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## **“Class Analysis in the Modern Communist Movement”**

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## MARXISM AND CLASS : SOME DEFINITIONS

A paper from the COMMUNIST LEAGUE (Britain)

### The Concept of Social Class

The concept of social class as

" . . . a division or order of society according to status",  
( 'The Oxford English Dictionary', Volume 3; Oxford; 1989; p. 279).

is a very ancient one, the English word 'class' being derived from the Latin 'classis', meaning each of the

" . . . ancient divisions of the Roman people".  
(Charles T. Onions (Ed.): 'The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology'; Oxford; 1985; p. 180).

Servius Tullius, king of Rome in the 6th century BC, organised a classification system

" . . . which divided citizens into five classes according to wealth".  
( 'New Encyclopaedia Britannica', Volume 10; Chicago; 1994; p. 455).

### The Marxist Definition of Class

Marxist-Leninists accept the concept of social class put forward above, but hold that a person's social class is determined not by the amount of his wealth, but by the source of his income as determined by his relation to labour and to the means of production.

"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 organisation of labour, and, consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and their mode of acquiring it".  
(Vladimir I. Lenin: 'A Great Beginning: Heroism of the Workers in the Rear: 'Communist Subbotniks' in: 'Collected Works', Volume 29; Moscow; 1965; p. 421).

To Marxist-Leninists, therefore, the class to which a person belongs is determined by objective reality, not by someone's opinion.

On the basis of the above definition, Marxist-Leninists distinguish three basic classes in 19th century Britain:

"There are three great social groups, whose members . . . live on wages, profit and ground rent respectively".  
(Karl Marx: 'Capital: A Critique of Political Economy', Volume 3; Moscow; 1971; p. 886).

These three basis classes are 1) the proletariat or working class, 2) the

bourgeoisie or capitalist class and 3) the landlord class, respectively.

### The Landlord Class

Marxist-Leninists define the landlord class as that class which owns land and derives its income from ground rent on that land:

"Land becomes . . . personified and . . . gets on its hind legs to demand . . . its share of the product created with its help . . .: rent".  
(Karl Marx: 'Capital: A Critique of Political Economy'. Volume 3; Moscow; 1971; p. 824-25).

With the development of capitalist society, however, the landlord class progressively loses its importance and a new class emerges -- the petty bourgeoisie. Thus, in a developed capitalist society, there are still three basic classes, but these are now: 1) the capitalist class or bourgeoisie; 2) the petty bourgeoisie; and 3) the working class or proletariat:

"Every capitalist country . . . is basically divided into three main forces: the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat".  
(Vladimir I. Lenin: 'Constitutional Illusions', in: 'Collected Works', Volume 6; Moscow; 1964; p. 202),

### The Bourgeoisie

The English word 'bourgeoisie' is derived from the French word 'bourgeoisie' meaning

" . . . the trading middle class"  
(Charles T. Onions (Ed.): op. cit.; p. 110).

as distinct from the landlord class.

Marxist-Leninists define the bourgeoisie or capitalist class as

" . . . the class of modern capitalists, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage labour".  
(Friedrich Engels: Note to: Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels: 'Manifesto of the Communist Party' in: Karl Marx: 'Selected Works', Volume 1; London; 1943; p. 204).

The capitalist class includes persons whose remuneration may come nominally in the form of a salary, but which is in fact due to their position in the capitalist class (e.g., the directors of large companies). It also includes persons who are not employers, but who serve the capitalist class in high administrative positions:

"The latter group contains sections of the population who belong to the big bourgeoisie: all the rentiers (living on the income from capital and real estate . . .), then part of the intelligentsia, the high military and civil officials, etc."  
(Vladimir I. Lenin: 'The Development of Capitalism in Russia', in: 'Collected Works', Volume 3; Moscow; 1960; p. 504).

It also includes the dependents of these persons.



### The Proletariat

The English word 'proletariat' is derived from the Latin 'proles', meaning 'offspring', since according to Roman law a proletarian served the state

" . . . not with his property, but only with his offspring".  
(Charles T. Onions (Ed.): *ibid.*; p. 714).

Marxist-Leninists define the proletariat or working class as

". . . that class of modern wage labourers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order to live".

(Friedrich Engels: Note to the 1888 English Edition of: Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels: 'Manifesto of the Communist Party', in: 'Selected Works', Volume 1; London; 1943; p. 204).

In modern society,

". . . the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class".  
(Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels: 'Manifesto of the Communist Party' in: Karl Marx: 'Selected Works', Volume 1; London; 1943; p. 216).

so that, in producing the proletariat, the bourgeoisie produces

" . . . its own gravediggers".

(Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels: 'Manifesto of the Communist Party' in: Karl Marx: 'Selected Works', Volume 1; London; 1943; p. 218).

### The 'Middle Class'

The term 'middle class' is used by Marxists -- including Marx and Engels themselves -- in two different ways:

Firstly, in the historical sense,

" . . . in the sense of . . . the French word 'bourgeoisie' . . . that possessing class which is differentiated from the so-called aristocracy".

(Friedrich Engels: Preface to 'The Condition of the Working Class in England: From Personal Observation and Authentic Sources', in: Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels: 'Collected Works', Volume 4; Moscow; 1975; p. 304).

secondly, when speaking of modern capitalist society, with the meaning of 'petty bourgeoisie', discussed in the next section.

### The Petty Bourgeoisie

Between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, stands the petty bourgeoisie:

"In countries where modern civilisation has become fully developed, a new class of petty bourgeois has been formed"

(Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels: 'Manifesto of the Communist Party' in: Karl Marx: 'Selected Works', Volume 1; London; 1943; p. 231).

The English term 'petty bourgeoisie' is an anglicisation of the French

term 'petite bourgeoisie', meaning 'little bourgeoisie'. Marxist-Leninists define the petty bourgeoisie as a class which owns or rents small means of production which it operates largely without employing wage labour, but often with the assistance of members of their families:

"A petty bourgeois is the owner of small property".

(Vladimir I. Lenin: Note to: 'To the Rural Poor', in: 'Selected Works', Volume 2; London; 1944; p. 254).

As a worker, the petty bourgeois has interests in common with the proletariat; as owner of means of production, however, he has interests in common with the bourgeoisie. In other words, the petty bourgeoisie has a divided allegiance towards the two decisive classes in capitalist society.

Thus, the 'independent' petty bourgeois producer

" . . . is cut up into two persons. As owner of the means of production he is a capitalist; as a labourer he is his own wage-labourer".

(Karl Marx: 'Theories of Surplus Value', Part 1; Moscow; undated; p. 395).

and consequently petty bourgeois

" . . . are for ever vacillating between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie".

(Josef V. Stalin: 'The Logic of Facts', in: 'Works', Volume 4; Moscow; 1953; p. 143).

This divided allegiance between the two decisive classes in modern capitalist society applies also to a section of employed persons -- those who are involved in superintendence and the lower levels of management -- e.g., foremen, charge-hands, departmental managers, etc. These employees have a supervisory function, a function is to ensure that the workers produce a maximum of surplus value for the employer. On the one hand, such persons are exploited workers, with interests in common with the proletariat (from which they largely spring); on the other hand, their position as agents of the management in supervising the efficient exploitation of their fellow employees gives them interests in common with the bourgeoisie:

"An industrial army of workmen, under the command of a capitalist, requires, like a real army, officers (managers) and sergeants (foremen, overlookers) who, while the work is being done, command in the name of the capitalist".

(Karl Marx: 'Capital: An Analysis of Capitalist Production', Volume 1; Moscow; 1959; p. 332).

"The labour of supervision and management . . . has a double nature.

. . .

On the one hand, all labour in which many individuals cooperate necessarily requires a commanding will to coordinate and unify the process. . . . This is a productive job. . . . On the other hand, . . . this supervision work necessarily arises in all modes of production based on the antithesis between the labourer, as the direct producer, and the owner of the means of production. The greater this antagonism, the greater the role played by supervision".

(Karl Marx: 'Capital: A Critique of Political Economy', Volume 3; Moscow;



1971; p. 383-84).

Because of this divided allegiance, which corresponds to that of the petty bourgeoisie proper, Marxist-Leninists place such employees (and their dependents) in the petty bourgeoisie. For the same reason, Marxist-Leninists also place persons in the middle and lower ranks of the coercive forces of the capitalist state -- the army and police -- (and their dependents) in the petty bourgeoisie

#### The Polarisation of Capitalist Society

Because of the small size of their means of production, petty-bourgeois are in constant danger of sinking into the proletariat:

"The lower strata of the middle class . . . sink gradually into the proletariat, partly because their diminutive capital . . . is swamped in the competition with the large capitalists, partly their specialised skill is rendered worthless by new methods of production"  
(Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels: 'Manifesto of the Communist Party' in: Karl Marx: 'Selected Works', Volume 1; London; 1943; p. 213).

"The working class gains recruits from the higher strata of society . . . A mass of petty industrialists and small rentiers are hurled down into its ranks".  
(Karl Marx: 'Wage-Labour and Capital', in: 'Selected Works', Volume 1; London; 1943' p. 280).

and even the old, once highly respected petty bourgeois professions become proletarianised:

"The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourers".  
(Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels: 'Manifesto of the Communist Party', in: Karl Marx: 'Selected Works', Volume 1; London; 1943; p. 208).

Thus, as capitalist society develops, it becomes increasingly polarised into two basic classes -- wealthy bourgeois and poor proletarians:

"Society as a whole is more and more splitting up . . . into two great classes facing each other -- bourgeoisie and proletariat".  
(Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels: 'Manifesto of the Communist Party', in: Karl Marx: 'Selected Works', Volume 1; London; 1943; p. 205-06).

"Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, moral degradation, at the oposite pole"  
(Karl Marx: 'Capital: A Critique of Political Economy'. Volume 1; Moscow; 1959; p. 645).

#### The Peasantry

The English word 'peasant' is derived from the Latin 'pagus', meaning a

" . . . country district".  
(Charles T. Onions (Ed.): op. cit.; p. 660).

and is defined as

" . . . one who lives in the country and works on the land".  
( 'The Oxford English Dictionary', Volume 11; Oxford; 1989; p.402).

The above definition excludes the landlord class from the peasantry since, even if a landlord 'lives in the country' he does not 'work on the land' , but derives his income from ground rent.

The peasantry do not form a class of society, but consist of a number of different classes which live in the country and work on the land:

"It is best to distinguish the rich, the middle and the poor peasants"

(Vladimir I. Lenin: 'To the Rural Poor: An Explanation for the Peasants of what the Social-Democrats want' (hereafter listed as 'Vladimir I. Lenin (1903)', in 'Selected Works', Volume 2; London; 1944; p. 261).

The peasantry is composed of:

Firstly, rich peasants, or rural capitalists, who employ labour, that is, who exploit poorer peasants:

"One of the main features of the rich peasants is that they hire farmhands and day labourers. Like the landlords, the rich peasants also live by the labour of others. . . . They try to squeeze as much work as they can out of their farmhands, and pay them as little as possible".  
(Vladimir I. Lenin (1903: *ibid.*; p. 265).

Sometimes rich peasants are called 'kulaks', a word derived from the Russian 'kulak', originally meaning a

" . . . tight-fisted person".  
( 'The Oxford English Dictionary', Volume 8; Oxford; 1989; p. 543).

Secondly, the middle peasants or the rural petty bourgeoisie, who own or rent land but who do not employ labour. Speaking of the middle peasantry, Lenin says:

"Only in good years and under particularly favourable conditions is the independent husbandry of this type of peasant sufficient to maintain him and for that reason his position is a very unstable one. In the majority of cases the middle peasant cannot make ends meet without resorting to loans to be repaid by labour, etc., without seeking 'subsidiary' earnings on the side".  
(Vladimir I. Lenin: 'The Development of Capitalism in Russia', in: 'Collected Works', Volume 1; p. 235).

Thirdly, the poor peasants or rural proletariat.

The poor peasant lives

" . . . not by the land, not by his farm, but by working for wages. . . . He . . . has ceased to be an independent farmer and has become a hireling, a proletarian".  
(Vladimir I. Lenin (1900): *op. cit.*; p. 265-67).



Sometimes Marxist-Leninists describe poor peasants as

" . . . semi-proletarians",  
(Vladimir I. Lenin (1900): *ibid.*; p. 267).

to distinguish them from urban proletarians, regarded as 'full' proletarians.

### 'Neo-Marxism'

'Revisionism' is

" . . . a trend hostile to Marxism. within Marxism itself".  
(Vladimir I. Lenin: 'Marxism and Revisionism', in: 'Collected Works',  
Volume 15; Moscow; 1963; p. 32).

In other words, a revisionist poses as a Marxist but in fact puts forward a programme which objectively serves the interests of a bourgeoisie:

"The revisionists spearheaded their struggle mainly against Marxism-Leninism . . . and replaced this theory with an opportunist, counter-revolutionary theory in the service of the bourgeoisie and imperialism".  
(Enver Hoxha: Report to the 5th Congress of the Party of Labour of Albania, in: 'Selected Works', Volume 4; Tirana; 1982; p. 190).

Despite all the torrents of propaganda levelled against it, Marxism-Leninism still retains enormous prestige among working people all over the world. It is for this reason that many modern revisionists call themselves 'Neo-Marxists' or 'Western Marxists' -- claiming that they are not revising Marxism, but merely bringing it up to date, bringing into the age of the electronic computer which Marx and Engels never knew.

In general, 'neo-Marxists' pay their loudest tributes to Marx's early writings, before he became a Marxist. 'Neo-Marxism' is essentially a product not merely of universities, but of the worst kind of university lecturer who equates obscurantism with intellectualism. One sees admiring students staggering from his lectures muttering 'What a brilliant man! I couldn't understand a word!'

Even sociologists sympathetic to 'neo-Marxism' speak of

" . . . the extreme difficulty of language characteristic of much of Western Marxism in the twentieth century".  
(Perry Anderson: 'Considerations of Western Marxism'; London; 1970; p. 54).

But, of course, this obscure language has a great advantage for those who use it, making it easy to claim, when challenged, that the challenger has misunderstood what one was saying.

Much 'Neo-Marxism' is an eclectic hotchpotch of Marxism with idealist philosophy -- giving it, it is claimed, a 'spiritual aspect' lacking in the original. A typical example is the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre who writes:

"I believe in the general schema provided by Marx",  
(Jean-Paul Sartre: 'Between Existentialism and Marxism'; London; 1974;  
p. 53),



but -- and it is a big 'but' -- it must be a 'Marxism' liberated from

" . . . the old guard of mummified Stalinists".  
(Jean-Paul Sartre: *ibid.*; p. 53).

And how, according to Sartre, is this 'liberation' to be effected? By merging it with the existentialism of the Danish idealist philosopher Soren Kierkegaard!

"Kierkegaard and Marx . . . institute themselves . . . as our future".  
(Jean-Paul Sartre: *ibid.*; p. 169).

However, this paper is concerned only with revisionist theories which are based on distortions of the Marxist-Leninist definition of class.

In particular, it will be concerned with 'neo-Marxist' definitions of the proletariat which narrow and restrict it as a class. While to these 'neo-Marxists' the proletariat may still be, in words, 'the gravedigger of capitalism', they portray it as a gravedigger equipped with a teaspoon instead of a spade.

#### The Unemployed

Some 'neo-Marxists' exclude the unemployed from the proletariat on the grounds that someone who is not working cannot be regarded as a member of the working class!

But Marx explicitly characterises the unemployed, the

" . . . industrial reserve army",  
(Karl Marx: 'Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production',  
Volume 1; Moscow; 1959; p. 628).

as part of the working class, as

" . . . a relative surplus population among the working class",  
(Karl Marx: 'Capital: A Critique of Political Economy', Volume 2;  
Moscow; 1974; p. 518).

and speaks of

" . . . the working class (now actively reinforced by its entire reserve army)".  
(Karl Marx: 'Capital: A Critique of Political Economy', Volume 2; Moscow;  
1974; p. 414).

Clearly, therefore, the founders of Marxism did not exclude the unemployed from the working class.

#### Non-Productive Labour

Other 'neo-Marxists' exclude all workers engaged in non-productive labour from the working class,

Certainly, for the purpose of analysing the complexities of capitalist society, Marx differentiated labour into productive and unproductive labour. According to Marx,

" . . . only that labour is productive which creates a surplus value".  
(Karl Marx: 'Theories of Surplus Value', Part 1; Moscow; n.d.; p. 45).

It is on this basis that the Greek revisionist Nicos Poulantzas excludes non-productive workers from the working class:

"I have a rather limited and restricted definition of the working class. . . .

The criterion of productive and unproductive labour is sufficient to exclude unproductive workers from the working class".

(Nicos Poulantzas: 'Classes in Contemporary Capitalism'; London; 1975; p. 119, 121).

Poulantzas therefore assigns non-productive workers to the

" . . . new petty bourgeoisie"  
(Nicos Poulantzas: *ibid.*; p. 117).

asserting that

" . . . the new petty bourgeoisie constitutes a separate class"  
(Nicos Poulantzas: *ibid.*; p. 115).

But

" . . . the distinction between productive and unproductive labour has nothing to do . . . with the particular speciality of the labour".  
(Karl Marx: 'Theories of Surplus Value', Part 1; Moscow; n.d.; p. 186).

The same kind of labour may be productive or unproductive:

"The same labour can be productive when I buy it as a capitalist, . . . and unproductive when I buy it as a consumer".  
(Karl Marx: 'Theories of Surplus Value', Part 1; Moscow; n.d.; p. 186).

For example, a teacher in a private school is engaged in productive labour (in the Marxist sense of the term), because his labour produces surplus value for the proprietors of the school. But a teacher in a state school, working under identical conditions, is engaged in unproductive labour, because his labour does not create surplus value.

Furthermore, many kinds of unproductive labour, such as the labour of clerical workers in a capitalist production firm,

" . . . while it does not create surplus value, enables him (the employer — Ed.) to appropriate surplus value which, in effect, amounts to the same thing with respect to his capital. It is, therefore, a source of profit for him".

(Karl Marx: 'Capital: A Critique of Political Economy', Volume 3; Moscow; 1971; p. 294).

Thus the question of whether an employee is engaged in productive or unproductive labour has no relevance to the question of whether he belongs to the proletariat.



The 'Labour Aristocracy'

In developed capitalist states,

" . . . the bourgeoisie, by plundering the colonial and weak nations, has been able to bribe the upper stratum of the proletariat with crumbs from the superprofits".

(Vladimir I. Lenin: Draft Programme of the RCP (B), in: 'Collected Works', Volume 29; Moscow; 1965; p. 104).

Superprofits are profits

" . . . obtained over and above the profits which capitalists squeeze out of the workers of their 'own' country".

(Vladimir I. Lenin: Preface to the French and German Editions of 'Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism', in: 'Collected Works', Volume 22; Moscow; 1964; p. 193).

Marxist-Leninists call employees in receipt of a share in such superprofits

" . . . the labour aristocracy".  
(Vladimir I. Lenin: *ibid.*; p. 194).

Some 'neo-Marxists' exclude employees who share in superprofits from the proletariat. Thus, according to the London-based 'Finsbury Communist Association', in Britain

" . . . the proletariat consists of the workers on subsistence wages or below"  
(Finsbury Communist Association: 'Class and Party in Britain'; London; 1966; p. 4).

However, Lenin defines the labour aristocracy as a part of the proletariat, as a

" . . . privileged upper stratum of the proletariat",  
(Vladimir I. Lenin: 'Imperialism and the Split in Socialism', in: 'Collected Works', Volume 23; Moscow; 1965; p. 110).

as

" . . . the upper stratum of the proletariat",  
(Vladimir I. Lenin: Draft Programme of the RCP (B), in: 'Collected Works', Volume 29; Moscow; 1965; p. 104).

as

" . . . the top strata of the working class".  
(Vladimir I. Lenin: 'How the Bourgeoisie utilises Renegades', in: 'Collected Works', Volume 30; Moscow; 1965; p. 34).

Furthermore, while Lenin characterises the 'labour aristocracy' as

" . . . an insignificant minority of the working class",  
(Vladimir I. Lenin: 'Under a False Flag', in: 'Collected Works', Volume 21; Moscow; 1964; p. 152).

the 'Finsbury Communist Association' presents it

" . . . the overwhelming majority of Britain's workers'"  
(Finsbury Communist Association: 'Class and Party in Britain'; London;  
1966; p. 5),.4).

Thus, according to the 'Finsbury Communist Association', the British imperialists pay the overwhelming majority of Britain's workers' above the value of their labour power. Since there is not even a Marxist-Leninist party, much less a revolutionary situation, in Britain at present, this can only be out of the sheer goodness of their hearts!

Clearly the 'neo-Marxist' picture of imperialism bears no relation to reality. It merely lends spurious support to the false thesis that, since the workers in developed capitaliist countries are 'exploiters', the future for socialism lies only in the less developed countries in the East!

#### Conclusion

THE MOST URGENT TASK FACING MARXIST-LENINISTS TODAY IS TO REBUILD UNIFIED MARXIST-LENINIST PARTIES IN EACH COUNTRY, UNITED IN A MARXIST-LENINIST INTERNATIONAL.

BUT SUCH PARTIES, AND SUCH AN INTERNATIONAL, CAN BE BUILT ONLY ON THE BASIS OF AGREEMENT ON MARXIST-LENINIST PRINCIPLES.

PERHAPS AGREEMENT TO ACCEPT A FEW SIMPLE DEFINITIONS PUT FORWARD LONG AGO BY THE FOUNDERS OF MARXISM-LENINISM, AND TO REJECT THEIR REVISIONIST DISTORTIONS, MIGHT CONSTITUTE A SMALL STEP IN THAT DIRECTION.

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