

THE CLASS STRUCTURE OF THE ADVANCED SOCIETIES

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SOME LATER THEORIES

1. DAHRENDORF: CLASSES IN POST-CAPITALIST SOCIETY

Dahrendorf's theory of class and class conflict, as described particularly in his *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*, treats themes previously developed by Geiger and others, but elaborates upon them in a different way. While he couches his ideas in terms of a 'positive critique' of Marx, he eventually reaches a theoretical position which departs very substantially from the one established by that thinker.¹ Like Geiger (and, of course, Weber before him), Dahrendorf offers two related sets of criticisms of Marx, concerning supposed conceptual weaknesses in Marx's notions of 'classes' and 'class conflict' on the one hand, and in his (abstract) model of capitalist development on the other.

According to Dahrendorf, Marx's works are based upon an illegitimate fusion of 'sociological' and 'philosophical' elements. We must draw a strict separation between those of Marx's propositions which are, in Dahrendorf's terms, 'empirical and falsifiable' and those which belong to a 'philosophy of history'. Propositions such as 'class conflict generates social change' are of the first type, while statements such as 'capitalist society is the final class society in history', or 'socialism leads to a complete realisation of human freedom' are not capable of either verification or falsification by reference to documented fact.² The task of the sociologist is to sift out those of Marx's ideas which can be embodied within an empirically verifiable theory of classes.

In Dahrendorf's view, the conjunction of 'sociological' and 'philosophical' elements in Marx's writings serves to mask a fundamental weakness in the connection which he makes between classes and private property. 'Property' can be conceived of in two ways:

in a broad sense, as *control* of the means of production, regardless of the specific manner in which that control is exercised; or, more narrowly, as the legally recognised right of ownership. 'Property' is not *what* is owned, but refers to the rights relating to the object. In the broad sense of property, these rights are defined in a generalised manner, and hence it can be said that property is a 'special case of authority'. In this sense, the manager of an industrial enterprise in a society in which private ownership of capital has been abolished, in so far as he has directive *control* of the enterprise, may be said to exercise 'property rights'. In the narrower meaning, by contrast, authority is a 'special case of property': i.e., the authority structure of the enterprise is dependent upon 'who owns the means of production' in the legal sense. According to Dahrendorf, Marx's analysis of classes and private property turns upon the latter, 'narrow' definition of 'property'. The existence of classes and, correspondingly, the disappearance of classes in socialist society, in Marx's formulations, are tied to social conditions in which legal title to property ownership is in the hands of a minority of individuals. In a society in which legal ownership of property by private individuals is abolished, there can—by definition—be no classes.

It is only because Marx employs the narrow conception of property that he is able to integrate, in an apparently plausible way, the 'sociological' with the 'philosophical' aspects of his theory:

By asserting the dependence of classes on relations of domination and subjection, and the dependence of these relations on the possession of or exclusion from effective private capital, he makes on the one hand empirically private property, on the other hand philosophically social classes, the central factor of his analysis. One can retrace step by step the thought process to which Marx has succumbed at this point. It is not the thought process of the empirical scientist who seeks only piecemeal knowledge and expects only piecemeal progress, but that of the system builder who suddenly finds that everything fits! For if private property disappears (empirical hypothesis), then there are no longer classes (trick of definition)! If there are no longer any classes, there is no alienation (speculative postulate). The realm of liberty is realised on earth (philosophical idea).⁸

The confusions inherent in this reasoning disqualify Marx's conception of classes, in unmodified form, as a viable scheme for analysing the class structure of modern societies. This is demonstrated further by the inadequacy of Marx's analysis in the face of the changes which have affected capitalism since the close of the nine-

teenth century. 'Capitalism', as Marx knew it, has become transformed: not through a process of revolution, however, and not in the direction which he anticipated. Here Dahrendorf introduces the conception of 'industrial society', of which capitalism is only one sub-type. Capitalism is that form of industrial society which is distinguished by the coincidence of the legal ownership of private property, in the hands of the entrepreneur, and actual *control* of the means of production. In this type of society, the two senses of 'property' overlap with one another—which explains Marx's failure to distinguish between them on the theoretical level. The modern form of society no longer preserves this characteristic, and is thus quite different from capitalism as Marx knew it: while it is still an 'industrial society', it is also a 'post-capitalist' society.

Dahrendorf details the following changes as being the most significant in the transformation of capitalism: (1) The decomposition of capital. Although, in the third volume of *Capital*, Marx discussed the growth of joint-stock companies, and the 'functional irrelevance of the capitalist', he failed to discern their true significance. In Dahrendorf's view, this has to be understood as a process of role differentiation, whereby the blanket category of 'capitalist' has become separated into the two categories of 'shareholder' and 'manager'. This process does not represent an enclave of socialism within capitalism; rather, it constitutes a progressive separation between the two forms of 'property' which were temporarily united in capitalist society. The authority of the managerial executive does not rest upon legal property rights. Since the interests of managers are not wholly convergent with those of shareholders, it follows that the real outcome of the development of joint-stock companies is the fragmentation of the unitary 'capitalist class'. (2) The decomposition of labour. Marx held that the mechanisation entailed by the growing maturity of capitalist production leads to the elimination of skilled labour, and thus to the increasing internal homogeneity of the working class. In fact, this has not occurred. On the contrary, the trend has been towards the maintenance, and even the expansion, of skilled labour; and the 'semi-skilled' category has intruded between the skilled and the unskilled. Far from becoming increasingly homogeneous, the working class has become more diversified: the differences in skill-level serve as a basis for divisions of interest which cut across the unity of the class as a whole. Thus the internal differentiation at the lower levels of post-capitalist society complements that which occurs in the upper echelons with the decomposition of the capitalist class.

(3) The growth of the 'new middle class'. The expansion of administrative or non-manual occupations is again a phenomenon unanticipated by Marx. But while the decomposition of capital and wage-labour is a consequence of social changes which have disaggregated these previously coherent classes, 'the "new middle class" was born decomposed'.⁴ The so-called new middle class, according to Dahrendorf, is not in fact a distinct class at all, but consists of two parts: those workers who are part of an administrative chain of authority ('bureaucrats'), and those who occupy positions outside such hierarchies (such as shop assistants). The bureaucrat, whether high-placed or lowly, shares in the exercise of authority, and thus his position is directly linked to that of the dominant groups in society; those workers in the second type of situation, on the other hand, are closer to the position of manual workers. But these two sectors of the 'new middle class' therefore add to the diversification in the structure of post-capitalist society already implied by the twin processes of the decomposition of the capitalist and the working class.

(4) The increase in rates of social mobility, which Dahrendorf regards as one of the principal characteristics of industrial society. The effects of widespread inter- and intra-generational mobility are twofold. First, these act to diminish the boundaries between classes, and thus to corrode any rigid barriers which might otherwise grow up between them. Secondly, the existence of high rates of social mobility serves to 'translate' group conflict into individual competition.⁵ Group antagonisms—class conflicts—become dissolved into a competitive struggle between individuals for valued positions within the occupational system. (5) The achievement of 'citizenship rights', as embodied in universal suffrage and welfare legislation, for the mass of the population. These are not simply formal privileges, but have had real effects in undercutting the extremes of political and economic disparity found in nineteenth-century capitalism. The Marxian anticipation of a polarisation between the economic fortunes of capital and wage-labour is again quite at variance with the actual trend of development: 'by institutionalising certain citizenship rights, post-capitalist society has developed a type of social structure that excludes both "absolute" and many milder forms of privilege and deprivation'.⁶ (6) The 'institutionalisation of class conflict', in the form of recognised procedures of industrial arbitration. The recognition of the right to strike, together with the existence of mutually accepted methods of resolving differences, has had the effect of confining conflicts to the sphere of industry itself, preventing them from ramifying into class conflicts.

These changes can only be adequately understood by abandoning an orthodox Marxian standpoint. Nonetheless, Dahrendorf argues, certain elements of Marx's conception must also be retained. The most important of these concerns Marx's emphasis that every (class) society incorporates conflicts which create a pressure towards internal change: there is an inherent connection between conflict and change. Secondly, Marx rightly assumes that social conflict must be understood in terms of a two-party model: a theory of class conflict must be founded upon recognition that, in any situation of antagonism, the struggle devolves upon two primary classes. While there may be coalitions, there are always two main positions in a conflict situation. But having accepted these formal properties of Marx's model, Dahrendorf explicitly repudiates most of the substantive content of the Marxian view. Marx's conception of class, as both a 'sociological' and 'philosophical' notion, is tied to his fusion of the two senses of 'property'. If the 'sociological' part of this conjunction has any validity, it is limited to nineteenth-century European capitalism. For the purpose of his theory of history, Marx universalises a particular—the connection between private property (narrow sense) and authoritative control (broad sense) which existed in the nineteenth century. A more adequate theory of class and class conflict, Dahrendorf suggests, must reverse this relation. That is to say, rather than class being defined in terms of ownership of private property (narrowly conceived), the tie between private property and authority, given such prominence by Marx, should be seen as a special case of a much broader relationship between class and authority. Marx's 'private property' should be seen as only a specific instance of authoritative rights of control more generally. 'Class', therefore, should be defined in terms of authority relationships: rather than ownership versus non-ownership of property, class should be taken to refer to *possession of, or exclusion from, authority*:

in every social organisation some positions are entrusted with a right to exercise control over other positions in order to ensure effective coercion . . . in other words . . . there is a differential distribution of power and authority . . . this differential distribution of authority invariably becomes the determining factor of systematic social conflicts of a type that is germane to class conflicts in the traditional (Marxian) sense of the term. The structural origin of such group conflicts must be sought in the arrangement of social roles endowed with expectations of domination and subjection.⁷

'Authority', following Weber, is defined as the legitimate right to issue commands to others: 'domination' represents the possession

of these rights, while 'subjection' is exclusion from them. Within 'imperatively coordinated associations'—i.e., groups which possess a definite authority structure (e.g., the state, an industrial enterprise)—possession of, and exclusion from, authority generates opposing interests. These interests may not be perceived by those involved: a 'quasi-group', in Dahrendorf's terminology, is any collectivity whose members share latent interests, but who do not organise to further them. Where a collectivity does organise itself for this purpose, it becomes an 'interest group'.

The utility of this *schema*, in Dahrendorf's view, is not limited in its application to post-capitalist societies: it can also be used to cover the characteristics of the class structure of capitalism as described, in different terms, by Marx. Thus the development of nineteenth-century capitalist enterprise may be said to have stimulated the emergence of two quasi-groups, capital and labour. The specific character of capitalist society, however, derived from the fact that industrial and political conflict were 'superimposed' upon one another. The conflict between capital and labour was not confined to industry, but extended to the political sphere, since political authority was largely coterminous with economic domination. As a result of this superimposition of interest divisions, class conflict became particularly intensive as organised interest groups began to form to represent the divergent claims of capital and wage-labour. But the very appearance of these interest groups, and the concrete changes which they have helped to bring into being, have undermined the possibility of the revolutionary upheaval foreseen by Marx.⁸

According to Dahrendorf's conceptual scheme, it follows that 'post-capitalist' society is necessarily a class society. But, no less obviously, its class system is very different from that of capitalism. The most far-reaching of the various changes in terms of which Dahrendorf seeks to distinguish 'capitalism' from 'post-capitalism' is the institutional separation of industrial and political conflict—a phenomenon which derives from the connected processes of the establishment of collective bargaining in industry and the attainment of universal franchise in the political sphere. This is manifest in the fact that the occurrence of industrial conflict, in the main, has no direct repercussions upon political action. According to Dahrendorf, 'the notion of a workers' party has lost its political meaning'.⁹ There is no integral connection between trade unions and 'labour' parties in the Western countries: those links which still exist are merely the residue of tradition. The same is true at the higher levels. The position of authority occupied by the manager in the enter-

prise yields no direct political influence: the latter is allocated independently of relationships pertaining in the industrial sphere.

2. ARON: INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

Rather than being directed solely to a critique of Marx, Aron's various writings on the development of 'industrial society' are focused upon a comparative assessment of Marx and Tocqueville.¹⁰ In common with Saint-Simon, of course, Tocqueville saw occurring in the newly emerging social order of post-feudal Europe, not the establishment of a new set of conflicting classes, but the development of tendencies towards democratisation and levelling. How far does the subsequent movement of society since the nineteenth century bear out the vision of Marx, in tending towards the polarisation of classes and the growing intensity of class conflict? Alternatively, how far has Tocqueville's anticipation of a growth in social differentiation, accompanied by the progressive impetus towards the eradication of inequalities, been realised?

These questions cannot be answered, Aron stresses, without taking account of the fact that there have been two 'paths' of social development in the modern world—one confined to the internal evolution of capitalism itself, and the other, although not originating within the advanced capitalist societies, claiming to represent the supersession of capitalism. The contrasts between these two forms of society, capitalist and socialist, cannot be understood, however, without recognising that they also share certain important elements in common as types of industrial society. The simplest abstract definition of 'industrial society' involves three principal characteristics: where the vast majority of the labour force is concentrated in the secondary and tertiary sectors; where there exists a constant impulsion, in contrast to the relatively static character of traditional societies, to expand productivity; and, consequently, where there is a rapid rate of technological innovation.¹¹ If this elementary definition of industrial society be adopted, Aron argues, it follows that certain formulae in Marx's analysis of capitalism apply also to the contemporary socialist or 'Soviet-type' societies:

Marx considered that one of the main characteristics of capitalism was the accumulation of capital. We know today, from factual evidence, that this is a characteristic of all industrial societies to the degree to which, obsessed by the anxiety to heighten production, they are obliged to invest a growing volume of capital in machinery. In the same way,

Marx considered that the worker was exploited because he did not receive, in the form of wages, the whole of the value produced by his labour. But, whatever the regime, this is obviously necessary, since a proportion of the value that is created must be reinvested. . . . In both societies (capitalist and socialist), certain individuals are privileged: that is to say, they have higher incomes than those of workers at the bottom of the hierarchy. The phenomenon of capital accumulation or 'exploitation' is common to both types of industrial society, and not characteristic of one type in contrast to the other.¹³

This 'exploitation' of the worker occurs within societies committed to ideals of democratic egalitarianism. All contemporary industrial societies proclaim the rule of the 'common man'; but at the same time as they do so, they generate inequalities which contradict their professed ideals. But this 'contradiction' is closer to that which might be envisaged following certain of the ideas of Tocqueville than those deriving from Marx.

Like Dahrendorf, Aron distinguishes two aspects of Marx's theory of classes: 'factual propositions' and 'philosophical propositions' which are intertwined in Marx's writings. Only the factual assertions—e.g., 'the material and moral suffering of the working class becomes worsened, and as a consequence of this worsening the workers become more revolutionary'¹³—can be examined in relation to empirically observable developments which have occurred in society since Marx's time, and are necessarily of a different order to statements which express a metaphysical philosophy of history. This distinction is directly relevant to Marx's concept of class, for there are, according to Aron, two definitions of 'class' in Marx. The first is that which treats 'class' as referring to the place of a grouping of individuals within the process of production, a conceptualisation which might be acceptable to a sociologist who is not of a Marxist persuasion. The second, however, ties the notion of class to (unrealisable) goals, such as that the 'domination of man by man' can be transcended with the supersession of capitalism by socialism—conceptions which are not acceptable unless one embraces Marx's theory *in toto*. It is the conjunction of these two elements in Marx's writing, Aron emphasises, which helps to explain the continuing fascination of social thinkers with the notion of class. But this is, in turn, bound up with the attraction exerted by Marxism itself—a phenomenon which Aron explains in 'Tocquevillean' terms. Modern societies, in so far as they are 'democratic', are exposed to the 'contradiction' between their declared faith that all men are equal and the manifest political and economic inequalities which exist within them. 'The industrial democracies proclaim the

equality of individuals, in work and in the realm of politics. Now the fact is that there is great inequality in incomes and in modes of life.¹⁴ The constant tension between the ideal and the reality, and the vision of a society in which this is dissolved—through the revolutionary action of a deprived class—explains the passionate commitment which Marxism can stimulate.

It follows that, for Aron, while Marx's ideas express certain of the aspirations generated by this inherent tension within industrial society, they do not provide a satisfactory analysis of its sources—even if we neglect Marx's 'philosophy of history', and confine ourselves to his 'factual propositions' about classes and class conflict. Marx's theory of class, Aron suggests, drew heavily upon observations which relate primarily to the proletariat, the 'class *par excellence*'. In nineteenth-century Europe, during the early phases of industrialisation, the proletariat, excluded from political power, working and living in uniformly degrading circumstances, appeared as the type-case of an oppressed class. But no other class conforms to this degree to the criteria of distinctiveness which Marx sought to apply. The 'bourgeoisie', for example, has never been such a clearly identifiable grouping, if it is defined as including everyone above the (not clearly demarcated) category of 'small property owner'. According to Aron, any theory of class must come to terms with the indefinite character of social reality *itself*: 'classes' are rarely such distinct and clearly identifiable groupings as was the nineteenth-century proletariat. The ambiguity of conceptual discussions of class since Marx reflects an actual condition in reality. This 'uncertainty in social reality', Aron argues, must 'be the point of departure of any enquiry into social classes'.¹⁵ Social thinkers in the Western societies have been obsessed with the problems of class, but have been incapable of reaching acceptable definitions of the phenomenon. The paradox is resolved in terms of the preceding analysis: industrial societies (of both types, capitalist and socialist) continually generate inequalities, whilst at the same time removing many of the forms of manifest discrimination that characterised previous types of society which were not influenced by democratic ideas. Legally prescribed relationships of inequality, for example, such as existed in the medieval estates, have been abolished; the hierarchical structures of industrial societies are more fluid and less clearly delineated. Moreover, these structures are of a complicated kind, involving a multiplicity of phenomena.

Under what conditions, therefore, Aron asks, can we speak of the existence of distinguishable classes? There are three sets of

circumstances in which we may *not* do so: (1) Where the main principle of hierarchical differentiation is not economic, but religious or racial. (2) Where the fate or the 'life-chances' of the individual do not depend primarily upon the group to which he belongs within society, but exclusively upon himself: in other words, where something close to full equality of opportunity prevails. (3) Where the socio-economic conditions of everyone are fundamentally similar. None of these three sets of circumstances obtains within the industrial societies, and consequently 'it is not illegitimate to speak of social classes, socio-economic categories (*ensembles*) defined by a plurality of criteria and constituting more or less real groups, within the total society'.¹⁶ The equivocation 'more or less real' is deliberate. If classes were, as Marx implied, clearly defined groupings, normally producing a consciousness of class unity, there would be no problem. But of the four major classes which are often recognised by sociologists as existing within capitalist societies, there is none which takes a clear-cut form. The 'bourgeoisie' is 'not a coherent unity'; the 'middle class' (or, as is frequently said, 'middle classes') constitutes 'a kind of hold-all' in which individuals are placed if they cannot be put into any of the other classes; the 'peasantry' is sometimes described as a single class, and on other occasions is treated as composed of two classes in relation to the ownership of property (farm owners and agricultural workers). Even the working class, which approximates most closely to the notion of a distinguishable and unified class group, is far from being a homogeneous entity, as measured either by socio-economic criteria or by political affiliation.

Marx was correct, Aron agrees, in believing that classes only become important agencies in history to the degree that they manifest a unified group consciousness, expressed particularly in the context of a struggle with other classes. While the working class may be characterised by shared objective and subjective traits, it does not manifest, in modern capitalist societies, the form of class consciousness necessary to provide the impulsion towards effecting a fundamental change in society. The role of 'class messianism', as set out in Marxism, has been a paradoxical one. It has undoubtedly played a major part in recent history, and thus in one sense has been endorsed by social developments since Marx's time; but it has been invalidated at the same time, because those who have adopted it, according to the theory, should not have done so. The influence of Marxism, as an organising political catechism, has been in inverse relation to capitalist development. On the whole, the working class has been less revolutionary the more advanced the

capitalist forces of production. Marxism has become an influence promoting the industrialisation process in the less developed countries, rather than expressing the demands of mature capitalist society. The 'socialist' countries are those which have followed a different route to industrial society than that taken by the countries of Western Europe.

The development of industrial society, Aron argues, should be understood in terms of a distinction between 'stages of economic growth' and 'modes of industrialisation'. At each stage of economic growth we find the emergence of different forms of 'contradiction' which can be resolved according to divergent modes of social and political control. In the initial phase of industrialisation, for example, it is necessary to promote rapid capital accumulation and investment, which can only be accomplished by some form of authoritative regime that restricts consumption on the part of the mass of the population. The 'contradiction' here is that the advance of (future) prosperity depends upon the self-abnegation of the present generation. The form which this took in the early development of capitalism in Western Europe, however, differs considerably from that which, legitimised within the framework of Marxist socialism, it assumed in the Soviet Union.

In a developed industrial society, whether 'capitalist' or 'socialist', the need for the authoritative or forced imposition of self-denial upon the population diminishes. But the 'Tocquevillean dilemma' assumes a burgeoning importance: the new 'contradiction' is between the democratic demand for 'levelling' and the continuing existence of inequalities.

3. OSSOWSKI: IMAGES AND CONCEPTS OF CLASS

Ossowski's *Class Structure in the Social Consciousness* attempts a general examination of the criteria which have been used, both in popular thought and in more systematic sociological analysis, to identify forms of 'class' (and forms of 'classlessness').¹⁷ The language of 'class', Ossowski points out, is permeated with spatial metaphor, representing society in terms of a 'vertical' order of divisions or 'layers' piled upon one another. But this vertical representation has assumed a variety of types, and it is the objective of Ossowski's work to analyse these.

The simplest type is the 'dichotomic' conception of class structure. The conception of a polar division between two main classes in society, Ossowski shows, is one which constantly appears in history. There are three principal modes in which this representation occurs,

corresponding to the sorts of privilege according to which advantages are distributed: (1) The 'rulers and the ruled': a division of power or authority, centred upon a separation between those who command and those who obey (Dahrendorf's conception of 'class', of course, falls into this category). (2) The 'rich and the poor': an economic differentiation, dividing those who own wealth or property from those who do not. (3) Those 'for whom others labour' and those who are the 'labouring class': a separation emphasising the *exploitation* of one group by another. These three modes of representing a dichotomous class division are not, of course, mutually exclusive, although where they are found together one of them tends to be treated as dominant and as determining the others. Most socialist thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, according to Ossowski, have regarded the third category ('exploitation') as being conditional upon one or other of the first two, and consequently have looked to the abolition of the former as the medium for the elimination of exploitative class relationships. But there have been important exceptions to this, among whom may be placed Saint-Simon. Since Saint-Simon's 'working class' includes all the 'real producers', industrialists as well as propertyless wage-labourers, his 'classless society' is quite compatible with major differentials in power and wealth.¹⁸

The existence of 'middle classes' is sometimes recognised in dichotomic schemes, but these are always seen as secondary groupings which are appendages of one or other of the two major class groups. What Ossowski calls 'schemes of gradation', the second main type of representation of class structure, differ from dichotomous conceptions in that a middle class (or classes) is often regarded as the most basic class, the position of other classes being determined in relation to it. In dichotomic forms of class imagery, moreover, each class is defined in terms of its dependence upon the other. In gradation schemes, on the other hand, the relationship between classes is one of ordering rather than dependence: this sort of conception is normally applied in a descriptive rather than an explanatory manner. Ossowski distinguishes two types of gradation scheme: the 'simple' and the 'synthetic'. In the former, a representation of class structure is made according to a single criterion, such as income. This was the case, for example, with the original Roman census categories: under the Republic, citizens were divided into six income classes. Synthetic schemes involve a similar rank ordering of classes, but apply a combination of criteria to effect the ranking. This is the typical conception of social class, Ossowski suggests, adopted by most contemporary American sociologists. Thus War-

ner's studies, for instance, set up a synthetic gradation scheme yielding six major classes in American society.¹⁹

The third principal form of class imagery Ossowski calls the 'functional scheme'. Here society is seen as being divided into functionally interrelated groupings in the division of labour. This conception usually recognises a plurality of classes; rather than being perceived as antagonistic groups, as tends to be the case in dichotomic representations, or as a set of ranked divisions as in gradation schemes, classes are considered to be interdependent and cooperative agencies. Certain contemporary sociological interpretations of class systems are of this kind: for example, those which identify a set of functionally interdependent classes such as 'managers', 'clerical workers', 'skilled workers', etc.—or, on a more ideological level, Stalin's conception of 'non-antagonistic classes' in the Soviet Union. Such classes are not measured in terms of uniform gradations on a scale: a given class differs from a second in respects which are distinct from those by which the second class differs from a third.

The significance of Marx's theory of classes is that it ties together strands drawn from each of the three modes of representation of class structure within a single, coherent theory: 'the writings of Marx form some sort of immense lens which concentrates the rays coming from different directions, and which is sensitive both to the heritage of past generations and to the creative resources of modern science.'²⁰ Marx's writings integrate the inherent revolutionary appeal of the dichotomic scheme with a systematic analysis of other properties of class relationships as these existed in the contemporary European societies of his time. The dichotomous conception, according to Ossowski, is most prominent in Marx's more propagandist writings, in which he sought to stimulate the development of a revolutionary consciousness. In his more scholarly writings, however, he was forced to blunt the clarity of the dichotomic perspective by introducing 'intermediate' classes, and managed to arrive at a descriptive assessment of class relationships in historical societies. Thus while, according to Ossowski, Marx's works embody each of the three main ways of representing class structure—the dichotomic, gradation and functional schemes—these are conceived in a new way, in terms of the intersection of two or more dichotomous class divisions.²¹

In Marx's writings, of course, the class societies of the present are counterposed to the classless order of the future. The concept of 'classlessness' in fact, Ossowski points out, has as long a history as that of 'class'. Just as images of class have differed, so have notions

of classlessness. In the modern world, however, there are two versions of classlessness which are particularly important as political ideologies. One of these simply involves a stress upon a functional scheme as against any competing modes of interpreting class relationships. Unlike the dichotomic and gradation schemes, which stress the asymmetry of class divisions, the functional conception involves the idea that classes are mutually supportive. Concentration upon functional connections, therefore (as in the notion of 'non-antagonistic classes'), can serve as a means of reducing the apparent significance of class divisions—not by lessening inequalities of wealth or power, but by emphasising the cooperative nature of classes. This conception differs radically from Marx's version of 'classlessness', since the latter presupposes a much more profound dissolution of class relationships. But it is a development of the functional interpretation of classlessness which has actually come to predominate in modern political ideology—and not only in the Western societies, committed to liberal democratic ideals, but also the socialist countries, nominally committed to Marx's classless society.

The American image of 'non-egalitarian classlessness', according to Ossowski, is formed primarily around the notion of equality of opportunity: everyone, regardless of origins, is presumed to have the same chance, if he possesses the appropriate capacities, of reaching the highest levels in the occupational system. The structure of Soviet society, as portrayed in Marxist orthodoxy, might appear to be quite different from this. In fact, there are very close similarities:

The socialist principle 'to each according to his needs' is in harmony with the tenets of the American creed, which holds that each man is the master of his fate, and that a man's status is fixed by an order of merit. The socialist principle allows of the conclusion that there are unlimited opportunities for social advancement and social demotion; this is similar to the American concept of 'vertical social mobility'. The arguments directed against *uravnilovka* [equalisation of wages] coincide with the arguments put forward on the other side of the Atlantic by those who justify the necessity for economic equalities in a democratic society.²²

The main difference between the two ideological standpoints, Ossowski suggests, is that, according to the socialist view, 'non-egalitarian classlessness' is only a temporary phase. Nevertheless, while the ultimate objective is different, the distinction here is not a radical one. For, according to socialist theory, the transition to 'egalitarian classlessness' is to be a progressive, not a revolutionary, process—and liberal democracy also envisages a continual advance

towards the further realisation of the principle of equality of opportunity.

The conception of 'non-egalitarian classlessness', in common with any sort of functional scheme, tends to appeal to those who wish to defend an existing social order. Dichotomic representations, on the other hand, often have a revolutionary connotation, since they tend to perceive class relationships as antagonistic in character. Gradation schemes, being primarily descriptive, are more neutral than either of the other two. The fact that these three types of imagery reappear throughout history, and are to be traced in both ideological thought as well as in the more systematic conceptions of modern sociology, Ossowski stresses, demonstrates the ubiquity of the social interests which generate them. This does not mean, however, that the formulations of sociology can be directly equated with popular images of class structure. Rather, the older conceptions form the background against which concern with class as a sociological concept came to dominate social thought from the turn of the nineteenth century onwards. Marx's theory, in particular, drew upon deeply engrained themes in the European cultural heritage, and connected the revolutionary appeal of the dichotomic conception to a concrete analysis of the class relationships in nineteenth-century capitalism.

But like Dahrendorf and others, Ossowski sees the relevance of Marx's conception of class as largely limited to a form of society (i.e., 'early capitalism') in which economic power was the main-spring of social and political organisation. This type of society, as Marx anticipated, proved to be a transitory one. The social changes which have occurred since the nineteenth century, however, while they have partly been shaped by Marx's ideas, have departed from the line of development he foresaw. Socialism, in one sense, has diverged from capitalism, because it has not sprung, as Marx believed it must do, from the latter; but, in another sense, the two forms of society, capitalism and socialism, have evolved in a similar direction. The Marxian conception, in its 'classical' formulation, can today be no more usefully applied to the analysis of the class structure of the Western societies, which have moved far away from a situation in which private property 'rules', than it can be to those societies in which private property has been formally abolished:

In situations where the political authorities can overtly and effectively change the class structure; where the privileges that are most essential for social status, including that of a higher share in the national income,

are conferred by a decision of the political authorities; where a large part or even the majority of the population is included in a stratification of the type to be found in a bureaucratic hierarchy—the nineteenth-century concept of class becomes more or less an anachronism, and class conflicts give way to other forms of social antagonism.²³