example, cannot be organized into working class trade unions or revolutionary socialist parties.[92] In these terms, contradictory locations within class relations can be viewed as those positions which have the least determinate probabilities of being organized into given class formations. They are characterized by multiple potential mappings into class formations, which reflect the objective contradictory character of the class interests of such positions.

To say that class struggle mediates this process of mapping class positions into class formations means that class struggle can alter the very probabilities of given positions being mapped into given class formations. In the case of the working class and the bourgeoisie, this process of mediation determines, above all, the extent to which they will be organized as classes in the first place. As Przeworski stresses, all classes are in a constant process of organization, disorganization and reorganization. It is conditions of class struggle which determine the extent to which a given structure of class relations will produce a high level of class organization or disorganization.[93]

92. This does not mean, of course, that individuals who occupy bourgeois class locations cannot support trade unions or, for that matter, join revolutionary socialist parties. Engels is a classic example of a bourgeois who, as an individual, played an important role in working class organizations. But the position itself cannot be mapped into trade unions or working class parties. When Engels died, there was no reason whatsoever for the next incumbent of his bourgeois class location to be tied to the working class. When an industrial worker dies, there are systematic social forces which link the next incumbent of the same position to working class organizations. It is important throughout this discussion to remember that the analysis refers to the forging of social relations between positions, not simply between individuals. Both processes are important, but the logic of positions has an analytical priority over the analysis of individual relations within those positions.

93. It is important to be clear about the distinction between mediation and transformation. Both involve processes by which class struggle shapes class capacities, but the logics of the two are quite different. In transformation, class capacities are a direct object of class struggle, and existing class organizations are transformed in the course of those struggles. Mediation, on the other hand, concerns the ways in which class struggle affects the relationship between class structure and class capacities. In a sense, in the process of mediation, class struggle operates as a contextual process which shapes the conditions of class formation, whereas in processes of transformation, class struggle directly impinges on class formation.

A good example of this process of mediation is the process of class mobilization in Portugal in 1974–1976. In the post-Caetano period, class struggle entered into the process of class formation in all of the ways indicated in Figure 2.3. Through the appropriation of land in the south, the nationalization of certain important industries and the occupations of many factories, the class structure of Portugal was directly transformed, although in limited ways, by the class struggles beginning in 1974. Class struggle also directly transformed class formation, especially through the dismantling of the old state apparatus, the legalization of parties of the left, etc. But perhaps most significantly, class struggle mediated the relationship between class structure and class formation. The new forms of class struggle established a political climate which radicalized certain segments of the petty bourgeoisie and of the working class. The shift in the balance of class forces and the relative disorganization of the bourgeoisie meant that more people were drawn into working class organizations. In the terms of our discussion, the changed conditions of class struggle meant that the same basic class structure generated different objective limits on class formation: different positions within the class structure could be mobilized into class organizations, the class capacity of the working class could be strengthened beyond what had been possible under earlier conditions, and the interests around which those class organizations were mobilized could move away from purely immediate interests towards fundamental interests. This changed situation of class formation in turn changed the selective forces operating on class struggle.

The processes of mediation by class struggle are especially important for the class formation of contradictory locations: class struggle plays a decisive role in determining how such positions are empirically organized or disorganized into classes.

Depending upon the conditions of class struggle, for example, semi-autonomous employees may be formed into petty bourgeois class organizations (professional associations) or into working class organizations (trade unions) or, for that matter, they may remain completely unformed into classes altogether. Because contradictory locations have contradictory class interests, they are objectively torn between class forces within the class struggle and can potentially be organized into more than one class capacity. Class struggle itself therefore determines to a large extent the degree to which the complexities of the class structure are reproduced at the level of class formation.

The central message from the model of determination in Figure 2.3 is that it is essential to analyse the complex dialectical relationships between class structure, class formation and class struggle in any analysis of classes. While decoding the class structure may be the appropriate starting point of the analysis, it is impossible to deduce any political lessons simply from the analysis of class positions. An adequate political understanding of the possibilities and constraints present in a given social formation depends upon showing the ways in which class structure establishes limits on class struggle and class formation, the ways in which class struggle transforms both class structure and class formation, and the ways in which class struggle mediates the relationship between class structure and class formation.

Conclusion

Where does all of this leave us in terms of a general analysis of the class structure of advanced capitalist countries? We began this chapter by saying that it mattered both for theory and for politics how the boundary of the working class was defined. We can now indicate somewhat more fully why it matters.

Defining the working class matters because it helps to specify the extent to which the task of building a viable socialist movement hinges on drawing contradictory locations within class relations into working class organizations. The contradictory locations around the boundary of the working class represent positions which do have a real interest in socialism, yet simultaneously gain certain real privileges directly from capitalist

relations of production. Somewhere between a quarter and a third of the American labour force falls into these locations near the boundary of the working class. When such contradictory locations are formed into the working class, the contradictory quality of their underlying class interests does not disappear. This implies that to the extent that contradictory locations are mapped into working class organizational capacities, those organizations will have to contend with potential conflicts of interests, and not simply conflicts of immediate interests but of fundamental interests as well. Thus, for example, if workers and semi-autonomous employees are organized into some form of factory councils, the conflict of interest is immediately posed between the *individual* autonomy (petty bourgeois autonomy) of the semi-autonomous employees and the collective control of the labour process by the working class. Similarly, if managers are also organized into such working class capacities, then the problem of elitism and authoritarian control is posed. Such conflicts are rooted in the relations of production themselves and thus are of a more fundamental character than conflicts over questions of wages and the like. Since any socialist movement in advanced capitalist societies will inevitably have to attempt to bring such categories into socialist struggles in order to be successful, it is essential that the nature of the conflicting class interests within such a socialist movement not be obscured. Developing a rigorous concept of the working class is necessary if the contours of fundamental class interests engaged in struggles for socialism are to be understood.

Defining the working class also matters because it makes it possible to distinguish immediate from fundamental interests, and to link those interests to the formation of class capacities. One of the central issues at stake in class struggles within capitalist society is the extent to which manifest social conflicts revolve around immediate interests or fundamental interests. Part of the impressive durability of capitalist systems can be attributed to the capacity of capitalism to displace conflicts from the fundamental to the immediate level, and one of the central tasks of any serious socialist movement is to reorient those conflicts back towards fundamental interests.

The difficulty of such a task is that immediate interests are real; they are not merely mystifications, false consciousness. A

viable socialist movement cannot deny the importance of immediate interests, but must adopt strategies which attempt to join immediate and fundamental interests in such a way that the organizational capacities of the working class are strengthened rather than weakened in the process. Revolutions occur not when the masses of the people are willing to abandon all immediate interests for the prospect of realizing fundamental interests, but when the struggle for immediate interests begins to coincide with the struggle for fundamental interests.

3

Historical Transformations of Capitalist Crisis Tendencies

Introduction

The last chapter ended with a discussion of the complex ways in which class struggle mediates the relationship between class structure and class formation. That discussion was incomplete in one crucial respect. While the model of determination does show the dialectical logic of the analysis of class relations, that model remains indeterminate in a basic sense. There are no "laws of motion," no tendencies of development or dynamics of systematic structural change. Class struggle is said to transform class structure, but such a transformation is completely directionless. The whole schema thus so far remains suspended abstractly in thin air: a logic of historical materialism without history.

The next problem is thus to discover why it is that the structural transformations mediated by class struggle are not random—why they assume a given direction of development. The solution to this problem lies in deciphering the logic of the capitalist accumulation process, specifically by revealing the nature of the contradictions within that process and the crises which those contradictions generate. This is not to say that the dynamics of accumulation mechanistically determine a unique path of development, but rather that the accumulation process generates contradictions, the temporary solutions to which push the development of the capitalist system in specific directions. More concretely, the argument which will be developed in this chapter can be summarized as follows: