

SECTION VI: POPULAR CLASSES IN ADVANCED CAPITALISM

I. Introduction to This Section of Study

The purpose of this week's section of study is to sketch the parameters of the popular classes in the contemporary US.--popular classes that are more or less typical of advanced monopoly capitalist societies. The reason we are doing this is that, of the myriad of contradictions that determine the development of US society, it is the contradictions of class that are most fundamental. What Marx and Engels recognized so long ago remains true today: the class struggle is the main motor force of history.

This however, is not to say that class contradictions, and the class struggles that they generate, are the only important contradictions. In the US today there are two other types of contradiction and struggle that are absolutely crucial. These are the contradictions of racism and oppression of national minorities, and the contradictions of sexism and the oppression of women. Neither racism nor sexism are simply "by products" of class contradictions, nor can either be reduced to simple "tricks" propagated by the ruling class to divide the oppressed classes, as dogmatists tend to believe. Both racism and sexism have dynamics and histories of their own, and they must be carefully studied by revolutionary Marxists.

Nevertheless, we believe that class contradictions are the principle contradictions, in the sense that Mao used this concept. Class struggle most conditions and influences the nature and direction of the other contradictions. The class contradictions of monopoly capitalist society ultimately determine the forms and functions of racism and sexism.

Thus we are focusing first on the particularities of class this week, then on sexism and racism in the following weeks. It is important that we attempt to understand each of these sets of contradictions in themselves, and also how they inter-relate and determine each other. Only then will we have a grasp on how to approach the main contradictions that we face in the contemporary US.

II. The Readings for this Week

Our readings on popular classes (ie. oppressed classes) in the US are not meant to be comprehensive in any sense. Rather we chose these readings because they highlight certain important aspects of the analysis of classes. Previously in this study group and elsewhere we have all read a good deal about classes; hopefully this week's readings will stimulate all of us to recall and rethink the ideas we already hold on this question. And our discussion should draw on all of our ideas and knowledge--not just this small sampling of the literature.

A word or two needs to be said here about the complexity of the problem of classes. Some Marxist-Leninists feel that classes can be identified by simply (and dogmatically) applying a formula or two. Unfortunately, when these people face concrete reality, their class analysis tends to become useless: they formally divide up the population into good guys and bad guys and either isolate themselves politically when nobody acts like they are "supposed to", or implicitly abandon their analysis and pragmatically react from moment to moment. In both

cases the analysis of classes fails to have any scientific explanatory or predictive power and is useless as a guide to practice.

To be of any use at all, the analysis of classes must be made on at least three levels. First is the structural determination of classes or the study of the basic structure of social relations that generate the classes of a given society. Our readings concentrate on this level of analysis.

The second level is the historical formation of classes, the actual anatomy of various classes as they are formed in the class struggle and exist at any given moment. No class is comprised only of those involved in the particular social relations of production. For example, the working class is not made up of just those who exchange their labor power for a wage but of their families as well. Moreover, every class elaborates political and ideological representatives who may not be involved in the determining social relations of that class, but who are bound to the class by various representative ties. More needs to be said here, but there is no space.

The third level is the study of the concrete forms of struggle, the concrete aspirations of a given class. In other words, the study of the contradiction between the fundamental interests of a class, and the forms that these interests take historically under the influence of the ruling ideology. For example, the fact that most US workers think of themselves as "middle class" does not make them any less "working class", but it does tell us important (but not obvious) things about the current situation of the US proletariat.

One final comment on the analysis of classes: to study classes as a whole is not enough, it is also necessary to study the fractions, sectors, and strata within classes. Last week we saw how important the analysis of class fractions was to Mao; our readings for this week should make this even clearer.

A. Lenin's definition of class from the "Great Beginning"

This short, well-known definition of class contains all of the major elements of the structural determination of classes in very summary form. In discussion we can use this quotation as a basis for a broader discussion of the definition of class. (Lenin's definition is appended to this study guide)

B. Marx's "The Factory" from Capital

This chapter from Capital discusses the structural determination of the industrial fraction of the proletariat from the combination of the capitalist forces and relations of production. It presupposes the understanding that the proletariat as a whole is determined in one aspect by its exchange of its labor power (its only "property") for a wage. Though it is a very "pregnant" piece, and should aid us in or discussion, it may be somewhat difficult to read, so we want to provide some guidelines.

When Marx writes about the forces and relations of production he often either uses synonyms, or speaks of aspects of these two structures. For instance, he often uses the terms "forces of production" and "labor process" interchangeably. Both concepts mean the same thing: specific relationships between particular types of producers, means of

labor (tools, machinery, etc.), and objects of labor (raw materials). Moreover, when he uses the concept "cooperation" he is referring to an aspect of the labor process: the manner in which producers inter-relate and the form of the division of labor. Also Marx uses capitalist "relations of production", "relations of exploitation", and the "process of creating surplus value" as equivalents, for reasons with which we are familiar.

Marx's major point in this piece is that the industrial working class is not determined by the relations of production and exploitation alone, but also by the specifically capitalist form of the labor process. In Socialism, Utopian and Scientific Engels referred to this as the "socialization" of the forces of production. To make this point Marx constantly compares the forms of cooperation of "manufacture"--the stage of embryonic capitalism when capitalist relations of production co-existed with a pre-capitalist, "handicraft" labor process--to forms of cooperation in "modern" (capitalist) industry. For Marx the forces and relations of production never exist in isolation from each other but are always combined and deeply condition each other.

If all of this is a bit confusing, it is worth struggling with--we will collectively clarify it in study group.

A last reference that should aid in reading Marx: Dr. Ure, against whom Marx polemicizes, was a leading ideological representative of the industrial fraction of the English bourgeoisie in the early 19th century.

C. Selections from Braverman's Labor and Monopoly Capital

Our selections from Braverman deal with the general definition and characteristics of the working class and the bureaucratic petty bourgeoisie, with the clerical and service sectors of the proletariat, and with the reserve army of labor. Braverman's book draws very heavily on the section of Capital that includes the chapter on "The Factory", and it represents an important extension of this facet of Marx's analysis. Moreover, Braverman is rather easy to read--although this can be deceptive. It is important for the reader to pay close attention to Braverman's structural analysis, for his somewhat off-handed style often obscures important points. Other than this, little introduction is necessary to our selections from this crucial work.

III. The Discussion for this Week

Because, as noted above, the readings for this week are meant to be a stimulant for broad discussion--a discussion that brings in other knowledge and experience--we suggest that the discussion follow these topics:

- general concept of social class and its structural determinants
- definition and conceptualization of the working class as a whole
- industrial fraction of the working class
- clerical sector of the working class
- service sector of working class
- the reserve army of labor

other fractions and sectors of the proletariat not mentioned in the reading

the bureaucratic petty bourgeoisies

other classes and fractions of classes

sum-up on the importance of the analysis of classes

While some of these topics will depend largely on one of the readings, we should attempt as much as possible to draw from several readings (and again, our previous knowledge) when addressing each topic. And, though the readings concentrate on the structural determination of class, we should go beyond this in discussion to take up classes as they exist, class interests, ramifications for our political work, etc.

We can only scratch the surface of the problem of class this week. Our goal should be to come out of the discussion with an analytical orientation toward this problem. And since this discussion will be somewhat different from earlier ones, we should end by evaluating its successes and weaknesses.

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QUOTE FROM LENIN'S THE GREAT BEGINNING:

"Classes are large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated by law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organization of labor, and consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it. Classes are groups of people one of which can appropriate the labor of another owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy."