

own rhythm, based on the clock and the pace of the machinery. Moreover, industrial capitalism incorporated a new logic that equated time with money, making it essential to instill a time-based work-discipline in workers. While the task proved difficult, factory managers accomplished it with the aid of whistles, fine schedules, and even nonwork-related institutions and methods such as schools and moralistic sermons on sloth. In the end, workers incorporated the new system of time so well that it figured into their demands in labor disputes. As Thompson remarks, while the first generation of factory workers resisted time-discipline, the next struck for the ten-hour workday. The selection concludes with a consideration of the price paid for this transition, with Thompson arguing against a value-free assessment of industrialization and its impacts.

In the final selection, Michael B. Miller shifts our focus from England to France, and to a later period in industrial development when modern forms of marketing and economic organization gave rise to the department store, a new arena in which the complex connections between ways of life and dispositions unfolded. Paris's most successful of these new "bazaars" and "emporia" was the Bon Marché, and its owners, the Boucicauts, grew rich by pioneering innovative techniques for promoting consumption. At the same time, however, they helped to create a different type of industrial worker: the white-collar worker. These men and women posed real problems for their bourgeois employers, for they straddled the divide between the middle and working classes; they had attained a certain level of education and sophistication necessary for working in close proximity to the Bon Marché's bourgeois patrons, but their salaries and lack of independence placed a true bourgeois lifestyle far out of reach. Moreover, the pressures of working for commission and the overbearing discipline the Boucicauts demanded made these employees potential devotees of union and socialist "agitators." As Miller indicates, integrating these men and women into the middle class became a chief concern not just for the Boucicauts, but also for all white-collar employers, from banks and insurance companies to railroads and post offices. For the Bon Marché, paternalism forged that bond between employee and "the House." Paternalist policies included provident and pension funds based solely on employer contributions, subsidized meals, social organizations, and free evening classes. By developing programs to tie the workers' private and work

lives to the store, and by carefully differentiating between "employees" and "workers," the Boucicaut sought to solidify a middle-class identity among their white-collar workers. Their success allowed them to dominate Parisian retail into the twentieth century, but for many enterprises the problems posed by working-class formation evaded easy solution.

Ira Katznelson

Working-Class Formation

... The concept "class" provides the obvious starting point. As a term, "class" has been used too often in a congested way, encompassing meanings and questions that badly need to be distinguished from each other. I suggest that class in capitalist societies be thought of as a concept with four connected layers of theory and history: those of structure, ways of life, dispositions, and collective action.

"It is not against a body of uninterpreted data, radically thinned descriptions that we must measure the cogency of our explications," Clifford Geertz has written, "but against the power of the scientific imagination to bring us into touch with the lives of strangers. It is not worth it, as Thoreau said, to go round the world to count the cats in Zanzibar." The extensive literature on working-class formation has succeeded in achieving much more than counting cats in Zanzibar, but it has not always known how to identify a particular kind of cat or to make crisp distinctions between types. As a contribution to social theory, the effort to distinguish between levels of class is an attempt to provide tools to construct cases of class formation systematically in order to promote comparative historical analysis.

As a concept, class has soaked up so much meaning that it has become bulky to use. Because it is often employed without a clearly specified definition, debates about class often become conversations in which

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people talk past each other because they are talking about different dimensions of class. Without clear analytical distinctions between levels or layers of class, it is hard to improve on the "class in itself—for itself" model. With the specification of different levels it becomes possible to construct the various cases of class formation in their own terms and to explore the competing capacities of various macrohypotheses about linkages between the levels. Above all, the distinctions that follow are meant to be aids to concrete description and explanation.

The *first* level is the structure of capitalist economic development, whose main elements include an economy based on privately owned autonomous firms that seek to make profit-maximizing decisions. These enterprises employ labor for a wage and sell what they produce in the market. This process of economic development contains some elements shared by all capitalist societies and others that are distinctive to each. As Karl Polanyi pointed out, this "great transformation" entailed the commodification of money, land, and labor. Capitalism is unthinkable without proletarianization; and, as Marx observed as the centerpiece of his political economy, capitalism is impossible without a quite specific mechanism of exploitation.

Because these key properties are shared by all capitalisms, it is appropriate at this first level of class analysis to propose such distinctions as collective capital and collective labor, and productive and unproductive labor. And it is at this level that the heuristic model building Marx did in his mature works of political economy must test its mettle against other competing accounts.

Structural analyses of capitalism at this level use class analytically as a construct that is "experience-distant" (that is, as a concept employed by specialists to further scientific, philosophical, or practical aims). Used in this way as a tool to analyze the "motion" of capitalist development, class has no direct or unmediated phenomenological referents.

But economic development, of course, occurs not just in theory or in capitalism in general, but in real places at actual times. If capitalism is structured everywhere in coherent ways, it is also structured in different particular manners. Each specific national history of capitalist development is shaped by the shared impulses and boundaries of all capitalisms; but each national economy is shaped not only by these tendencies. Family patterns, demography, cultural traditions, inherited practices, state organization and policies, geopolitics, and other factors help determine the

specific empirical contours of macroscopic economic development at this first level of class.

Even as we pay attention to these variations, however . . . , at this level of economic structure class remains an experience-distant analytical concept, needed to describe and explain what happened because class is a constitutive element of any capitalist structure. Distinctive national histories of capitalist economic development perforce are structural histories of class formation in the sense of Charles Tilly's "thin" definition in his treatment of the demographic origins of the European proletariat: "people who work for wages, using means of production over whose disposition they have little or no control." Proletarianization at this level provides a necessary, indeed the necessary condition for class formation in the more thickly textured senses of ways of life, dispositions, or patterns of collective action. But even when we take variations in macrolevel economic development into account it is not a sufficient condition. It is impossible to infer ways of life, dispositions, or collective action directly from analyses of class at the first level.

Nevertheless, broad patterns of economic development are of central importance in shaping patterns of life and social relations in specific capitalist societies. This *second* level, determined in part by the structure of capitalist development, refers to the social organization of society lived by actual people in real social formations. For this reason, theories that deal with this level of class must be "experience-near."

Because this second level includes such economic phenomena as workplace social relations and labor markets, it is tempting to collapse the first two levels of class into the single category of the "economy." Such a conflation, however, eliminates in one stroke a series of important questions about the connections between key aspects of capitalist accumulation and national economic histories on one side and the organization of labor markets and workplaces on the other. As any student of capitalist industrialization knows, the growth and expansion of capitalism has proved capable of fostering many different kinds of workplaces and work. . . .

Although the second level of class includes work settings and labor markets (here classes can be stacked up and counted according to criteria that distinguish between various active members of the labor force), it is not coextensive with these social relationships. The level of ways of life refers to how actual capitalist societies develop at work *and* away from it.

One of the hallmarks of industrial capitalist societies is that they tend to foster ways of life that differentiate between the location and social organization of these two realms. Over time, this distinction is expressed in the social geography of industrial cities. Work leaves the home. Cross-class households break up. Whole regions of cities come to be defined as areas of residence or of production. Further, residential communities segregate by the class position of their residents (in both the Marxist sense of location in a system of production and the Weberian sense of capacity to consume goods and services in the marketplace). With these separations between work and home and between the social classes in space, class relations are lived and experienced not only at work but also off work in residence communities.

The first two levels of class are closely related, of course, in that it is something of a conceit to separate too starkly the structure of capitalist accumulation and the self-sustaining development of the economy at the first level from how such broad patterns of economic development exist for working people where they labor and where they live at the second level. Moreover, if we understand that neither level of social relations is purely economic, then it makes sense to see the second level as an attribute of the first. But however closely connected, they are separate nonetheless, and many debates, such as the one between Erik Olin Wright and Nicos Poulantzas about mappings of class, suffer from the failure to make this distinction.

At the first two levels of class it is appropriate to construct classifications of class relations, and the literature of social science is full of them. At both levels class is defined, from an orthodox Marxist position, as G. A. Cohen writes, solely "with reference to the position of its members in the economic structure, their effective rights and duties within it. A person's class is established by nothing but his objective place in the network of ownership relations, however difficult it may be to identify such places neatly." Even if the criteria used in such definitions are expanded to other bases of class relations and to patterns of class embedded in residence communities, Cohen is right to stress that at these levels of analysis a person's "consciousness, culture, and politics do not enter the *definition* of his class position. . . . Not even his behavior is an essential part of it." Yet by themselves no such schemata, however compelling, can tell us how class exists distinct from other bases of solidarity and action in specific societies at specific times. This level of analysis may tell us how workers exist and live in

certain circumstances, but not how they will think or act in those experienced circumstances.

At a *third* level social classes are not heuristic or analytical constructs nor do they consist of members of this or that cell of a typology. At this level, classes are formed groups, sharing dispositions. Such cognitive constructs map the terrain of lived experience and define the boundaries between the probable and improbable. Note that I am deliberately avoiding the term "class consciousness" in order to make clear my rejection of any notion of degrees of consciousness, with the highest corresponding to the "real" interests of the working class. Further, the scheme of four levels of class does not imply a series of necessary stages or a natural progression (after all, ways of life are not independent of thought or action). It is, rather, a classification that aims to promote the development of theory free from developmental assumptions.

I take it that the third level of class is what Thompson means when he writes:

Class is a social and cultural formation (often finding institutional expression) which cannot be defined abstractly, or in isolation, but only in terms of relationship with other classes; and, ultimately, the definition can only be made in the medium of time—that is, action and reaction, change and conflict. When we speak of a class we are thinking of a very loosely-defined body of people who share the same congeries of interests, social experiences, traditions, and value-system, who have a disposition to behave as a class, to define themselves in their actions and in their consciousness in relation to other groups of people in class ways.

This suggestive formulation condenses a number of significant issues. To say that people share dispositions can mean that they have come to share understandings of the social system or that they have come to share values of justice and goodness. These two kinds of disposition are at least partially independent. Further, whether they are class dispositions is a contingent matter. Members of a class may share dispositions of either kind, but they need not necessarily be class based analytically or normatively. Further, either knowledge- or norm-based dispositions may view the current situation as the outcome of circumstances that cannot be altered or as posing the possibility of something better.

Much of the variation between the French, American, and German cases consists of variations in the ways working people, confronting changes in the conditions of life at the second level of class, mapped and interpreted these changes at the level of dispositions. Most new

social history joins the story of class formation here, studying situations from the point of view of a specific working class in a specific place at a specific time. It is at this level that a Geertzian cultural analysis of the ways people construct meaning to make their way through the experienced world is most compelling, especially because shared dispositions are interactive. They are formed by the manner in which people interact with each other. Thus dispositions are transindividual, not merely opinions or views of individual actors. They constitute cultural configurations within which people act. In Bernard Cohn's terms, "[T]here can be no practical realities without the symbolic coding of them as *practical*. . . . People cannot act as maximizers—either out of self interest or out of deep psychological conditionings— . . . without the preexistence of meaning in cultural terms."

The third level of class, that of dispositions, is not coextensive with class structures and class-based ways of life; nor, however, do dispositions simply mirror reality. Rather, they are plausible and meaningful responses to the circumstances workers find themselves in.

A number of important recent discussions in philosophy concern the issue of "correspondence." Analytical philosophers, much like some orthodox Marxists, have taken very seriously the idea that for something to be "right" it must correspond to something "real." Some efforts have recently been made, especially by Hilary Putnam and Nelson Goodman, to transcend this assumption of correspondence. Putnam proposes that the key issue is "how can language or thought connect up to what is outside the mind"; and Goodman insists that "philosophy must take into account all the ways and means of worldmaking." But though such worlds are made, they are not constructed from scratch. Meaning is the result of the interaction between the world and human efforts to signify it. If the construction of meaning is not entirely an open or contingent matter, what are the causes of the construction of different kinds of meaning systems about class? I will return to this question shortly.

Thompson follows his discussion of class dispositions by adding, "[B]ut class itself is not a thing, it is a happening." Here he moves much too quickly from this third level of class to a *fourth*, collective action. Groups of people sharing motivational constructs ("disposition to behave") may or may not act collectively to transform disposition to behavior. Even where workers have close contact at work and in their residential communities; even if this interaction promotes strong collective identities; and even if these workers share common systems of meaning that incline them

to act in class ways, they may not necessarily act together to produce collective action. For this reason it is useful to distinguish between class at the third level and at the fourth, which refers to classes that are organized and that act through movements and organizations to affect society and the position of the class within it. This kind of behavior is self-conscious and refers to activity that is more than just the common but unself-conscious shared behavior of members of a class. After all, members of categorical classes must immanently share certain behaviors, but they do not necessarily act consciously and collectively in pursuit of common goals.

The "class in itself—for itself" formulation makes thinking about the links between the social organization of class, class dispositions, and collective action superfluous. But in fact class conflict of any particular kind is not necessarily entailed in the class organization of patterns of social life, nor even in the development of groups of people inclined to act in class ways. The one broad exception to this general rule of contingency is the development of trade unions to fight for better wages and working conditions at the place of work. Although here too there are wide variations between the experiences of different working classes, there are no examples of national histories of class formation utterly lacking in the effort to create trade unions.

There are always impediments to collective action, to those occasions when "sets of people commit pooled resources, including their own efforts, to common ends." A key feature of the historical study of class must consist "of discovering which sets of people, which resources, which common ends, and which forms of commitment were involved in different places and times. Did the configurations change systematically with the advances of capitalism and large organizations?" Both the content and the form of collective action are highly variable, and this variation demands explanation.

Class, Thompson suggestively points out, is a "junction term," which lies at the intersection of structure and process, social being and social consciousness. Structural change gives rise to changed experience: that is, both to a set of subjective perceptions of objectively ordered realities and to a more active process of learning, possibly leading to action to modify the objective realities. I have already noted that Thompson, in my view, makes the movement from class structure to class action too certain a passage, but this teleological element can be extruded from his formulation.

The distinctions drawn here between the four levels of class may be read as an elaboration of Thompson's insight that class is a junction term.

They allow us to specify more precisely the points of connection *between* the structure of class relations at the macroeconomic level; the lived experience of class in the workplace and in the residence community; groups of people disposed to act in class ways; and class-based collective action. These points of contact specify the possibility of alternative kinds of relationships between the levels, a problem best approached by asking what we mean by class formation after moving beyond "class in itself-for itself" formulations.

It is possible, of course, to continue to define class formation in terms of specific outcomes, rather than to leave open the content of class formation. We might say that class formation has occurred only when class exists at all four levels of structure, patterns of life, dispositions, and action simultaneously. This would have a number of advantages. It would turn our attention to the links between class levels, and it would treat class formation as only one of a number of possible outcomes. It would dispose of the Hobson's choice between structuralist formulations that claim, at least implicitly, that experience is ideology, and culturalist stances fashionable in much current linguistic and semiotic theory in which class society is said to exist only when it is signified.

But despite these advantages, such a definition would be unsatisfactory. An outcome approach hinging on the appearance of class at each of the four levels without specifying the components of class and the range of both class and nonclass possibilities at each of the levels too starkly posits a dichotomous outcome (and in this way resembles the tradition of "revolutionary consciousness"): class either exists or does not as the basis of social solidarity and action. This distinction does not appear to be terribly helpful in explicating the puzzles posed by our three cases. Further, such an approach fails to answer the question, class formation with respect to what content?

Class formation may be thought of more fully and more variably as concerned with the conditional (but not random) process of connection between the four levels of class. The specification of four levels of class allows us to keep the advantages of defining class formation in terms of outcomes while providing a more elaborated and variable object of comparative historical analysis. The content of each of the four levels of necessity will vary from society to society; no level need be understood or analyzed exclusively in class terms; and the connections between the levels are problematical and conditional.

Questions about the content of each level and about the connections between the levels of class constitute the very heart of the analysis of class formation. A precise (but not too narrow) charting of class formation, based on a contingent but not undetermined approach to the relationship between these levels, and the attempt to develop macrocausal hypotheses about variations in class formation are the interrelated tasks that follow from this approach. . . .

Stephen Nicholas and Richard H. Steckel

Heights and Living Standards of English Workers During the Early Years of Industrialization, 1770-1815

The last decade has seen a substantial research effort directed toward measuring the trend in real wages and living standards during the British Industrial Revolution. Although most historians agree that workers received real-wage improvements from the 1820s on, controversy still surrounds the changes in English workers' living standards before that decade. Advising the standard-of-living pessimists to retreat to the pre-1820 era, Peter Lindert and Jeffrey Williamson argued that their data on male earnings pointed to real-wage stability between 1755 and 1797, then falling real wages until 1819, broken only by a brief rise between 1810 and 1815. Taking issue with Lindert and Williamson's cost-of-living index, N. F. R. Crafts thought that pre-1820 real wages of all blue-collar

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