

## WORK RELATIONS AND THE FORMATION OF CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

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Careful, rigorous and honest struggle with theoretical issues is the hallmark of Erik Olin Wright's work. *Classes* is no exception.<sup>1</sup> In its clarity of exposition, in its provocative ideas, in its comparative analysis of Sweden and the United States, this book makes a substantial contribution.

Wright consistently emphasizes the "probabilistic" relationship between class location on the one hand, class affiliation and action according to class interests on the other. Still, he contends that class consciousness systematically connects to objective interests arising from locations in a class structure. Managerial/supervisory workers and expert/semicredentialed workers will tend to have different world views because their interests differ from those of proletarians on two counts: (1) they enjoy higher incomes as a result of an exploitative transfer from other workers within capitalism, and (2) they have the potential to become a dominant class in alternative societies: statism or socialism.

Wright is right to look for underlying structural determinants of different world views, but, I think, wrong in how he has defined them. First, I think it important to recognize that even the most proletarianized workers still have short-run interests within capitalism that divide them from each other. Unskilled workers, just like skilled workers, can improve or maintain their position within the system by using strategies which put them in antagonistic relationships with other workers. Whatever their long-run interests, any given group of workers will have a set of short-run interests that do not lead to class-based world views. So, for example, private sector workers, experiencing a real decline in their standard of living and unable to take on their own employers, have supported tax decreases and cuts in public spending as a strategy to improve their own incomes, even at the expense of public sector workers and recipients of public services.

It is true that certain conditions, the militant organization of important sections of the working class, economic crisis, etc., help to

change this set of interests by making particularistic and narrow strategies less possible and by making broader and more political forms of organization more possible. Thus, where public sector workers are well organized and there is a strong anti-racist movement, private sector workers might come to see that they have more to gain by affiliating with public sector workers to demand shifts in spending from the military to social services, corporate tax increases, control on the export of capital and so forth. The strength of trade union organization and the breadth of working-class political organization mediate experience and consciousness, but not only, as Wright says, because they provide different interpretations of experience. They also change the character of experience itself. Workers who fail to act in class conscious ways are not failing to understand their "real" interests, but are rather acting in terms of one set of interests, their immediate interests under given historical conditions, rather than in terms of another set of interests, the long-run benefit of an alternative.

However, short-run conflicts of interests among workers get constructed in different ways. And some conflicts are more enduring and difficult to overcome than others. This, it seems to me, was useful about Wright's earlier conceptualization of contradictory class locations which utilized two dimensions of actual work relationships: whether or not individual workers controlled the conditions of their work and whether or not their work put them in domination relations with other workers. This approach, whatever its weaknesses (and I think Wright has laid them out rather well), focused on how social relationships within production might define different experiences which in turn would produce different world views. There was a dynamic and social/historical element that is missing in Wright's current framework.

Attention to social relationships seems to me not only useful but very much in line with the classic Marxist argument that day-to-day experiences of conflict and cooperation at work could lead workers to take up kinds of affiliation, organization, action, militance that would in turn provide the experiential basis for the development of broader revolutionary vision. Marx argued that the proletariat is the historical bearer of a socialist revolutionary project not only because workers would benefit from ending their exploitation under capitalism (that is, it is in their "interest" to end capitalism), but because their experiences within capitalist production might allow them to imagine a society based on collective, democratic control over production as an alternative to capitalism.

Wright argues against his earlier conceptualization of contradictory class location on the ground that neither worker autonomy nor domination relations specify particular antagonistic economic interests. To take the example of managers: he says that unless we can show that

1. E.O. Wright, *Classes* (London: Verso, 1985).

managers dominate labor in their own interests and not only in the interest of capitalist owners, there is no reason to distinguish managerial employees from other workers. As an alternative, Wright argues that managers exploit other workers through their effective control of what he calls organization assets. Managers have a claim on the surplus because they control the coordinated cooperation among producers in a complex division of labor.

Yet, it is not at all clear to me how managers are able to appropriate a piece of the surplus for themselves through control over the coordination and planning of production separate from capitalist property structures. Indeed, I find convincing Wright's earlier argument that managers' relatively higher wages are a "loyalty dividend" paid out of the surplus in order to insure that they carry out their control functions. (Of course, managers in the upper tier may acquire large amounts of capital, in which case they are no different from capitalist employers proper and so present no analytic difficulty for traditional Marxist class theory.)

I would argue that it is more reasonable and useful, in differentiating managers from workers within capitalism, to say that they have a different relationship to the capitalist surplus extraction process. Managers and supervisors do not exercise authority simply to coordinate production but do so within a context in which the goal of production is profit and the means to that goal is the extraction of surplus labor. Managerial direction of other workers therefore has a two-sided character: on the one side, in coordinating production managers and supervisors may be performing tasks that are socially necessary labor; on the other side, since production is being coordinated within constraints set by the need to make an average rate of profit, managers also have to control and discipline the workforce. Managers may exercise authority in order to coordinate the labor process or they may exercise authority in order to control workers—and often they do both at once. But these are two distinct kinds of authority (and a failure to distinguish them underlies Weberian claims about the inevitable connection between a complex division of labor and bureaucratic hierarchy). Positions within the labor process that synthesize information or coordinate different aspects of production may exist without coercion, resting on the consent of those receiving direction. On the other hand, a manager's capacity to set the pace of work faster than what the workers themselves desire, requires the right to discipline and rests on capitalist class relations. (In making this point and in the following argument I'm relying very much on Bob Carter's *Capitalism, Class Conflict, and the New Middle Class*.<sup>2</sup>

2. B. Carter, *Capitalism, Class Conflict, and the New Middle Class* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985).

However, he should not be held responsible for my formulations.)

Wright's definition of modes of production in terms of dominant forms of exploitation and exploitation in terms of effective control of productive assets leads him to separate the organization of the production process from the distribution of the product. On this basis, he can argue that managers exploit labor not as agents of capital but in their own interest and through their control of the labor process. However, this separation between structures of production and appropriation is unwarranted, since the organization of technology and the division of labor are always limited by the structures through which a surplus is appropriated. Even in feudalism, where the peasant household/community organizes production without interference from the landlord, feudal institutions affect the way that production is organized. For example, the inalienable character of both land and labor power limit concentration and centralization of the means of production, investment in technological innovation, and so forth.

The division of labor within production is only in part determined by a given level of technological development—presumably the same under socialism, capitalism, or statism. Much of the technology of production in both capitalist and statist society, including the particular division of tasks, the way that expertise is developed and practiced, the way that productive activities are coordinated, reflects the given social relations of production and would be different in a socialist society. In capitalism, the drive toward accumulation socializes production, including the evolution of a complex division of labor, but only in ways appropriate for the continued extraction of surplus labor.

Managerial tasks that involve giving direction in order to integrate and coordinate the labor process and to provide specialized knowledge are usefully distinguished from the authority exercised to discipline and control. But coordination tasks in themselves cannot be a base for exploitation, for the extraction of surplus labor. Exploitation does require discipline and control. However, under capitalism, the managerial tasks of discipline and control must be exercised toward the end of producing an average rate of profit. (I would also argue that the requirements of capitalist accumulation constrain the organization of production within the state in similar, although not as direct ways, but that point will have to be left aside here.)

By the same argument, I think that Wright's definition of the statist mode of production is less satisfactory than his earlier approach. In *Classes* he defines statism as the extension to the whole society of managerial control over coordinating production. In his article, "Capitalism's Futures", Wright asserted that in both statist and capitalist societies managers are in similar positions: they direct production but under

constraints, in particular decisions about the allocation of investment, over which they have no control.<sup>3</sup> In capitalism, the allocation of investment is determined by the market, capital flowing to the most profitable areas. In statism, as Wright previously argued, the allocation of investment is determined directly in a process of political negotiation among bureaucratic sectors adjudicated by the highest decision-making bodies of the state. "The ruling class in a statist society is thus defined by those positions within the relations of bureaucratic domination that control the basic allocation of means of production and distribution of the social surplus. This implies that vast numbers of positions within the bureaucratic structure of the state economic apparatuses are *not* in the ruling class" (p. 98).

This argument suggests that managers might not have an objective interest in the statist alternative to capitalism and do not exploit other workers independently of capitalist exploitation. Yet, whatever their long-run interest in a democratic socialist alternative to capitalism, within capitalism, that is outside of a revolutionary transformation of the system, managers and supervisors must carry out, to a greater or lesser extent, control functions which do place them in an antagonistic relationship to other workers. The degree to which the jobs of lower-level supervisors involve them in control functions varies according to both management policies (the greater or less centralization of control/supervision) and the level of organization and combativity of the workers they are supposed to supervise. Thus, both their experience in work, their relationships with other workers, and their actual interests (for example, whether they have more to gain than to lose from cooperating with those they supervise) will also vary. None the less, most supervisors and managers, most of the time, however pressed by capital, will find themselves to one degree or another in an antagonistic relation to other workers. These real relationships within production can lead them to organize, when they do, separately from other unions and can open them up to technocratic/statist ideologies.

An analogous argument can be made in regard to the work of many professional and technical workers who do not exercise direct managerial authority. I think Wright is correct not to try to find a single dimension that differentiates both these workers and managers/supervisors from other occupational groups. (This is a problem with the work of other new middle-class theorists such as Poulantzas and Carchedi.) Still, I'm not convinced by his argument that these workers exploit others through a credential monopoly which raises their pay

3. E.O. Wright, "Capitalism's Futures," *Socialist Review*, no. 68 (1983).

above what it would be in a free market. Unskilled unionized workers make more money than nonunionized workers, but none of us I think would want to argue that they are exploiting nonunionized workers. Wright rejects his earlier emphasis on work autonomy as defining the contradictory location of these employees. He argues that, unlike the (petty bourgeois) self-employed professional or artisan, the autonomy of salaried professional/technical workers or skilled workers is generally highly contingent and therefore a weak criterion for class locations, as these ought to designate fairly stable and structurally determinate properties of positions within the social relations of production. I agree with Wright's critique of his former definition of these workers as in a contradictory location between the petty bourgeoisie and the working class.

However, I think that there are characteristics of their work that do distinguish them from other nonmanagerial employees. They possess knowledge that other workers don't have and that often supplies the conditions and *direction* for the work that other workers do. This may be in part a necessary aspect of the technical division of labor—that is, of the need for specialized knowledge. But it is also the result of their own actions aiming to monopolize knowledge as a labor market strategy and the result of management actions aiming to reduce management's dependence on its employees. As members of a collective labor process, workers with expertise have no reason to differentiate themselves from other workers, to refuse to share their knowledge, or to be hostile to having the goals of their work set by the associated producers rather than by an employer. As possessors of knowledge, knowledge workers have no particular interest in organizing themselves apart from other workers. Nor do they have a reason to resist identifying with the class of producers whose collective labor is exploited by capital. On the other hand, as competitors on a labor market, these workers can improve their standard of living by excluding others from access to their knowledge. But this labor market strategy will itself have implications for the social relationships these workers enter into at work. Insofar as this set of workers judge that their own higher salaries depend on their monopolization of knowledge, they have a consistent interest, within capitalism, in maintaining their exclusive control over knowledge and in adopting an elitist ideology which justifies that control. This interest in protecting their position within the labor market encourages their commitment to defending their exclusive control over certain kinds of decisions, reinforces the hierarchical character of their relations with other workers, and can therefore lead them to resist attempts by other workers to expand and democratize decision-making. It will encourage them to insist on their distance from other workers and discourage their identification

with the trade union movement. It will also tend to attract them to a technocratic/statist alternative to capitalism. I would argue that analogous sets of pressures characterize many service professionals' relationship to other workers and to their clients, most of whom will be working class.

Workers with specialized skills are also subject to tendencies toward proletarianization. However, the impact of proletarianization on consciousness has historically varied. Sometimes, proletarianized workers have been in the forefront of militant class confrontations (for instance, the shop stewards' movement in early twentieth-century England). But many times proletarianization has led them to organize primarily to restore old prerogatives, thus to a kind of trade unionism that is in a very uneasy alliance with the rest of the trade union movement.

Defining class location in terms of exploitation interests and measuring exploitation by income, Wright is forced to assert an overly abstract connection between objective interests and consciousness. There is nothing in his definition of class location that theorizes the process through which workers develop their world views. Work relationships are not the only determinant of consciousness. However, it seems to me that they are a significant structural dimension differentiating experience and thus leading to different ways of understanding the world. Attending to them can provide one point of entry for analyzing changing consciousness.

## EXPLOITATION, IDENTITY, AND CLASS STRUCTURE: A REPLY TO MY CRITICS\*

*Erik Olin Wright*

Most of the criticisms raised in this symposium on *Classes*<sup>1</sup> can be grouped under two general headings: (1) criticisms which question various aspects of my analysis of exploitation, although not necessarily rejecting the general claim that class structures should be defined with respect to mechanisms of exploitation; (2) criticisms which question the definition of class structure exclusively in terms of exploitation and argue that the concept of class must also capture the idea of common lived experiences. Both of these clusters of criticisms touch on fundamental issues in class analysis. In what follows I will try to respond to these criticisms in the spirit of clarifying and advancing the conceptual issues at stake rather than simply defending the arguments I have made in the past.

### Class and Exploitation

It will be helpful to recapitulate briefly the core argument in my analysis of class structures. Classical Marxism contains a well-developed concept of the fundamental classes of the capitalist mode of production—capitalists and workers—but does not provide a satisfactory way of conceptualizing what in common language is called the “middle class.” I proposed the following solution: actual capitalist societies should be understood as containing a variety of forms of exploitation, not simply capitalist exploitation as such. While these noncapitalist forms of exploitation may be structurally subordinated to capitalism—indeed, this is what is entailed by calling the society “capitalist”—nevertheless, they can still provide the material basis for secondary forms of class relations. The “middle classes” can then be understood as locations in the class structure which are *exploited* in terms of capitalist mechanisms of exploitation, but *exploiters* in terms of one or more of these secondary mechanisms of exploitation.

\*I would like to express my gratitude to Michael Burawoy for refusing to let me sidestep certain crucial theoretical problems in an earlier draft of this paper.

1. E.O. Wright, *Classes* (London: Verso, 1985).

More concretely, I argued that "actually existing capitalism" contains two secondary forms of exploitation: exploitation based on the control over organizational assets and exploitation based on the ownership of monopolized skills, most notably where these are legally certified through "credentials".<sup>2</sup> The middle class, therefore, consists of wage-earners who are organization and/or skill exploiters.

Three general objections to this formulation have been advanced in the papers commenting on *Classes*: first, while the ownership of skills or credentials may reduce the rate of capitalist exploitation, they should not be thought of as a distinctive mechanism of exploitation in their own right; second, organization assets cannot be distinguished from capitalist property itself, and thus cannot be the basis for a distinctive mechanism of exploitation; and third, regardless of the issue of whether or not managers and professionals are exploiters, their class interests are so deeply linked to those of the bourgeoisie that it makes no sense to regard them as in a distinct class with latently anticapitalist tendencies at all. They may be junior partners of the bourgeoisie, but they are not part of some "contradictory class location" as I suggest. Let us look at each of these issues.

### *Skill Exploitation*

Arthur Stinchcombe questions the claim that the higher incomes that go to people with high levels of skills or talents can be considered "exploitation." As an alternative he suggests that such higher income basically reflects the higher levels of productivity of wage-earners with high levels of skills. For various reasons one might want to criticize inequalities in income based on differential productivity, but this should not be conflated with exploitation—the unjust transfer of labor from one economic agent to another.<sup>3</sup>

2. It is important to note that the argument is not that the possession of skills *per se* constitutes a basis for exploitation. Skill exploitation is based on the restriction of the *supply* of particular skills, through one mechanism or another, so that the price of those skills (that is, the wage of the skilled labor power) is above its costs of production. Credentialing is the most important institutionalized mechanism of such monopolization, and thus I generally identify skill exploitation with credentialism.

3. This is obviously a highly truncated general definition of "exploitation." The use of the adjective "unjust" is intended to distinguish exploitations from gifts (since gifts also involve the transfer of labor from one agent to another), but this obviously simply displaces the problem to establishing appropriate criteria for the unjustness of a transfer. Throughout *Classes* I adopt a modified version of John Roemer's concept of exploitation; J. Roemer, *A General Theory of Exploitation and Class* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982. The core idea is that exploitation involves two critical elements: (1) the material welfare of exploiters are at the expense of the material welfare of the exploited; and (2) the material welfare of the exploiter depends upon the labor or effort of the exploited. Criterion 1 alone defines economic oppression. The two criteria together define exploitation.

The issue, then, is whether an income differential which reflects productivity differences can still constitute exploitation. I think that it can. Consider the following imaginary world: every person is allocated an equal amount of land, but different land has different degrees of fertility and is suitable for growing different crops. Also imagine, for simplicity, that everyone in this imaginary world wants to consume the same bundle of crops (the only things produced in the world). I happen to have a parcel of land that can grow a crop that few other parcels can grow and which also turns out to be very desirable. Everyone else is willing to trade large quantities of their produce for mine. What happens in this world? I discover that, *given my private ownership of this land*, I can obtain the commodities I wish to consume by working many fewer hours than people on other land. Everyone ends up with the same consumption (by the assumption of the story), but I have to work fewer hours to get it. This, I would argue, is appropriately described as a situation in which I am able to exploit other producers by virtue of my ownership of the special land.<sup>4</sup>

The story I have just told could, of course, also be described by saying that my land is more productive than other land since the products from it will have a higher equilibrium price (or, equivalently, that the land itself would have a higher market value if it were traded). The higher income I receive (in the form of less work for the same consumption) is simply a return to the higher productivity of the land, but is exploitative none the less.

Now let us change the example a bit: instead of land of differential fertility, let us say that everyone is given one "unit" of labor power (themselves), but this labor power has differential *talents*, where we consider talents to be innate attributes of individuals acquired through the "genetic lottery." Talent in this sense is analogous to the natural fertility of land: it allows particular skills to "grow" with the expenditure of less effort (and other inputs). Because of the unequal distribution of talents, some people are able to obtain a given level of consumption by expending less labor than others (or, equivalently, to obtain higher levels of consumption by expending the same amount of labor). This seems to me to be parallel to the case of the differential fertility of the land: the private ownership of talents enables the talented to potentially appropriate the labor of the untalented. This is not to deny the claim that people with talents are more productive—indeed, if they were not, their talents could not be cashed in for exploitative appropriations of the

4. This story is a slight variant of a model from Roemer, *A General Theory*.

labor of others.<sup>5</sup> This higher productivity may help to legitimate and mask the exploitation, but it does not render the transfer of labor, if it occurs, nonexploitative.<sup>6</sup>

Talents, as defined here, are genetic endowments. In the analysis of the middle class, however, I have talked of skill or credential exploitation, not "talent exploitation." Credentials, in these terms, can be viewed as a socially institutionalized mechanism of artificially creating talents. A "talent" is a scarce genetic endowment that enables people to acquire valued skills. A credentialing institution is a mechanism that allows some people to acquire a valued skill and not others. The result is that the acquired skill is scarce just as it would have been if it was strictly the result of differential talents. To be sure, the owner of that skill may be "more productive" in the sense that they have a skill that is valued in market.<sup>7</sup> But the inequalities that are generated by that ownership, as in the earlier case of land, should still be treated as potentially exploitative.

Now, this does not imply that all income inequalities linked to skill differentials necessarily reflect exploitation. It takes time and effort to acquire skills, and part of the income of a skill owner is simply a reflection of the costs of producing the skill itself. Furthermore, in many instances, people have to accept lower incomes during the training period in which skills are acquired and, again, part of the higher income of a skilled wage-earner reflects the "discounted" value of such foregone earnings. The exploitative element in the wage of a skilled wage-earner, then, is that part of the wage which directly reflects the monopoly control of the supply of the skill. One form of such monopolization is

5. Throughout this discussion I will ignore the problem of what is sometimes called unproductive labor—labor that is expended in capitalist production but which does not produce anything of value. I am assuming that all labor power is deployed productively, but that different units of labor power are more or less productive. I do not think that the issues under discussion here are affected in any interesting way by the problem of unproductive labor, since unskilled, fully proletarianized labor power can also be unproductive in the sense defined above. The unproductive/productive distinction, therefore, does not bear on the problem of the status of skilled labor power with respect to exploitation.

6. A talented person who makes things for his or her own consumption much more productively than others is not exploiting anyone. The exploitation comes when this production is used to appropriate the labor of others through exchange.

7. It is important to stress that contrary to Burris's construal of my argument (see p. 163) I am not suggesting that skill or credential holders are actually more productive physically in the sense of contributing more to the total social product. The activities of a lawyer involved in corporate mergers may actually reduce the total social product and thus be negatively productive in social terms, and yet highly valued in the market because of their "productivity" for the capitalist. All that is entailed by the argument is that their labor power is more valued on the market and that this greater valuation results in exploitative transfers.

rooted in "natural" talents; another—and I believe more important—form is based on credentials. The result is a monopoly *rent* component of the wage. This rent component is potentially a form of exploitation.<sup>8</sup>

Why do I say simply "potentially"? This is an important wrinkle in the argument: the existence of monopoly rents in the wages of skilled/credentialed labor power is a *necessary* condition for such wage-earners to be exploiters, but it is not a *sufficient* condition. The monopoly rent indicates (by definition) that skilled wage-earners are able to appropriate part of the social surplus in their wage. But since the laboring activity of the skilled wage-earner is also contributing to that surplus, this need not imply that the skilled wage-earner is appropriating the labor of anyone else. The privileged position of skilled wage-earners in the labor market, in short, may simply give them the "privilege" of appropriating their own surplus.<sup>9</sup>

It is not an easy matter to establish whether or not this rent component of the wage is sufficiently large to constitute a genuine transfer of surplus to skill owners, and thus to constitute exploitation. To sort this out we would need a way of measuring the contribution of a given wage-earner to the social surplus and then compare this to the amount of surplus embodied in that person's wage. If all labor power was completely homogeneous, this would not be such a difficult matter—contribution to the surplus would be measured directly by the labor time expended by workers in the production of the surplus. But how should the value of the surplus be measured under conditions of heterogeneous labor?

8. To say that skills/credentials constitute a distinct mechanism of exploitation in capitalist societies does not imply that the empirical effects of skill exploitation in capitalism occur independently of the capitalist context in which they occur. Burris seems to believe that to postulate a distinct mechanism one must also be committed to the view that this mechanism produces empirical effects autonomously from the effects of capitalist institutions (see p. 163). This is simply not the case. Burris is entirely correct when he writes: "The nature and distribution of such positions [positions in which credentialed labor power is employed] is certainly influenced by the nature of labor markets, but it is also and more fundamentally conditioned by the powers and interests invested in the private ownership of the means of production" (p. 164). This is, indeed, what it means to describe the society as "capitalist"—that capitalist interests, powers and imperatives structure the opportunities for all economic agents in the society. But this does not imply that what I have termed skill exploitation has no effects of its own. In late feudalism, for example, one could have said the same thing about the powers and interests of feudal lords with respect to the opportunities for capitalist investment, and yet this would not have implied that the capitalist mechanisms did not exist. Skill exploitation in capitalism is deeply structured and constrained by capitalism, but this does not demonstrate that it is no more than an effect or reflection of capitalist exploitation.

9. This description of the logic of exploitation mechanisms for credential owners is consistent with the theoretical position that they are "petty bourgeois"; the petty bourgeois consists of those producers who are neither exploiters nor exploited—that is, they are able to appropriate the surplus which they produce.

There is no simple answer to this question. If a type of labor power is in permanent short supply because of scarce talents or institutionalized credentials, and thus is highly valued in the market, does this mean that it creates more "value" in an hour of labor time than a type of labor power in abundant supply? From the point of view of "subjective theories of value" the answer is obvious: a scarce input into production of whatever sort creates more value precisely because it is subjectively more valued (that is, in greater demand and thus commands a higher price). In such a perspective, the problem under discussion disappears: highly valued labor produces additional value exactly equivalent to the wage it commands in the market, and thus it is meaningless to say that the wages of such labor power are exploitative.

Marxists, however, generally reject such subjectivist views.<sup>10</sup> A change in the effective market demand for a particular kind of labor power should not, in and of itself, change the amount of labor value it produces per unit time, even if it will affect the prices of the commodities produced by that labor power. Imagine the following situation: a particular kind of highly trained credentialed labor power capable of producing ten units of commodity X per day is very scarce and in high demand. It therefore commands a very high wage and, accordingly the commodity X commands a high price. Now the monopoly control of the training is broken, the supply increases and the wage drops to the point that it simply covers the costs of reimbursing the costs of training. But nothing else changes: the physical productivity of the trained labor power is the same and thus still produces ten units of X per day. Only now, X is much cheaper. In a subjectivist theory of value, this labor power is now less productive—it produces less value than before—whereas in an objective theory of value, the amount of objective value remains unchanged since the real inputs into production remain unchanged. If one rejects a subjectivist theory of value, therefore, the only reason why trained labor power might produce more labor value per hour of current work is that part of the past labor of training is embodied in the value of the products currently produced by skilled labor power.<sup>11</sup>

10. Even Marxists who reject the labor theory of value are hesitant to accept a full-fledged subjectivist view of value. They reject the labor theory of value because, once the assumptions of homogeneous labor and homogeneous capital are relaxed, it is no longer internally coherent, but in general Marxists still argue for some sort of objective, real-cost based theory of value.

11. In traditional Marxist language this means, in effect, that part of the "socially necessary labor time" of producing a particular commodity is the socially necessary labor time of training the labor power itself. Training time is thus amortized over the useful life of the skill in question by being "transferred" to the commodities produced using the skill.

Because highly trained labor power does contribute more to the social surplus than unskilled labor power, it is entirely possible that the higher incomes of many credentialed wage-earners do not embody any genuine exploitation of others. They would still be a *privileged* social category, and thus it might be appropriate to call them a distinctive *stratum* within the working class, but they would not be properly described as exploiters and thus would not have a distinctive class character. This is basically the theoretical position advocated by Meiksins and Burris.

Classical Marxist accounts of exploitation in capitalism finessed this problem by assuming homogeneous labor. Possible labor transfers among wage-earners were thus ignored; the only issue was the transfers of surplus labor (or surplus value) from wage-earners to capitalists. But in the world in which we live labor power is not homogeneous and massive income differentials exist among wage-earners. One way or another this has to be accommodated within the general discourse of Marxist theory, and how it is accommodated affects the way in which the class structure of capitalism is viewed.

We thus have two broadly different theoretical solutions to the problem of the class character of highly skilled/credentialed labor power: in one, such wage-earners are at least potentially exploiters, potentially appropriating the labor of others through their monopolization of a particular scarce social resource, and thus occupying a contradictory location within class relations; in the other, they are a privileged stratum of the working class, able to reduce their rate of capitalist exploitation by appropriating part of the surplus which they produce. How can we choose between these alternative theoretical solutions? There are good arguments that can be brought to bear on both approaches, and I certainly do not think that there is an unambiguous case for the solution I have proposed. There are, however, several lines of reasoning which might support the concept of skill exploitation.

First, the main upshot of the above discussion is that in many cases it is difficult to decide in practice whether or not a given position involves skill exploitation. As Roemer has demonstrated, however, the same ambiguity exists for capital-based exploitation as well: there is a grey area of self-employed small owners for whom it is ambiguous whether or not they are exploiters.<sup>12</sup> The difference between the skill case and the

12. In Roemer's analysis, such small owners are potentially exploiters through unequal exchange in the market, even if they hire no labor power. Petty bourgeois self-employed producers with relatively large amounts of capital are able to appropriate the surplus of others by exchanging their products for those produced under less capital-intensive technologies. Once they own sufficient capital to become employers, however, there is no ambiguity in their exploitation status: all capitalist employers are necessarily exploiters.

capital case in Roemer's analysis is that for the latter there is a clear criterion for when this ambiguity disappears: once a capital-owner owns sufficient capital to employ wage-earners, that owner becomes an exploiter. This is the basis of Roemer's important Class-Exploitation-Correspondence-Principle: under conditions of homogeneous labor, all wage-earners are exploited and all employers are exploiters. There is no corresponding transparent criterion for when a skill owner becomes a skill exploiter. The "grey area" in which it is ambiguous whether or not a skill owner is an exploiter is thus not only potentially quite large for skill exploitation but there is no direct indicator of its boundaries. This does not, however, imply that unambiguous skill exploiters cannot be identified. In particular, no matter how one counts the training time of high-paid professionals it is hard to see how they would fail the test of being net appropriators of the surplus labor of workers.<sup>13</sup> These conceptual problems, however, may undermine the usefulness of the concept of skill exploitation for the empirical specification of class structures.<sup>14</sup>

Second, it can be argued that the social surplus is a jointly produced surplus of a collectively organized process of production. While individuals contribute their time and energy to this process, it is impossible to meaningfully define individual contributions to that surplus, and thus any individual, private appropriation of the social surplus is a form of exploitation. Wage differences that reflect different costs of producing and reproducing different kinds of labor power, therefore, would not be exploitative, but any other differential would be.<sup>15</sup>

13. Take, for example, a doctor whose work life is forty years and, let's assume, that the training time embodies forty years of training—surely a large overestimate. Assuming that the training does not have declining value over time (and thus it is evenly amortized over the work life of the doctor), this would mean that in every hour of current labor the doctor contributes two hours of labor value to the total social product. Further, imagine that the doctor works ten hours a day, thus contributing a total of twenty hours of labor values to the social product a day. If the income of this doctor was the equivalent of only twenty hours of abstract labor value a day, then he would not be an exploiter. Even with these exceptionally liberal assumptions, however, most doctors will be consuming more labor values than they contribute.

14. Skill assets, like capital assets, are essentially a continuous variable: in both cases an individual can own incrementally increasing amounts of the resource. The critical difference is that in the case of capital, once this quantity surpasses a certain threshold, the owner is in a position to hire others: the quantitative variation thus constitutes the basis for a qualitative shift in the nature of the social relations. There is no corresponding qualitative shift in the social relations in which owners of skills enter the production process that could provide the basis for an unambiguous demarcation between skill privileges and skill exploitation. As I have argued in *Classes*, this lack of a qualitative relational criterion corresponding to skill exploitation may undermine the claim that skill exploitation is a dimension of class structures.

15. If one accepts these arguments, then the normative principle "equal income returns to equal effort" is the nonexploitative income distribution among wage-earners, rather than "equal income returns to equal contribution," since contribution is no longer, in general, identifiable with isolated individual labor.

Third, following the work of John Roemer, one can argue that the surplus-transfer notion of exploitation should be abandoned altogether since the concept of surplus-transfer becomes so ill-defined under conditions of heterogeneous labor. The test for exploitation, then, is basically whether or not the welfare of one group is *at the expense of* another; the issue of whether or not there are actual labor transfers between the groups does not enter the analysis.<sup>16</sup>

### *Organization Exploitation*

Some of the same issues raised around the problem of skill exploitation could be raised for organization exploitation as well. One might argue that managers are not the beneficiaries of exploitative transfers of surplus at all; they occupy strategic jobs within firms, positions within which their decisions can have a massive impact on the overall productivity of the enterprise. Their higher incomes, therefore, could simply reflect the size of their "productive contribution."

Most radical class analysts would reject this kind of neoclassical economics defense of high managerial incomes. While it is undeniable that actions of a top manager might result in massive increases (or decreases) in the surplus produced within a capitalist firm, most radical theorists would still insist that the surplus is actually produced by the laborers who make the products. Managerial labor is, at most, a small component of the total labor embodied in those products. Radical class analysts, therefore, in general accept the idea that the income of managers, particularly higher level managers, is exploitative. The issue in dispute is whether managers should be seen as participating indirectly in capitalist exploitation itself or, alternatively, whether they should be seen as exploiters based on their control of organizational resources.

In the treatment of managers as beneficiaries of capitalist exploitation,

16. Roemer adds a number of other conditions to his formal definition of exploitation which I will not review here. The important point is that he tries to maintain the notion of exploitation as a condition which produces inherently antagonistic material interests without insisting that the antagonism is based on actual surplus transfer. It should be noted that in more recent work Roemer has seriously questioned whether Marxists should worry about exploitation at all; J. Roemer, "Should Marxists Be Interested in Exploitation?" in J. Roemer (ed.), *Analytical Marxism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). He now argues that the fundamental arguments against exploitation by Marxists ultimately amount to arguments against inequalities of resources as such, and that the rhetoric of exploitation simply confuses the matter. Marxists, in his view, should defend their normative commitments directly on egalitarian principles rather than indirectly via the problematic concept of exploitation. I believe that such a conceptual move undermines one of the core explanatory concepts in Marxism. Exploitation is explanatory not just because it reflects inequalities, but because of the ways in which it attempts to map interdependencies of antagonistic interests.

they are viewed as simply holders of powers delegated to them by their employers. If they are loyal lieutenants, then they will receive some of the spoils of capitalist exploitation. But as lieutenants they control no autonomous mechanisms of exploitation at all. In the alternative approach, on the other hand, capitalists are seen as being forced by the level of development of the forces of production and the social character of production in advanced capitalism to create managerial hierarchies. The powers of managers, however, should not be viewed as simply nominally "delegated," as if they were revokable at will by capitalist owners. Rather, these powers are built into the social organization of production in such a way that they give managers some measure of real autonomy and power. This constitutes the basis for their organizational exploitation.

As in the case of skill exploitation, I do not think that the case for organization exploitation is unambiguous. It may well be that the privileges of managers should be viewed entirely as derivative from capitalist exploitation. The essential opposing argument is that the exploitative transfers to managers can exist even in the absence of capitalist exploitation. In a society within which private ownership of the means of production has been eliminated—that is, means of production could not be sold on a market and individuals could not accumulate capital—managers could still occupy positions within which they were able to extract surplus labor from workers. And this could be true even if managers did not monopolize any particular scarce skills and were thus not skill exploiters in the sense discussed above.

How is this possible? Basically the argument is this: people who control organizational resources—the basic planning, coordinating and integration of productive activities—occupy what I have called "strategic jobs." These are jobs in which it matters a great deal for the overall productivity or profitability of the organization how responsibly and conscientiously the job is performed.<sup>17</sup> Because of managerial control over information flows and the extreme interdependence of managerial actions, these are also jobs in which it is very difficult for anyone outside of the managerial hierarchy itself to effectively monitor the performance of individual managers. The combination of the strategic importance of these jobs and the ineffectiveness of external surveillance means that

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17. As in the case of skills and productivity, there is no assumption here that managerial activity actually contributes to physical productivity. All that matters is that this labor is strategically important for the economic performance of the organization. Such activity can be, of course, profoundly "unproductive" in material terms (for example, where managerial activity is directed towards speculation or simply increasing the capitalist exploitation of workers).

managers are in an excellent position to extort wages out of proportion to the costs of producing managerial labor power. Of course, such higher wages are legitimated as "incentives," but this is simply the ideological mask for exploitation, much as the need for profit incentives is an ideological mask for capitalist exploitation.<sup>18</sup> The abolition of private ownership of the means of production does not in and of itself eradicate this strategic power of managerial labor, and thus in state socialist societies managers and bureaucrats are still able to exploit.

Now, in spite of this argument, it remains the case that in capitalist societies there is a sense in which capitalists, not managers, "own" the organizational assets of production. The capitalist hires at least the very top managers and the capitalist—not the manager—can decide to destroy the organization assets by eliminating the organization as a whole. In the same sense, capitalists "own" the jobs occupied by credentialed wage-earners. A credential as such does not generate exploitation; the credential owner must be hired into a job which requires that credential in order for the credentialed employee to acquire the wage within which skill exploitation occurs. It is thus true, as Burris and Meiksins have argued in different ways, that in capitalism the wages of both managers and credentialed wage-earners are "derived" from capitalist revenues.

However, even though the exploitation from which managers and credentialed wage-earners benefit is systematically tied to capitalist exploitation, it does not follow from this that these exploitations are reducible to capitalist exploitation. They can have real effects of their own even if, in a capitalist society, they invariably take the form of payments out of capitalist profits. The fact that such exploitations can exist in the absence of private ownership of the means of production at least lends some support to the claim that they should be treated as distinct exploitations in capitalism as well.

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18. Incentives are not inherently indicators of hidden exploitation. It may take the expectation of higher incomes, for example, to induce people to undergo a long and unpleasant process of training to acquire a skill. If this is fundamentally reimbursement for the effort and foregone earnings of training, the "incentive" would not constitute exploitation. Or, it may take incentives to get people to do unpleasant work—to pay them for the "disutility" of particularly toilsome labor. If in these cases there are no barriers to entry into either training or unpleasant work—anyone is able to accept the bribe if they want—then the incentives are not exploitative. But when a person says, "I will not act responsibly unless you pay me more," and you pay the person more because they have the power to harm you if you don't, the "incentive" is simply a mask for the use of power to extort income.

### *Class Interests*

Ultimately the most serious objection to the concept of skill and organization exploitation as the basis of particular kinds of class locations is not based on technical arguments concerning the existence of strategic rents or monopoly rents in wages, but rather concerns the question of the basic class interests of managers and professionals-technocrats. Peter Meiksins has expressed this problem most forcefully when he argues that it is basically unthinkable that managers or intellectuals in advanced capitalism could ever adopt an autonomous class project.<sup>19</sup> Either they would support some version of capitalism, perhaps reformed and rationalized in various ways, or under extreme conditions they might support some kind of democratic socialism embodying a working-class project. In neither case would they have their own project for the reconstruction of society. Similar themes are raised by Burris and Brenner.

Again, I take these criticisms seriously and I do not feel that I can offer a decisive defense of the theoretical position I am advocating. I do not, however, think that the arguments I have made "strain the imagination to the breaking point."<sup>20</sup> To clarify my position, I would like to discuss two issues: first, the mechanisms within capitalism that tie the interests of the middle class to the bourgeoisie; and second, the sense in which "middle classes" in capitalism potentially could support an anti-capitalist, antiproletarian class project.

Within capitalist societies there are two central mechanisms which systematically link the material interests of the middle classes to the bourgeoisie. First, one of the distinctive features of middle-class jobs is their location within orderly career structures, either as part of managerial hierarchies, or as part of professional hierarchies. To a significant extent, the reproduction and enrichment of such career structures depends upon the profitability and vitality of capital accumulation. This is most obviously the case when such career structures are directly located within capitalist corporations, but it is also true for career structures in the state since the funding of state employment through taxation is at least in part contingent upon accumulation.

This interest in capitalist profits and accumulation, of course, is not unique to middle-class wage-earners; as Adam Przeworski has argued, so long as workers have to live in a capitalist society, they also have an interest in profitability and accumulation.<sup>21</sup> While the middle classes

19. See pp. 179-81.

20. See p. 180.

may disproportionately benefit from capital accumulation, all wage-earners have such a material interest.

The second mechanism which ties the middle class to capitalist interests, on the other hand, is much more specific to their class situation. The argument that the middle classes are exploiters through secondary mechanisms of exploitation implies that their incomes will tend to be much higher than the costs of producing and reproducing their labor power. This means that, compared to the working class, they will have relatively high levels of discretionary income, income left over after they have provided for their basic expenses of living. The existence of such discretionary income opens the possibility that middle-class wage-earners are able to save and, more importantly, invest their surplus income. In other words, they are able to capitalize the income they receive through exploitation. In the course of a middle-class career this can result in the accumulation of a quite considerable portfolio of capitalist assets which, in effect, directly integrates the middle class into the bourgeoisie. While the unearned income generated by such capital assets will rarely equal the wage income of a professional or manager at the peak of their careers, it nevertheless links them to the capitalist class in a direct and systematic way that rarely exists in the working class itself.

So long as people in the middle class are able to capitalize their surplus income and count on a career trajectory firmly underwritten by capitalist accumulation, it is hardly surprising that in general they support capitalism. This is in part what it means to say that capitalism is a *hegemonic* system: it is able to effectively tie the class interests of various subaltern classes, in this case the middle classes, to the interests of the capitalist class. This is similar to the situation of merchant capitalists in feudal society: so long as they were able to "feudalize" their capitalist exploitation (that is, buy into the feudal class in various ways) they generally supported feudalism. It was only in the period of the long crisis of late feudalism, in part perhaps stimulated by the expansion of capitalism itself, that the bourgeoisie became stridently antifeudal. Similarly, in the case of the middle classes of advanced capitalism: their procapitalist orientation is likely to be eroded only under conditions where a long-term stagnation occurs which seriously erodes the ability of people in the middle class to capitalize their surplus income and which threatens the reproduction of middle-class employment in the state and private sectors. It is even possible to imagine corporate managers

21. The argument is not that workers have an interest in capitalism over socialism, but rather, given the continuation of capitalism they have an interest in capital accumulation rather than stagnation. See A. Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

supporting various kinds of statist alternatives to corporate capitalism if capital was rapidly disinvesting, managers were losing their jobs, etc.

Meiksins argues that under such long-term crisis conditions, the only plausible political reform program of intellectuals, managers and bureaucrats would be some modification of capitalism involving greater state planning and coordination, but not anything genuinely anti-capitalist. The only alternatives to such "managed capitalism" that he entertains would be democratic socialism (in which case they would be basically supporting a working-class project, not a middle-class project) or "Soviet-type economies in which public ownership is combined with strong, centralized, undemocratic control over the economy." This latter alternative is so unattractive to all actors that it is impossible to imagine a mass-based movement in the middle class adopting it as a political goal. In Meiksins's view, therefore, the middle class would either put its political support behind a basically bourgeois-class project of reformed capitalism or a working-class project of democratic socialism. In either case it would not have its own class project, and therefore should not be considered a "class."

I do not think that Meiksins has correctly posed the alternatives. Under the specified conditions of long-term stagnation and crisis of capitalist hegemony, it is possible that the working class and the various segments of the middle class might form a coalition to struggle for something people would call "democratic socialism," as Meiksins suggests, but this common discourse is likely to mask rather different—and deeply conflicting—visions of an alternative society. In one vision of democratic socialism, it is a society which is deeply antimeritocratic and antihierarchical. Not only would the principal means of production be under "democratic control" rather than privately owned, but hierarchies within production would be severely curtailed in favor of radical participatory democracy at the point of production, and meritocracies would be dramatically eroded in favor of popular control over and access to training and certification of specialized skills. In the second vision, "democratic socialism" would be democratic in the familiar bourgeois sense—civil liberties, elected officials, due process—and it would be socialist in the sense of the state owning the principal means of production, but would retain hierarchies and meritocracies in production. These would, undoubtedly, be legitimated on the grounds of rewarding people for their contribution to society (meritocracy) and the responsibility and importance of their work (hierarchy), but would nevertheless protect the exploitative inequalities that define the material interests of the middle class.

The kind of society that would actually emerge if a democratic socialist project of a coalition of the working class and the "middle class" were successful would probably embody in significant ways the distinc-

tive class interests of skill exploiters and organization exploiters. Even under conditions of sustained capitalist crisis, antimeritocratic, anti-elitist, radical democratic socialism is unlikely to have a broad base in the middle class. What is more plausible, therefore, is that under these hypothetical conditions, the middle class would be mobilized behind the more statist, hierarchical and meritocratic vision of socialism. Struggles over these hierarchies and meritocracies would be at the center of class struggles in such a society.

These claims on my part are highly speculative. Meiksins is correct that "the historical record holds very few examples of significant middle-class technocratic or statist movements." The response that this simply reflects the long-standing hegemonic strength of capitalism in the advanced industrial societies sounds like special pleading. However, one could equally well point to the weakness of revolutionary democratic socialist movements in the working class as proof that the working class in advanced capitalism is also not properly a class in fundamental opposition to the bourgeoisie. Working-class anticapitalism, when it occurs at all in developed capitalist countries, tends to take social democratic and statist forms, forms which embody much of what I have characterized as middle-class anti-capitalism (that is, they do not challenge exploitation based on hierarchy and meritocracy). What the historical record of advanced capitalism really demonstrates is the profound difficulty of any social category consistently defining a political project radically opposed to capitalism. When such projects do become articulated, they tend to embody in complex ways the specific class interests of a variety of subordinated classes within capitalism.

### Class and Identity

I would now like to turn to an entirely different set of issues. Throughout the development of my work on class I have resolutely insisted that class should be understood fundamentally as a concept revolving around the problem of antagonistic material interests based on exploitation.<sup>22</sup> While I have devoted considerable energy to trying to figure out how those interests are constituted, what kinds of relations are most central

22. "Material interests," as I will use the term, are interests with respect to toil, leisure, and consumption. I have generally argued that material interests should also be thought of as "objective" interests, that is, that it makes sense to say that people have objective interests in improving their material well being (in the above sense). This does not mean that people have an inherent or objective interest in maximizing consumption (or income) *per se*, but simply that if given the choice between two different trade-offs between toil, leisure, and consumption, people have an objective interest in the more favorable trade-off.

to determining class interests, how different aspects of class interests are combined, and so on, I have always taken it as axiomatic that the most crucial thing which all members of a given class share in common is common material interests.<sup>23</sup>

It is because of this preoccupation with class and material interests that I sought to reconstruct the concept of the "middle class" around the problem of exploitation. Exploitation is a preeminently interest-centered concept and is certainly at the heart of Marxist conceptions of class. It therefore made intuitive sense to try to understand the middle class as occupying a distinctive kind of position within processes of exploitation, for this would define them as having a distinctive commonality of material interests.

Johanna Brenner's critique of my approach to class structure rests, in part, upon the view that classes should not simply be defined with respect to interests, however those interests are conceptualized. She concludes her essay by writing:

Defining class locations in terms of exploitation interests and measuring exploitation by income, Wright is forced to assert an overly abstract connection between objective interests and consciousness. There is nothing in his definition of class location that theorizes the process through which workers develop their world views. Work relationships are not the only determinant of consciousness. However, it seems to me that they are a significant structural dimension differentiating experience and thus leading to different ways of understanding the world.<sup>24</sup>

In my approach, the crucial thing which all members of a class share in common is fundamental objective material interests. The theory of exploitation, then, provides the basis for understanding the mechanisms which generate that commonality of interests in opposition to the interests of other classes. In Brenner's argument, in contrast, members of a class also share in common a pattern of *lived experiences* and the theory of workplace relations and practices provides the basic understanding of the mechanisms which generate that commonality of experience:

Attention to social relationships seems to me not only useful but very much in line with the classic Marxist argument that day to day experiences of conflict

23. To talk about "common" material interests implies being situated in a common manner to the underlying mechanisms which generate material welfare. Two people with the same actual income may not be in the same class since to be in the same class they would have to share a common relation to basic income-producing mechanisms.

24. See p. 190.

and cooperation at work could lead workers to take up kinds of affiliation, organization, action, militance that would in turn provide the experiential basis for the development of a broader revolutionary vision. Marx argued that the proletariat is the historical bearer of a socialist revolutionary project not only because they would benefit from ending their exploitation under capitalism (i.e. it is in their "interest" to end capitalism), but because their experiences within capitalist production might allow them to imagine a society based on collective, democratic control over production as an alternative to capitalism.<sup>25</sup>

Class structures, in Brenner's argument, are characterized both by a particular distribution of exploitation-generated material interests and of labor process-generated lived experiences. An account of both interests and experience is essential for class structural analysis: the commonality of material interests within a class helps to explain the inherent tendency towards conflict between classes; the commonality of lived experience is essential for explaining why members of class tend to develop common *identities*, without which there would be no inherent tendency for solidary action and class struggle.<sup>26</sup> Exploitation is central to explaining what classes struggle over; common experiences are central to explaining their collective capacity to struggle at all. The category "workplace relations and practices" is therefore analytically parallel to "exploitation": both are meant to designate an underlying mechanism which generates particular effects—objective material interests and lived experiences—which, in turn, are constitutive of the concept of class. Both exploitation and workplace relations/practices are themselves structured by the social relations of production characteristic of capitalism, but they need not correspond to each other perfectly.

One possible implication of Brenner's comments is a new general way of specifying the theoretical status of the "middle-class."<sup>27</sup> The category "middle class" could be seen as representing a particular disjunction between interest-mechanisms and experience-mechanisms: they share with all wage-earners a common set of exploitation-generated interests opposed to capitalism, but they have a distinctive set of workplace experiences which produce a systematically nonproletarian form of

25. See p. 185.

26. I am using the term "identity" in a very broad sense to encompass the self-understanding of people of who they are and how they fit into the social world.

27. Brenner does not explicitly play out these implications for the analysis of the middle class in the class structure, and I am not sure that she would in fact endorse them as I have elaborated them here. Nevertheless, I think that the analysis I propose is a logical extension of her comments.

identity.<sup>28</sup> More specifically, Brenner suggests that this is the best way of understanding the division between workers on the one side and managers and professionals on the other. Managers and supervisors, she writes,

must carry out, to a greater or lesser extent, control functions which do place them in an antagonistic relationship to other workers. The degree to which the jobs of lower level supervisors involve them in control functions varies according to both management policies . . . and the level of organization and combativity of the workers they are supposed to supervise. Thus, both their experience in work, their relationships with other workers and their actual interests . . . will also vary . . . These real relationships within production can lead them to organize, when they do, separately from other unions and can open them up to technocratic/statist ideologies.<sup>29</sup>

She makes an analogous argument for professionals: their immediate conditions and practices of self-direction and control of knowledge within the workplace generate lived experiences and corresponding identities which set them apart from other workers. For both managers and professionals, then, the decisive feature of their structural location which differentiates them from the working class is not their material interests *vis-à-vis* capitalist exploitation, but the nature of the daily experiences generated within the process of production that shapes their identity.

One way of situating this alternative strategy of specifying class structures within the classical Marxist tradition is in terms of the contrast between alienation and exploitation as foundational concepts for class analysis. The different immediate lived experiences that Brenner emphasizes can be thought of as generated by different locations with respect to the process of alienation. The control over knowledge and self-direction within work characteristic of professional labor processes could be understood as involving incomplete alienation. The managerial work of domination, control, surveillance, on the other hand, can be thought of as labor that produces and reproduces alienation in workers in the

28. This formulation is similar to my earlier conception of the middle class as a contradictory location within class relations in which there was a noncorrespondence between the relations of domination and the relations of exploitation; *Class, Crisis and the State* (London: Verso, 1978). Capitalists were considered exploiters and dominators, workers as exploited and dominated, and managers as dominators and exploited. In Brenner's formulation, the emphasis is less on domination *per se* than on the workplace experiences generated by the totality of workplace relations and practices. Domination would constitute one aspect of these relations, but not necessarily the decisive one.

29. See p. 188.

labor process. More generally, then, the middle class could be defined as individuals who are proletarianized with respect to exploitation but nonproletarianized (or only incompletely proletarianized) with respect to alienation.

In the traditional Marxist vision of the historical trajectory of capitalism, there is a systematic tendency for these two dimensions of class structure to progressively correspond. Capitalism simultaneously brings ever-broader sectors of economic activity under a regime of capitalist exploitation and deepens the conditions of alienation within the capitalist labor process. In the essential Marxist teleology of history, then, the workplace experiences that generate collective identities progressively coincide with the exploitation relations that generate material interests. In these terms, the persistence, and perhaps even the intensification, of the disjunction between exploitation and alienation, constitutes the social basis for the existence of a middle class in capitalist societies.

This general line of reasoning in class analysis is in keeping with a variety of recent work in class theory. There is, of course, a long tradition in mainstream sociology in which the concept of "social" class is linked to issues of common lifestyle which is closely tied to the issue of common subjectivity and identity, presumably rooted in some structuring of common lived experiences. More significantly for radical class analysis, the attempt to integrate the problem of common experiences and identity formation into the concept of class finds a resonant cord in the work of Pierre Bourdieu.<sup>30</sup> Bourdieu attempts to elaborate a view of class around the dual concepts of class *habitus* and *capital*. A class habitus is defined by a set of common *conditions* in everyday life which produce common *conditionings* experienced by people and which, in turn, generate a common set of internalized *dispositions* to act in particular ways. These dispositions range from *tastes* (the central preoccupation of Bourdieu's book, *Distinction*) to receptivities to particular ideological appeals and calls to action. In Bourdieu's analysis, a class habitus is not simply constituted within the workplace, but in community, schools, families, and other institutions as well. These institutional settings generate lived experiences (conditionings) over the life cycle which reinforce certain modes of thought and action and undermine others. As in Brenner's argument, the decisive criteria which distinguish classes are thus not reducible to differences in their material

30. For a good review of Pierre Bourdieu's work on class theory (*Distinction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups," *Theory and Society*, vol. 14, no. 6 (1985) and "What Makes a Social Class?" *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, vol. 22 (1987)), see R. Brubaker, "Rethinking Classical Theory: The Sociological Vision of Pierre Bourdieu," *Theory and Society*, vol. 14 (1985), no. 6, pp. 723-44.

interests (based on their control over different kinds of capital in Bourdieu's analysis), but must include differences in their habituses as well.<sup>31</sup>

A general reconstruction of the concept of class structure along the lines proposed by Brenner is an important, and potentially powerful, alternative to approaches such as my own which more narrowly elaborate the concept of class structure around material interests. To be convincing, such an approach needs to construct a clearer abstract concept of the commonality of workplace experiences that are constitutive of different class positions in capitalism. In the case of exploitation-centered concepts of class structure, there is a systematic, abstract, deductive logic to the specification of what it is that all members of a given class have in common: all workers in capitalism are exploited through capitalist mechanisms of exploitation; all capitalists are exploiters. Of course, there is great variation within classes in what I have called elsewhere *immediate* interests—interests determined by particular markets, particular working conditions, particular forms of competition, etc.—but members of a given class share common *fundamental* interests, interests over how the basic property relations of the society should be organized.<sup>32</sup> What is needed, then, to construct a concept of class structure which is, in part, based on workplace relations and practices and not just exploitation, is a parallel abstract specification of “fundamental” and “immediate” commonalities of workplace experiences.

What is the abstract dimension of workplace experiences that is shared in common by workers in a nineteenth-century textile mill, a contemporary Japanese auto factory, and a Swedish high technology factory in which worker teams are given high levels of collective autonomy? In his comparative research on the organization of industrial work, Michael Burawoy has defined a number of different “factory regimes”: market despotism, patriarchal regimes, hegemonic regimes.<sup>33</sup>

31. Brenner's arguments are also in keeping with Michael Burawoy's emphasis on what he calls the “relations in production” in constituting the working class; *The Politics of Production* (London: Verso, 1985). In his view a class cannot be defined simply in terms of a set of “empty places” within the relations of production (the relations which generate exploitation in my terms), but must include a specification of the relations in production, the relations within which the daily experiences of social interaction in production are created.

32. Stated in somewhat different terms, immediate interests are interests defined within a particular set of rules of the game; fundamental interests are interests over what game should be played (that is, what should be the mode of production). See Wright, *Class, Crisis and the State*, pp. 88–91.

33. M. Burawoy, *The Politics of Production*.

We can say that in each of these cases the workers are capitalistically exploited, but what *precisely* defines the fundamental commonality of their lived experiences within work? If we simply say that they are “dominated” within work and lack full control over what they produce and how they produce it, then this does not distinguish their lived experiences from those of workers in many noncapitalist systems of production (for instance, workers in the Soviet Union). If we try to define the forms of domination in a less vague way, then it is hard to encompass all of the cases that we would want to consider “capitalist”.

Because of these difficulties in defining adequately the distinctively capitalist form of workplace experiences, for the moment, I continue to have reservations about the ultimate fruitfulness of this conceptual strategy. While I think that the substantive problem of identity-formation is important and, furthermore, that the micro-experiences within the daily practices of work are likely to be an important determinant of class identities, nevertheless I am not persuaded that the best way of advancing class analysis is to subsume these processes under the concept of *class structure* itself. The alternative is to define classes in terms of a structural map of material interests (based on exploitation or some other account of material interests) and then to treat the problem of lived experiences as an independent source of variation within classes rather than as a criterion for class as such.

Now, if one were convinced of the traditional, teleological version of the Marxist theory of history, then there would be a good reason for insisting that the structural map of relations of exploitation and the map of workplace lived experiences should be combined into a single concept of class structure in spite of the difficulty of constructing a rigorous abstract concept of such experiences. Such a class concept would capture the immanent, dynamic tendencies of the system as a whole in a powerful and elegant manner. If, however, one is skeptical about the strong teleological versions of the Marxist theory of history and question the existence of any immanent tendency for these two dimensions of class to coincide, then merging them into a single concept is likely to hinder, rather than enrich, the development of class theory. Under these theoretical conditions it is better to have two distinct concepts—one of class structure centered on exploitation and interests, and one of class experience, centered on workplace practices and the formation of identities. Instead of seeing the linkage between these two concepts as having some immanent necessity, the problem of their interconnection could then be treated as a theoretical problem in its own right in which a considerable degree of variability and even indeterminacy is allowed.