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**THEORIES OF SOCIAL CLASSES**

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### Introduction

Class as an economic category denoting different types of claims on social product, appeared first in a systematic fashion in the physiocratic analysis of French society. In his *Tableau 'economique*, Francois Quesnay distinguished three classes, which were the 'productive class' of the farmers, 'distributive class' of the land-owners and the 'sterile class' of tradesmen and merchants.<sup>1/</sup>

Adam Smith, though he did not explicitly talk about classes, clearly recognised three different groups of economic agents who had different functions in the division of labour and had different sources of income. Smith thus wrote, "the whole annual produce ... taken complexly must resolve itself into the same three parts, and be parcelled out among different inhabitants of the country, either as the wages of their labour, the profits of their stock, or the rent of their land".<sup>2/</sup>

Ricardo also explicitly recognised these three classes, arising out of three different sources of livelihood.<sup>3/</sup>

In the 19th century, the concept of class assumed a crucial role in the writings of historians also. Classes as aggregates of people with similar 'civil condition' were regarded as principal actors of history. Historical and social changes were depicted in terms of struggles between classes. Thus the French historian Guizot described the religious and political struggles in England in the seventeenth century as a "screen for the social question, the struggle of various classes for power and influence".<sup>4/</sup>

The concept of class was elevated to a new status in the writings of Marx. In Marx's theoretical framework, the concept of class became both an analytical and a historical category in which the economic content of class as formulated in classical political economy was synthesized with the politico-historical content of the French historians. As Colletti has observed, in Marx, the concept of class assumes a 'double significance', "firstly as factors or objective conditions of production and secondly as the political agents of the whole human social process"<sup>5/</sup>. The only major theoretical intervention in the theory of social classes after Marx was that by Max Weber who sought to play down the grand analytical role that Marx attributed to the category of class.

Apart from these two major theoretical approaches in the study of social classes, we may take note of a third one, which may be generally labelled as the functionalist approach to the study of social classes, associated with the names of Emile Durkheim, Kingsley Davis, Talcott Parsons among others.<sup>6/</sup> These authors consider social stratification system as an integral and necessary aspect of any complex society. A complex society, according to them, is distinguished by the presence of highly developed division of labour. There exists, therefore, a number of distinct and specific roles which must be performed. The function of a stratification system is to allocate these roles to different individuals so that they are motivated to perform their role. Since different roles have different degree of functional necessity in their view, different roles should be associated with different levels of income, social status and prestige. Clearly, class contradiction and class struggles have no role to play in such

a framework. In fact, the proponents of this approach emphasise the essential harmony of interests between different social strata rather than the contradiction between them. We do not think it necessary for us to go into any more elaborate exposition of this approach. All the recent theoretical developments, in the theory of classes are essentially refinement and reformulation of the ideas of the two major theorists, namely Marx and Weber and in the present paper we shall mainly discuss the theories of social classes expounded by them.

In Section I of this paper we shall provide an outline of Weber's theory of classes. In section II, Marx's theory implicit in his own writings is discussed. In section III we take a critical look at some of the recent reformulations of the Marxian theory. In section IV, we present a theory of classes of our own that we believe is rooted in the Marxian concept.

### Section I

#### Weber's theory of social classes

Weber considered classes to be just one of the stratification systems prevalent in any complex society. For him, classes merely represented, "possible and frequent bases for communal action"<sup>1/</sup>. In fact Weber considered other stratification systems giving rise to more cohesive social groups. In particular, stratification by status, according to Weber, is the most important characteristic of a complex society.

Classes, in Weber, are defined in terms of 'life chances' which denote, "the kind of control or lack of it which the individual has

over goods and services and existing possibilities of their exploitation for the attainment of receipts within a given economic order"<sup>8/</sup>. 'Life-chance' therefore refers to the opportunity an individual has, to enjoy socially produced use values, not for a certain moment but over his entire life-period. Individuals with similar life chances are then said to be in the same 'class-situation'.

Classes, therefore, constitute a stratification system in the economic dimension alone. What is more, Weber considered economically determined classes as a relevant stratification system only in the context of a market-economy:- "the kind of chance in the market is the decisive moment which present a common condition for the individual's fate. Class situation is in this sense, ultimately market situation"<sup>9/</sup>. Individuals whose fate are not determined in the market, therefore cannot constitute a class. For example, slaves, according to Weber did not constitute a class. They rather formed a 'status group'.

Weber, however, did not spell out why the system of stratification by classes should be restricted to the market economies alone. His definition of life chances are general enough to be applicable in any economic system and classes should be considered to exist whenever 'life chances' differ systematically between social groups. The confusion arises, probably, because of Weber's insistence that classes are determined only by economic factors alone, more precisely by the nature of distribution of goods and services. Since only in a developed market economy, distribution of goods and services appears to be independent of the distribution of social status and power, Weber could recognise the existence of classes only in a market economy.

But in the case of a slave society, where the sphere of economy was not so neatly separated at a manifest level from other spheres of social activities, Weber failed to identify any class in the sense he understood in that society.

Weber distinguished three types of social class. Firstly, a 'property class' consists of members whose life chances are "primarily determined by the differentiation of property holdings"<sup>10/</sup>. Secondly, a class was defined as an 'acquisition class' when "the class situation of its members is primarily determined by their opportunity for the exploitation of services on the market"<sup>11/</sup>. And thirdly, Weber defined a 'social class' to be composed of the "plurality of class statuses between which an interchange of individuals on a personal basis or in the course of generation is readily possible and typically observable"<sup>12/</sup> - that is a collection of social groups with a large degree of mobility of individuals between these groups.

According to Weber, sharing of a common class situation by a large group of people need not produce organised and conscious corporate actions by the members of that group. He explicitly formulated the conditions that would produce conscious class activities - the most important being "the possibility of concentrating on opponents where the immediate conflict of interests is vital"<sup>13/</sup>.

Weber considered these conditions as only rare ones and only in the case of persons, "who are completely unskilled without property and dependent on employment without regular occupation", did he think that the possibility of emergence of an organised 'social class' exists.<sup>14/</sup>

Weber took 'social status' of a person to be a more important determinant of the person's social behaviour and beliefs, than his 'class status'. According to him, the term 'social status' is to be applied to a "typically effective claim to positive or negative privilege with respect to social prestige so far as it rests on one or more of the following bases: (a) mode of living; (b) a formal process of education which may consist in empirical or rational training and the acquisition of the corresponding modes of life, or (c) on the prestige of birth, or of an occupation"<sup>15/</sup>. A 'status group' is constituted by individuals having similar 'status situations'. Individuals belonging to a status group are distinguished from others by their specific 'styles of life', according to them a "specific, positive or negative, social estimation of honour". The status groups are considered to be more homogenous, cohesive and a closed social group with no free entry permitted. The development of status, therefore, becomes a "question of stratification resting upon usurpation"<sup>16/</sup>.

Weber thus sees 'status groups' and 'classes' as two different systems of stratification without having any determinate relation between the two.<sup>17/</sup> Stratificatory status may be based on class status directly or related to it in complex ways. It is not, however, determined by this alone . . . . Conversely, social status may partially or even wholly determine class status, without however, being identical with it"<sup>17/</sup>. Thus class status of an officer, a civil servant, and a student may be widely different, although they are, according to Weber, all in similar social status, "because they adhere to the same mode of life in all relevant aspects as a result of their common education"<sup>18/</sup>.

For Weber 'class' is not an important sociological category since he does not consider class conflicts to be the most decisive factor behind social changes. In his framework, conflicts over unequal distribution of social status and power is the most important source of social changes. In fact, the discrepancy between the status position and class position of a particular social group and conflicts arising thereof are considered to be a more important source of social change than the conflicts between classes.

## Section II

### Marxian Theory of Social Classes

Though the concept of social class occupies a central position in Marxian theory of society and economy, though Marx employed this concept in almost everything he wrote, he started formulating a precise definition of social class only in the third volume of Capital. Unfortunately the manuscript breaks off when Marx had only mentioned three major classes of a capitalist society, in fact capitalist society of the nineteenth century Europe.

In this last chapter of capital, Marx however, gives a negative answer to the question of what constitutes a class - that is, "the identity of revenues and sources of revenues" are not sufficient for grouping separate individuals into one class, because otherwise, "physicians and officials, e.g. would also constitute two classes"<sup>19/</sup>. It is not, however, stated why physicians and officials cannot belong to two different classes.



In the absence of a precise definition of class in Marx's own writings, there is no other alternative than to reconstruct a definition and theory of class based on the uses made by him of the concept in his writings.

The theory of social classes implicit in Marx's writings is organically linked with Marx's conception of society and sources of historical changes occurring within human societies. Marx conceived of human society as a group of individuals in definite relations with each other. Marx thus wrote, "what is society, whatever its form may be? The product of Men's reciprocal actions"<sup>20/</sup> Each of these reciprocal actions describe a relation between the actors. Individuals within a society, can, therefore, be also characterised by an ensemble of social relations. Among the multitude of these social relations, all are not of equal status. Some of them are determined by others. The cornerstone of Marxian framework of social and historical analysis is that the relations of production which men enter with each other while producing their means of livelihood is the primary determinant of all other social relations. Marx gave a heuristic justification for this approach.

Since "life involves before anything else eating and drinking, housing, clothing and various other things ... the first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself"<sup>21/</sup> The production of material life is not simply, "the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals". "Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with what they produce and with how they produce. Hence what individuals

are depends on the material conditions of their production".<sup>22/</sup> Thus it is clear that Marx believed that the material conditions of production in which a man finds himself ultimately determines his behavioural pattern - his actions vis-a-vis other members of the society.

From the above proposition it may also be included that if a set of people are in identical position, in respect of 'material conditions of production' they may be expected to act similarly in different economic and political conjunctures and we may group them together so far as their social practices are concerned.

The expressions like 'positions in respect of material condition of production', 'positions in the social organization of production' and 'position in respect of relations of production' are generally considered as equivalent in the Marxist literature. Though these expressions abound in the Marxist literature, we have no systematic presentation of the content of these terms in Marx's own writings. Before we proceed it is necessary to explore Marx's own writings to get an idea about the operational content of these supposed equivalent expressions.

Marx understood relations of production as a complex category having several dimensions. Relations between individuals that are obtained in the sphere of production need to be expressed in each of these dimensions or co-ordinates. According to our understanding of Marx, relations of production between individuals can be described in terms of four co-ordinates. They are discussed in the following:

(a) Relations in respect of co-operation in the work process:-

Numerous labourers work together side by side, whether in one or the same process or in different but connected process. Marx described them as working in co-operation. Existence of the co-operativ

labour process, obviously presupposes the existence of division of labour within the society. Relations between individuals arising through this co-operation are indicated in the specific and interrelated functions they carry out. Marx analysed the structure of co-operation only in the context of the capitalist society. A capitalist labour process has two fold nature, "which on the one hand is a social process for producing use values, on the other a process for creating surplus value"<sup>23/</sup>. This double nature of co-operation in turn leads to the second aspect of relation of production.

(b) Relation of control:

The second aspect of production relation is that of control whereby one's labour is controlled by another. This control of labour of one by another has a double nature.

In one aspect, this control is a purely technical necessity whenever the labour process is based on co-operation of individual labourers. In the capitalist labour process, in particular, "the co-operation of wage labourers is entirely brought about by the capital that employs them"<sup>24/</sup>. Since the assembling of workforce is brought about by an external force, i.e., capital, the work of supervision and direction becomes one of the function of capital. Hence capital requires a special group of managers, foremen etc. whose exclusive function is to supervise and command the labour process on behalf of the capitalist. The other aspect of control is a social one described in our next coordinate of production relations.

(c) The relation of exploitation:

The above relation of control in its social aspect is also a

relation of exploitation, which is the most crucial one for the identification of classes in the Marxian framework. In fact the social relations of dominance and subjugation of one class by another is determined by this aspect of production relation. This relation is supposed between any two economic agents whenever one extracts surplus labour from the other.

(d) The property relation:-

Finally, all the above relations, for their continued reproduction presupposes certain forms of property. Though apparently property describes a relation between man and object, for Marx property is essentially a relation between man and man in so far as property right over an object confers some socially enforceable rights with reference to the object apropos other members of the society. Marx distinguishes between simple possession and property. Possession expresses only the capacity of an individual or a community to use some objects. But property expresses the capacity to utilise means of production for extracting surplus labour out of the direct producers.

Marx, when he discusses an economic system at a very high level of abstraction e.g. in the conceptual framework of modes of production recognises two levels in each of the four co-ordinates of production relations described above. Thus, in the first co-ordinate we have the categories - producers and non producers. Producers are, engaged in the co-operative labour process, they are part of the co-operative labourers. In the control aspect of production relations, only two categories are developed - those whose labour is controlled by, others and those who control others' labour. In the third co-ordinate the

two levels are - the exploiters and the exploited. In the fourth co-ordinate we have owners and non owners.

Marx, however, does not consider these aspects of production relations as independent of each other. In fact, the relations of exploitation is taken to be the most crucial and all other aspects are thought to be dependent on it. As a result Marx recognises two basic classes characterising every known modes of production. The class of direct producers, who are exploited and do not own property, though they may be in possession of some parts of the means of production, stands in opposition to the class of non producers, who are also owners of property and direct appropriators of surplus labour. This dichotomic image of class structure appears with a literary flourish in the Communist Manifesto in an oft quoted passage. "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guild master and journeyman, in a word oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight"<sup>25/</sup>.

It may appear from the above passage that Marx, the revolutionary propagandist, in his penchant for making sweeping generalisation and dramatisation of historical changes, has brushed aside all the complexities of the social structure of a real society and reduced the course of historical development to a simplified account which bears no empirical correspondence. But if we study the more mature theoretical works of Marx, especially his analyses of the 19th century French society, we find a much deeper and complex understanding of social classes.

In fact struggles between the minority classes are considered as a more important determinant of the observed historical changes. Engels, thus introduced "The class struggle in France 1848-50" with the following words: "All revolutions upto the present day have resulted in the displacement of one definite class rule by another, but all ruling classes upto now have been only small minorities in relation to the ruled mass of the people... . The common form of all these revolutions was that they were minority revolutions. Even when the majority took part, it did so - whether willingly or not - only in the service of a minority"<sup>26/</sup>.

The picture of class struggles in the history that emerges from the above passage is entirely different from the one that we have found from the passage in the Communist Manifesto. The conflict between different minority classes of oppressors representing different forms of oppression is considered here as the determinant of historical changes than the conflict between all oppressors and the oppressed majority. The struggles of the oppressed majority assume historical importance only in so far as these struggles have a catalytic effect in hastening the dissolution of the old form of oppression. For example, it was not the struggles between the serfs and landlords that gave rise to a new economic order i.e. capitalism in the place of feudalism but the struggles between the landlords and the bourgeoisie

Thus we obtain two different, in fact, conflicting view points about the historical importance of two different categories of class struggles as the prime mover of history. The problem arises because Marx carries out his analysis of classes at two different levels.

In his analysis of the dynamics of a given mode of production, which is an abstract theoretical construct, class appears as an analytical category, and contradictions between the two basic classes characterising a given mode of production provide the dynamics of the economy. For example, in the feudal mode of production, contradictions between the lords and serfs cannot but be the most important determinant of social dynamics. But in any real society, the pure categories of logically defined classes of a definite mode of production appear in varied and mixed forms. Furthermore, which is more important, categories related to two different modes of production coexist in any real society at any given point of time. Therefore, when Marx analyses the social structure of a concrete society, he has to recognise not only the existence of social classes but also of fractions of classes, social strata not belonging to any class and even simply aggregates of individuals which he calls Masses. Thus in "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" Marx mentions a long list of social categories of individuals with definite interests of their own - "the aristocracy of finance, the industrial bourgeoisie, the middle class, the petty bourgeoisie, the army, the lumpenproletariat organised as the Mobile guard, the intellectual lights, the clergy and the rural population".<sup>27/</sup>

Obviously Marx does not consider all the above social groups as social classes but he clearly recognises these social groups as distinct social strata which played important political role in a particular juncture of history. It is interesting to note that Marx treats, two fractions of the bourgeoisie, namely 'the aristocracy of finance' and 'the industrial bourgeoisie' separately and in fact

recognises some important conflicts between these two strata, although in respect of production relations, at least in terms of relation of exploitation and property relationship, these two strata occupy similar positions in the social organisation of production.

In respect of the peasantry Marx uses the expression "peasant masses" instead of treating them as a distinct class. What is, therefore, required, according to Marx, for a certain social group to be called a class is that there exists a potential for realisable unity among the members of that groups.

Marx thus writes:- "In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of other classes, and put them in hostile position to the latter, they form a class.

In so far as there is a merely a local interconnection among these small holding peasants and identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond and no political organisation, they do not form a class"<sup>28/</sup>. Therefore, the unity among members of a class must be a unity opposed against another unity representing a different class. "The separate individuals form a class only in so far as they have to carry out a common battle against another class; other-<sup>29/</sup>wise they are on hostile terms with each other as competitors".

The contradiction between two classes is not the collection of all the contradictions existing between individual members of two classes. Initially, the contradictions between two nascent classes appear as individual conflicts between individual members of two classes. The process through which this conflict between isolated and separate individuals take the form of contradiction between two



classes is called the process of formation of social class. Marx envisages the formation of social class at two levels. Firstly, at the objective material level, common class situations are created for a mass of individuals against another class. The class struggle at this level is carried out by spontaneous combinations of the members of a class. The class exists here as a potential force, as a 'class in itself'. A 'class for itself' comes into existence, when the members of a class become conscious of their class positions and seek to realise their objective class interest through organised political practice.

### Section III

#### Some recent reformulations of Marx's theory of social classes

##### Poulantzas and structural determination of social classes:-

'Structural determination of social classes' and 'class positions' are the two key concepts of Poulantzas's version of Marxian theory of social classes. The 'structural determination of social classes' refer to "certain objective places occupied by the social agent in the social division of labour, places which are independent of the will of these agents"<sup>30/</sup>. A social class, according to Poulantzas<sup>31</sup> "is defined by its place in the social division of labour as a whole". By social division of labour, Poulantzas not only designates the relations of productions, but also ideological and political relations obtaining in a given social formation. For Poulantzas, "economic place of the social agents" is not sufficient to determine social classes and political and ideological aspects must also be considered



in identifying the social classes. This is so because, "social classes coincide with social practice i.e. class struggle and only defined in their mutual opposition"<sup>32/</sup>. By class struggle, however, Poulantzas does not mean any organised and conscious political practices of a group of social agents but only to the presence of mutual antagonism between classes, which are being reproduced day by day. In other words class struggles continue, according to him, even when no politically conscious class organization exists.

By 'class position' Poulantzas refers to the concrete position a structurally determined social class adopt in 'each specific conjuncture' of history. A social class therefore, "may take up a class position that does not correspond to its interests, which are defined by the class determination that defines the horizon of class struggle"<sup>33/</sup>. It may so happen that a class or a fraction of a class takes up a class position which is inconsistent with its interests derived from its structural determination. For example, "the labour aristocracy in certain conjunctures takes up class positions that are in fact bourgeois"<sup>34/</sup>. This does not mean that in such cases the labour aristocracy becomes a part of the bourgeoisie; rather it remains, "from the fact of its structural class determination, part of the working class"<sup>35/</sup>.

Poulantzas substitutes the Marxian distinction between 'class-in-itself' and 'class-for-itself' which he rejects as a Hegelian schema, with his own distinction, between 'structural class determination' and 'class position'. Poulantzas emphatically argues that, "ideological and political relation i.e., the places of political and ideological domination and subordination are themselves part of

the structural determination of class; there is no question of objective place being the result only of economic place within the relation of production, while political and ideological elements only belong simply to class positions".<sup>36/</sup>

Poulantzas, however, never spells out clearly what determines the class position that a particular social class takes in a specific historical conjuncture and also how the class position is related with the structural determination of a social class. Poulantzas says: "class determination must not be reduced, in a voluntarist fashion, to class position".<sup>37/</sup> In fact, class determination only "defines the horizon of the class struggle",<sup>38/</sup> that is, sets limits to the possible class positions. So there exists an element of indeterminacy regarding the class position that a class takes up. It is also not clear what Poulantzas means by saying that "structural class determination involves economic, political and ideological class struggle".<sup>39/</sup> Class struggle can only be understood as expression of contradictory class positions that different classes take in historical conjunctures. Therefore, class position becomes a defining element of class determination. We get a relation of circularity between class position and class determination.

Furthermore, it is not clear as to what are the specific ideological and political relations that Poulantzas wants to include in the criteria that structurally determine social classes. If we examine some of the specific classes that Poulantzas defines in the context of present day advanced capitalism, we find that the criteria which Poulantzas designates as ideological and political are essentially components of relations of production, as we understand the

latter. For example, the political criterion that Poulantzas uses in differentiating the working class from the new petty bourgeoisie (to which belong foremen, engineers, scientists etc.) is that of the position of an economic agent in the hierarchy of management and supervision. Similarly the core ideological criterion that Poulantzas uses is that of division between mental and manual labour and domination of the latter by the former. Here obviously Poulantzas is equating the political or ideological content of certain aspect of relations of production with politics and ideology itself.

The main problem, as we see it, in Poulantzas's definition of social classes lies in his exclusive preoccupation with the problem of redefining of the working class of the contemporary western society. Since the usual definition of the working class as a class of wage earners fails to explain the wide diversity of social practices characterising the various segments of wage earners in the most advanced capitalist society, Poulantzas has to bring in various aspects of these social practices itself in his definition of social class, so as to narrow down the definitional boundary of the working class. Evidently his treatment of the concept of class renders it inapplicable, more or less, to a wide spectrum of social systems.

Erik Olin Wright and 'contradictory class locations' -

Wright's contribution to the recent Marxist debate on identification of various classes in the developed capitalist countries, lies in his treatment of ambiguous positions within the class structure. These ambiguities in the class structure is related to some class positions, which occupy "objectively contradictory locations within class relations"<sup>40/</sup>. In other words there are objective positions

within the class structure, which are "torn between the basic contradictory class relations of capitalist society"<sup>41/</sup>.

Wright identifies three clusters of such positions, namely, (i) managers and supervisors having a contradictory location between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat (ii) certain categories of semi-autonomous employees, having contradictory location between the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie (iii) small employers situated in a contradictory location between the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie. These three contradictory class locations assume its contradictory positions only in relations to the three basic classes in the capitalist society namely, the bourgeoisie, the working class and the petty bourgeoisie.

Wright identifies these three basic classes in relation to three central processes underlying the basic capital-labour relation, which are, "control over the physical means of production, control over labour power, control over investments and resource allocation"<sup>42/</sup>. Capitalists exercise control over all the three processes and the workers are excluded from the control in each of these aspects. Wright defines the petty bourgeoisie as having control over the physical means of production and control over investments and resource allocation, but no control over labour power (as they do not employ any labour in Wright's framework).

Wright defines the three contradictory class locations, stated above, as those "situations in which these three processes did not perfectly correspond to the basic class forces within the capitalist mode of production or to the petty bourgeoisie in simple commodity production"<sup>43/</sup>. For example top managers exercise full control over the physical means of production and over the labour power of others

but only partial or attenuated control over investment and accumulation process. Wright, therefore, considers the class location of top managers, as a contradictory location around the bourgeoisie which, by definition, exercise control over all the three processes. On the other hand, foremen and line supervisors have only residual control over all the three processes and therefore occupy a contradictory class location closest to the working class.

Wright, however, leaves unanswered the question whether contradictory class locations define separate social classes or merely some social strata. It is not clear whether there exists any unity of interests of different categories (for example between foremen and top managers) occupying contradictory class locations in a similar way. Therefore, we fail to understand the analytical value of such categories as 'contradictory class location', apart from having some classificatory purpose, in the ensemble of class relations obtaining in a capitalist society.

Carchedi and "economic identification of social classes":-

Carchedi discusses classes only in the context of a capitalist society. His discussions are carried out mainly at two 'levels of abstraction' - "the level of the pure capitalist structure and the level of the capitalist socio-economic system"<sup>44/</sup>. On the former level, a capitalist economic system in its most elemental and ideal form is considered. Production agents are grouped into only two classes typical of the capitalist system, the capitalist class and the working class. These two basic classes are defined in terms of four fundamental dichotomies, which are - the producer/non producer,

the exploited/exploiter, the labourer/non labourer and the non owner/owner. At the first level of abstraction Carchedi groups "the terms of these dichotomies in the following two equivalences: 1. labourer = non owner = exploited = producers; 2. owner = non labourer = non producer = exploiter"<sup>45/</sup>. These two equivalences, then give rise to two basic classes of a capitalist structure, considered in its most basic form. Carchedi considers this definition of classes as 'economic definition of classes' which is "nothing more than the class collocation of the production agents due to the production relations"<sup>46/</sup>.

At the second level of distraction Carchedi considers not only the 'economic instance' but also the political and ideological ones. As a result of introduction of these new elements, the definitions of two basic classes also undergo changes and it becomes also possible to consider a 'third primary class', that is the petty bourgeoisie. To distinguish this new definition of classes from the earlier ones, Carchedi class them, 'economic identification of classes'. The working class is then 'identified' as the proletariat and the capitalist class as the bourgeoisie.

Although Carchedi talks about ideological and political criteria in defining classes essentially he introduces two concepts, namely the 'global function of capital' and the 'function of collective workers' to identify classes under the monopoly stage of capitalism. These two concepts are related to the nature of functions the economic agents carry out in a given labour process. Carchedi, like Poulantzas emphasises the social content of these functions (i.e. of supervision, of management etc.), and regards these functions as main ideological and political ones. Thus Carchedi, like Poulantzas,

confuses ideological and political dimensions of the relations of production with ideology and production itself. The specificity of the ideological and political superstructure are, therefore, not considered in such an approach.

All the three authors mentioned above conceive of classes principally, as a classification problem of 'positions' in the division of labour. Each class represents a certain grouping of such positions. It remains, however, unexplained in the writings of all the three authors, why certain sets of positions constitute a class. In fact all the three authors do not discuss the analytical requirements of the category of class and therefore the elaborate discussions about the definitional boundaries of few classes in the advanced capitalist societies are not provided with any proper perspective for evaluating these definitions.

#### Section IV

So far we have given an exposition of Marx's theory of social classes and the recent reformulations and clarifications of Marx's theory. On the basis of that we shall try to present below a definition of classes that we find useful in identifying and discussing the classes of any given society.<sup>47/</sup>

The crucial element for our definition is the concept of contradiction, which is not equivalent to any relation of conflicting interests between any two individuals within a society. A relation of conflicting interests between two individuals may arise if the two individuals have certain incompatible objectives or goals. In other words, the objectives of one individual can be



realised if and only if the objective of the other one is not fulfilled. A relation of conflicting interests may be called economic political etc. depending upon the nature of the objective. For example the conflict between a buyer and a seller of a certain product is a relation of economic conflict, the conflict between two election candidates is a political one and so on. More precisely, a relation of conflict will be called an economic one, if the conflict has a direct bearing upon the positions of two parties involved in the structure of production, distribution and appropriation of social surplus. Contradictions that are relevant for defining social classes are based upon these economic conflicts existing between economic agents alone. A relation of conflict becomes a relation of contradiction when the following conditions are satisfied:-

- (1) the conflict cannot be resolved without necessitating a change in the social division of labour of the parties involved, the position being approximated by the four co-ordinates of relations of production described before, namely the relations in respect of co-operation, relation of control, relation of exploitation and finally property relation.
- (2) the conflict is not of a transient character - that is without a historical dimension.
- (3) the conflict should be of such a degree that no stable coalition can be engaged over long periods between the parties involved.

We shall now discuss these three points in a greater detail.

The first point states that contradictions are conflicts that primarily arise due to an individual's position in the structure

of relations of production and are integral aspects of that position. For example, conflicts between a worker and a capitalist can be called a contradiction and so far as the economic agents occupy these two positions respectively, this contradiction is irreconcilable. But the competition and the conflict arising thereof between two capitalists is not <sup>usually</sup> a contradiction since that conflict can be reconciled by merger, cartel formation etc. without them ceasing to be capitalists. The second point suggests that we are talking about conflicts which are properties of the given structure of relations of production and cannot be reduced to mere interpersonal conflicts which may be resolved by mutual consent of the two parties. The conflicts cannot be also resolved by suitable state policies. In other words, the interests of two parties are of such fundamental nature that even when the economic conditions change a great deal, the interests remain in conflict with each other. For example, enactment of minimum wage legislation, tax on super profits, unemployment allowance etc. do not change the basic conflict between the interests of the wage earners and the profit making capitalists.

To illustrate the third point, let us consider the example of capitalists and workers. Suppose an individual capitalist co-operates with the workers employed by him to edge out another capitalist from competition. This co-operation can be of some gain to the workers, only if the distribution of income changes in their favour as a result of the co-operation, but such a change goes against the interest of the capitalist concerned. On the contrary, a co-operation between the two capitalists will be helpful to both of them, in so far as this gives rise to monopoly position making

them monopolistic buyers in the labour market and monopoly producers in the product market.

Classes can now be defined in terms of contradiction.

Firstly the members of any class should occupy similar positions in the structure of production relations, without having any contradiction (but conflicts other than contradiction may remain) among themselves. Secondly two classes are distinguished from each other by the presence of contradiction between the members of two classes. In other words there exists intra class conflicts and inter class contradictions.

Adopting the language of statistics, we may state that classes should be such groupings that intra group conflicts are dominated by the inter group conflicts (i.e. contradictions). As we do in cluster analysis, we are trying to define classes as clusters of economic agents such that intra cluster distances (i.e. intra class conflicts) are relatively insignificant compared to the inter cluster distances (i.e. between classes contradictions).

The similarity of the concepts, however, is strictly limited. In analysis of variances or in cluster analysis, variabilities or distances between any two groupings and within any one grouping are measured in a same uniform scale. But in class-analysis, intra class conflicts are of a qualitatively different nature from the conflicts (the contradiction, to be precise) existing between two classes and there is no accepted scale or unit for measuring either of them. Furthermore, in cluster analysis one deals with an exhaustive stratification of the underlying population. But classes do not constitute an exhaustive stratification of economic agents, - that is

economic agents may exist who cannot be included in any class.

Finally classes should not be understood as a mere grouping of economic agents and class analysis as just a classificatory problem. If classes do not form the bases for social practices (i.e. political and ideological) of the individual members of classes, if class contradictions do not explain social changes, class analysis becomes a fruitless exercise. Thus, unlike in cluster analysis, there is an independent way to test the validity of a particular class analysis - that is in terms of its usefulness in any study of the dynamics of the society concerned.

Notes

- 1/ See the article "Class, class struggle" by Klaus von Beyme in *Marxism, Communism and Western society* Vol.2 (ed) b, C.D.Kerning pp 1-19, Herder and Herder, New York 1973.
- 2/ Adam Smith: *The Wealth of Nation*, Vol.1, Every Man's Library Education New York 1964, pp 46.
- 3/ David Ricardo: Preface to "On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation" included in the *Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo* (ed) by P.Sraffa, Cambridge University Press, 1975. pp 5.
- 4/ Quoted in G.Plekhanov: *Development of the Morist view of history*; Progress Publishers, Moscow 1974. p 26.
- 5/ Lucio Colletti: *From Rousseau to Lenin*, Ne Left Books, London 1972. p 14.
- 6/ See Emile' Durkheim: *The Division of Labour in Society*. Glencoe III, Free Press, 1960.  
Talcott Parsons: "A revised analytical approach to the theory of social stratification", pp 92-128 in Reinhard Bendix and Seymour Martin Lipset (ed): *Class, Status and Power* (1st edn:)  
Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E Moore: "Some Principles of Stratification", pp 47-53 in Bendir and Lipset (op.cit) First Edn:
- 7/ Max Weber: "Class Status and Party" - reproduced in Bendix and Lipset (op.cit) 2nd Edn: 1970 p.21.
- 8/ Max Weber: *The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation* (ed), by T.Parsons (TSEO), 1966. New York Free Press.
- 9/ Max Weber: "Class Status and Party" (op.cit) pp 22.
- 10/ TSEO - (op.cit) p.425
- 11/ *ibid.* p 425
- 12/ *ibid* p 426
- 13/ *ibid* p426
- 14/ *ibid* p 425
- 15/ *ibid* p 429
- 16/ Weber: *Class Status and Party* (op.cit) p 24.
- 17/ TSEO (op.cit) p 429

- 18/ *ibid* p 429
- 19/ Karl Marx: Capital Vol.3, Foreign Language Publishing House, Moscow 1961. pp 862-863.
- 20/ Quoted from Marx's letter to P.V. Anselvkov Dec.28,1846 published in Marx Englos Selected Works (MESW) (3 Vols) Vol.1 Progress Publishers, Moscow 1969.
- 21/ MESW, Vol 1 p 30
- 22/ MESW, Vol 1 p 20
- 23/ Capital Vol.1 Progress Publishers Moscow 1977. pp 308
- 24/ *ibid* pp 314
- 25/ "Manifesto of the Communist Party" in MESW (op.cit) Vol2 pp 377
- 26/ Engels's introduction to "The Class Struggle in France" in MESW (Vol.1) p 190.
- 27/ "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" in MESW, Vol.1 p 404
- 28/ *ibid* p 479
- 29/ The German Ideology in MESW Vol.1 p 65
- 30/ Nicos Poulantzas: "Classes in Contemporary Capitalism" Verso Edn: London 1978 p-14.
- 31/ *ibid* p 14
- 32/ *ibid* p 14
- 33/*ibid* p 15
- 34/ *ibid* p 15
- 35/ *ibid* p 15
- 36/ *ibid* p 16
- 37/ *ibid* p 16
- 38/ *ibid* p. 16
- 39/ *ibid* p 16
- 40/ Erik Olin Wright: Class, Crisis and the State, Verso Edn, London 1979. p 61.



41/ ibid p 62

42/ ibid p 73

43/ ibid p 88

44/ Guglielmo Carchede: On the Economic Identification of Social Classes, Routledge and Kegan Paul Pvt.Ltd. (Direct Edn) London 1977 p.49

45/ ibid p 81

46/ ibid p 81

47/ Our approach outlined below draws heavily from an unpublished paper by Prof.Ashok Rudra, titled "Emerging Class Structure in Indian Agriculture".

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