

An aerial photograph of a large, diverse crowd of people gathered on a paved street, likely for a festival or race. The people are wearing colorful clothing and some are holding flags. The street is lined with trees on the left and a sidewalk on the right. The overall scene is vibrant and busy.

EDITED BY

STANLEY ARONOWITZ  
MICHAEL ROBERTS

# CLASS

THE ANTHOLOGY

WILEY Blackwell



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# CLASS THE ANTHOLOGY

*Edited by Stanley Aronowitz  
and Michael J. Roberts*

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**WILEY** Blackwell

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# General Introduction

*Stanley Aronowitz and Michael J. Roberts*

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This volume of documents, classic articles and original analysis by the editors remains controversial on several grounds. Despite the growing evidence that the global economy is dominated by a handful of leading corporations and the very rich individuals who control them, the conventional wisdom is that we live in a world of mom and pop enterprises. Accordingly, most citizens of the most industrially developed countries are termed “middle class.” For those who do not own their own businesses, we measure class by income and by consumption. Beneath this vast social group is the relatively small corps of the poor, a diminishing proportion of the population.

Mainstream political science insists that there is no ruling class or power elite in the functions of the state. Following the dictum, most forcefully established in the late 1950s by Yale political scientist Robert Dahl, whose book *Who Governs?* remains a bible for many, American politics consists of a plurality of organizations, including business, political parties, pressure groups on single issues, and unions, none of which, in advance, constitutes the leading edge of governance. This idea of American classlessness can be traced back to the immensely influential book *Why There is No Socialism in the United States* (1906) by the German economist and sociologist Werner Sombart. Sombart advanced the thesis that the workers were not a class in the European sense. They did not exhibit solidarity as a class because America is really the land of opportunity. It had no feudal tradition and possessed unlimited natural and economic resources. The urban political machines address and often solve the most pressing issues facing workers outside the workplace. Yet in subsequent years, especially the 1930s, 1940s and 1960s, American workers engaged in some of the sharpest strikes, factory occupations and demonstrations of any working class in advanced industrial capitalism, most of which were unauthorized by law.<sup>1</sup> Even so, conventional social science remains adamant that class plays a subordinate or no role in the conduct of politics and the political economy. According to this view, the United States is a middle class society with a tiny stratum of the rich and a slightly larger underclass of the poor, who are declining over time. And the poor are poor because their families are dysfunctional or they lack the energy and the will to take advantage of prevailing opportunities to lift themselves out of poverty. Some anthropologists and sociologists advanced the theory that the poor wallow in a “culture of poverty” that effectively cuts them off from mainstream society. In the absence of outside intervention, either by the state or by private philanthropies this culture, it is held, is self-reproducing. Among the leading scholars of this position were Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Nathan Glazer, whose book *Beyond the Melting Pot* stirred fierce debate in the 1960s when the question of poverty commanded the nation’s attention and became a subject of national policy.

However, the most disputed idea that underlies this project is that we declare that our societies are constituted by three classes: a capitalist ruling class consisting of the tycoons of finance, the top political managers, the corporate elite, and in the United States what C. Wright Mills termed the “warlords” at the pinnacle of the military; a middle class of small business owners and salaried professionals and technical operatives who still enjoy some autonomy in the performance of their work; and the working class, employed or not, with decent or low income, who have little or no control over their labor.<sup>2</sup> More, we argue that class and class conflict has riven society throughout the history of capitalism and, indeed, constitutes how capitalism has developed. Capital accumulation is not an automatic process initiated solely by investment. It is spurred by economic and social struggles. When force does not work, the demands of labor are often met by capitalists through the introduction of job-destroying technologies that may yield higher wages, but to fewer employees. Capitalism has penetrated agriculture in these societies, so that there is no longer a peasantry. Capitalist agriculture is almost entirely industrialized; it imposes a factory-like division of labor, hours of work and forms of supervision. Most people who work the land are either a diminishing group of small producers, seasonal laborers on middle sized farms, many of whom are immigrants, often undocumented, or workers for giant agricultural corporations. The developing world, which still has billions of peasants – small owners, tenant farmers, subsistence farmers, workers on state or privately-owned industrial farms – has experienced, over the last 40 years, an explosion in manufacturing industry. The primary site for the industrialization is China. Following the death in 1977 of Mao, the revolution’s key figure, the leadership of the Communist Party began a major program of industrialization. In predominantly peasant society, its first task was to create a working class. With a population of over a billion, it adopted the most extensive enclosure in human history. The expulsion of farm labor from the countryside made the parallel effort of the British seventeenth and eighteenth centuries look like a tea party. In the 1980s and 1990s, 150 million people were driven from the land into China’s major cities.<sup>3</sup> There they were employed in construction, factories and urban service industries, and some remained unemployed pending economic expansion. Second, under state control, the government invited foreign private capital to establish industrial plants and other enterprises. Third, the state began a program of expanded vocational and higher education to train skilled workers, scientific and technical personnel and managers. In contrast to the years following the conquest of power in 1949, the party and the government were eager to learn from the capitalist West, and to import its technologies. For example, scientists, engineers and students were sent abroad to acquire knowledge and training in their respective fields and western consultants were brought to China to train the indigenous population in management skills and technical fields.

By 2000 China was already a major global industrial power. It quickly overtook western countries in the production of textiles, shoes and clothing, but moved beyond light manufacturing to heavy machinery such as construction vehicles, electronics (computers, telephones and other equipment), petrochemicals and, within a few years, automobiles. Much of its industrial production was destined for export; its main internal market was among the growing middle class of small producers and professionals. The regime retained a substantial state sector, but the emphasis on attracting private capital marked a new phase in the country’s history. China’s exports to the United States and Europe far

exceeded its imports. By 2010, China was supplying inexpensive cars to the growing middle class of Southeast Asia and was beginning to penetrate the African and Latin American markets.

Working and living conditions in the private sector were, in the main, abysmal. The 1990s witnessed the beginning of a steady wave of worker protest against these conditions. Workers demanded higher wages, but also fought for decent working conditions and housing. The state permitted strikes and demonstrations against private sector employers, but strictly forbid industrial action against state enterprises. Its argument was that because the Chinese state is a workers' state, workers cannot strike against themselves. Yet the past 20 years have been rife with class conflict. Since the early 1990s, official reports count the number of protests each year at about 7000; in recent years the number has reached nearly twice that amount.<sup>4</sup> In some instances the government and the private employers have responded by instituting reforms. In other cases, conditions have not materially improved. Workers are often required to labor for 12–16 hours a day and occasionally are forced to spend 30 hours or more on the job. Beyond the factory the government's vast urban development program has been met with resistance. As the government tore down thousands of residential buildings to make way for industrial plants and middle class housing, residents responded by what the official press termed "riots," which obliged the authorities to promise relocation to alternative housing, a promise not always fulfilled. Will the great proletarian revolution break out in China?

Following World War Two, experts left, right and center have, with numbing regularity, declared the era of class and class struggle at an end. In the advanced societies, workers enjoyed rising living standards brought about by a combination of economic growth in Western Europe and North America and the legalization of collective bargaining and state-sponsored social benefits. The strike weapon proved potent, providing upward pressure for change. While Europeans hesitate to call this phenomenon a symptom of the "bourgeoisification" of the working class, sociologists in the United Kingdom and the United States argued that workers had become "middle class" and the concept of struggle between classes was permanently overcome by welfare capitalism.<sup>5</sup> State and private pensions insured the continuation of economic security beyond employment; unemployment compensation effectively tided over those temporarily afflicted by recession or labor market instability. And in the years following the failure of Congress to enact national health insurance in 1949, unions incorporated health coverage in collectively-bargained contracts, and most, but not all non-union employers offered some kind of health plan to their workers in order to prevent further union organization. In addition, with the assistance of the Federal Government, many working class families were able, for the first time, to purchase single or two household homes.

The post-war boom which left millions behind lasted until about 1973. This was the year that President Richard Nixon took the United States off the gold standard in order to spur the economy, which after 1969 was stagnating. Already, in the late 1960s America was experiencing capital flight to developing countries and the US South, leaving New England, parts of the Midwest, and the Middle Atlantic states in an apparently permanent condition of decline. The new challenges to the US economy were wrought by the emergence of Japan and Europe as global economic powers and by the militancy of a considerable, highly unionized industrial labor force which fought against speedup and other productivity measures.<sup>6</sup> In the wake of declining productivity due, chiefly, to

worker resistance, US capital went on strike. It fought the workers by destroying jobs in two ways: outsourcing and, perhaps more important, introducing a new wave of technological innovation led by computerization of manual labor. In automobile manufacturing, machine tool manufacturing, steel, textiles, oil refining and chemical production, corporations shed workers even when they did not close plants. But they closed plants, too.

Once prosperous industrial cities like Homestead, PA, Detroit, Flint, Toledo, Akron, Youngstown and many others were either suddenly or gradually deindustrialized. The remaining labor force was reduced by as much as 60–70%, even as production levels did not suffer. For example, the basic and fabricating US steel labor force was 600,000 in 1960. By 2000 it had been reduced to slightly over 100,000, with no loss of tonnage production. The big three auto corporations had employed 750,000 workers in 1970; by 2000, threatened in part by foreign imports and by their own computerization on the production lines, they had no more than 200,000 workers and continued to shed workers in the early years of the twenty-first century, even as the industry revived from its doldrums in 2010. In 1960, there were 180,000 refinery workers in the oil industry. By 2010, even as production remained high, less than 40,000 were still employed.<sup>7</sup>

In Europe, Spain has a 20% unemployment rate, joblessness is rising in Italy and Portugal, and in Greece the economy is close to collapse. The demands of the European Union's financial managers for severe austerity measures in these countries as a price for bailout funds for the banks and other institutions of the financial system have met with varying degrees of resistance. Trade unions and Left parties have argued that the austerity is directed, much like US austerity, at workers' living standards. Already in Greece, for example, pensions for state employees, including academics, have been cut in half. Private sector wages have also suffered and social benefits are threatened everywhere. Among these countries, Greece is experiencing ongoing protest. The parties of the Left won a clear majority in the 2012 parliamentary elections, and the coalition of the groups calling itself Syriza enjoyed a stunning victory in the January 2015 election and is now leading Greece against the austerity programs designed by the captains of finance capital.<sup>8</sup> In Spain, the anti-austerity party Podemos was on the verge of winning national elections there, as Pablo Iglesias had a good chance of becoming the next Prime Minister.<sup>9</sup> Podemos lost ground in a recent election in June of 2016, but it is too soon to know if they can regain the ground that they lost.<sup>10</sup> The French elections resulted in the first Socialist government in 18 years, a victory that can only be ascribed to resistance to the austerity program of the previous Center-Right government of Sarkozy. Still, it remains to be seen whether the new Socialist regime will chart an independent course or submit to the harsh conditions set by the European Union's managers and by the conservative German Chancellor. Recent events have revealed that the Socialist government is suffering from internal strife, as strikes by workers resisting changes in the country's labor laws have significantly complicated the ability of the Socialist government to mediate class conflict.<sup>11</sup> Italy's technocratic regime that has been installed to administer austerity is highly unstable. From the Right as well as the Left, there have been challenges to the idea that the people must pay for the perfidy of the banks and other institutions of finance capital.

But America was not immune from protest against austerity from below. In 2006 a million marchers took to the streets of American cities and towns to demand immigration reform.<sup>12</sup> The protesters, who were composed, largely, of undocumented as well as legal immigrants, believed that their action would force the Federal government to enact a plan to legalize 11 million undocumented immigrants. Indeed, the administration of the Republican president, George W. Bush, called for changes in both statute and the

practice of government expulsion. But Congress was slow to act. The marchers could be confident that a new Democratic president and a Democratic Congress would heed their call. However, the 2008 Democratic sweep of the White House and Congress failed to fulfill the immigrant dream of citizenship. The newly elected president Barack Obama did not view his victory as a mandate for change. From the start, he assumed a defensive posture, as if he had barely squeaked through, despite a commanding majority in the poll. Most of the undocumented were working as low-paid laborers in various service industries or in the hugely important agricultural sector and were no burden on the public treasury. Nor did citizens clamor to take dishwashing jobs in restaurants or opportunities to pick apples, vegetables, strawberries and cotton. But these facts failed to deter the administration from undertaking a fierce campaign of deportation that far exceeded that of the previous Bush era. Indeed, according to *The Nation* magazine, Obama expanded an existing deportation program by 3,600 percent.<sup>13</sup>

Spring 2011 was a season of global discontent. In quick succession mass demonstrations in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and other Arab countries removed long-ruling dictators from their thrones.<sup>14</sup> The democratic impulse ran deep among all subordinate classes of society. But US media all but ignored the working class strikes and demonstrations that preceded and accompanied the protests in the center of Cairo.<sup>15</sup> For these media, the so-called "Arab Spring" was clearly a middle class series of events. If there was any difference within the movement it was termed religious versus secular, the army against the democrats, but the class struggle was conveniently left out. The fact that many workers walked out from the workplace and took to the streets was due, largely, to years of political and social repression and impossibly low wages reinforced by state-run trade unions as much as the government. Egypt, the largest country in North Africa and the Middle East, faced the problem of a military take-over that threatened to undermine and ultimately cancel the effect of liberal democratic elections, and the re-introduction of anti-working class force. In an unstable situation in 2012 it remained to be seen whether liberal democracy and an autonomous labor movement would survive.

After four years of economic slump, a new movement of protest and resistance emerged in the United States. The first sign of struggle occurred in Madison, Wisconsin. Following the shellacking sustained by the Democrats in the 2010 elections where the Republicans captured the House of Representatives and many statehouses and state legislatures changed hands as well, the newly elected right-wing Wisconsin governor Scott Walker, following the lead of his Indiana counterpart, Mitch Daniels, proposed abolition of collective bargaining for state employees, except on wages. In the spring of 2011, the labor movement, students and community activists responded with mass demonstrations at the state capital, including an occupation of the capital. It was not a one-day demonstration. Day after day up to 125,000 demonstrators showed up at the capital; teachers left their classrooms and students at the university stopped attending classes. Fourteen Democratic senators left town, depriving Walker of a quorum to pass the legislation.<sup>16</sup> As the movement gained momentum the Democrats proposed to recall four Republican senators and the governor. The forward march of direct action was diverted to electoral strategy. The Democrats regained a senate majority but the recall failed to topple the governor. But, after years of torpor, a section of the American labor movement had removed the scales from its eyes, for at least a moment. The Wisconsin struggle, which failed to reverse the anti-collective bargaining legislation, reverberated throughout the country. In Ohio, in a referendum, voters repealed a similar measure as Labor flexed its considerable muscle.

In September 2011, the class movement from below entered a new phase. Occupy Wall Street, without offering a list of specific demands, occupied Zuccotti Park, a sliver of land in the Wall Street area. The occupation, which gathered mostly young people, many of whom were unemployed college graduates, advanced only a single slogan, “We are the 99%,” and opposed themselves to the “1%,” who they claimed ran the economic and political institutions of the globe and had ruthlessly imposed a series of bank bailouts that would be paid for with working class and middle class tax dollars, a merciless transfer of wealth from the 99% to the 1%. A few weeks later the 200 occupiers, now supplemented by at least 500 others, attempted to block the Brooklyn Bridge. The demonstration was quickly met with a cordon of New York City riot police that beat some of the protesters and arrested more than 70 of them. The exhibition of police coercion electrified youth and activists throughout the United States and spread around the globe. Within days at least 110 American cities and smaller communities had Occupy movements: Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, Saint Louis, Detroit, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, Seattle and Providence, among others. In Oakland, dockers who were members of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union shut down the port in sympathy with the occupation, and in New York a demonstration and march of 20,000 pro-occupiers, many of whom were organized union members, filled the streets of the downtown area.<sup>17</sup>

Occupy movements sprouted in some Canadian, European and Southeast Asian cities such as London, Toronto and Hong Kong, and in Latin America in Mexico City, Santiago and Buenos Aires, among others. By late fall, 2011, the class nature of global power was exposed to public view. Occupy Wall Street organizers resisted calls from liberal supporters to advance specific demands, enter the electoral arena, and negotiate with city and state authorities. President Obama expressed sympathy with the movement, but did not come to the Washington Occupy site, let alone any of the more than 100 others. Mayors in some leading cities hesitated to break the occupation until in late November a conference call was convened among 18 mayors of cities where the occupation was particularly effective and visible. They decided, probably advised by the US Attorney General, to apply force to disperse the sites. Accordingly, under the pretext of security and sanitary concerns, a coordinated police action was implemented and dozens of sites were cleared. The Occupy movement did not entirely disappear but it was set back, in part, because the organizers did not seem to have a “plan B” to meet the eventuality that they would be removed from public space.

What differentiates the Occupy movement from other social movements? In the first place, the activists remained skeptical about suggestions made by their liberal supporters that they frame a specific series of demands. Their suspicion was motivated by a reading of the history of American social movements. Feminist, black freedom and environmental movements of recent vintage have sought amelioration of very pressing but relatively easy grievances for the power structure to address. Although the mass struggle for black civil rights was conducted over several decades of the twentieth century, its resolution was not genuine equality but two significant but limited legislative victories. The Voting Rights Act prohibited by law discriminatory state measures to exclude blacks from the vote. These included literacy tests, poll taxes and outright coercion. The Civil Rights Act was more far-reaching. For the first time since Reconstruction, the Federal government would enforce employment, housing and public accommodation discrimination, and the right of citizens to organize for their interests without facing the organized violence of the state. Similarly, women fought for and, in 1973, won abortion rights and

anti-discrimination measures at the Federal level on questions of employment. But abortion rights were granted by the Supreme Court rather than Congress. In *Roe v. Wade*, Justice Harry Blackmun, writing for the majority, invoked the privacy doctrine, not the equal protection under the 14th amendment, which Ruth Bader Ginsburg argued would have been a stronger rationale because it would have recognized women as a class.

The publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 was the intellectual event that spurred the emergence of the contemporary environmental movement. Within a decade, activists in Greenpeace and other organizations engaged in direct action against polluters, especially power companies that used fossil fuels, the US Navy, public institutions and some politicians. Their force was sufficiently potent to influence the Nixon administration to establish an Environmental Protection Agency with some enforcement powers. In subsequent years, the Agency faced strong opposition from conservatives and some unions, especially in the energy sector that was invested in coal and oil. As scientific evidence mounted in the 1980s and 1990s that showed the planet was experiencing severe climate change (global warming, sea level rise, tornadoes, drought, etc.) that would eventually threaten the supply of food and potable water and rain physical destruction on entire communities, the subject became a major public issue. The Right greeted the ecological crisis with systematic denial. The Left remained divided: while it did not repudiate the claim of global deterioration, it remained preoccupied with issues of economic justice, the definition of which grew narrower after 2000 as the employment and financial crises became endemic to all industrially advanced societies. As always, the progressive liberals vacillated between their reliance on political parties which they believed could enact legislative remedies, and institutions such as the United Nations which enjoyed the legitimacy of international law and public opinion.

The brilliant success of the political center was to persuade all of the major social movements, including the disability movement, to follow the playbook of the unions. Even though their most successful results had been won by direct action rather than electoral politics, at least initially, one by one they formed caucuses within the Democratic Party at the national and state levels. While not entirely renouncing direct action, especially in times of dire emergency, they largely surrendered their independence. Consequently, as the Democrats moved to the center, they pulled the unions, civil rights, feminist and environmental organizations away from confrontation toward compromises that frequently amounted to defeat. For example, as black and Latino joblessness officially grew to double digits even as the general unemployment rates were about 8% or less, the black and Latino organizations did not entertain the idea that they should learn from the example of Madison Labor or the Occupy movement. They had become so tied to the electoral and legislative process that placing their faces against the wheel became virtually unthinkable. While Martin Luther King Jr. remained an icon and events like the Montgomery bus boycott, the Birmingham mass demonstrations that faced down police violence, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom and the fight for unionization of Memphis garbage workers are worn proudly by the leadership, these organizations have largely remained passive as poverty has spread throughout many black and Latino communities. Nor have the women's organizations been able to counter the steady deterioration of abortion at the state and local level. And at the global and local level the struggle for sustainable ecology is at a standstill, even as the icecaps melt, incidents of climate instability multiply, and unseasonable drought spreads throughout the American Midwest that threatened the 2012 corn crop and other grains. Efforts to reach a global agreement to stem the deleterious effects of climate change have failed because

some of the leading powers like the United States and the emerging economies like China have effectively vetoed the entreaties of scientists and activists to heed the call to action.

The failure of the Bernie Sanders campaign to topple the Clinton–Obama machine that dominates the Democratic Party is the most recent example of how the political center continues to thwart challenges from the Left. In some ways, the Sanders campaign provided an avenue for Occupy Wall Street to enter mainstream politics, but the attempt failed. It might be, as Robert Reich has recently argued, that the Left needs to seriously consider once again a third party, like the Green Party led by Jill Stein, as a more effective vehicle for progressive change, because the Clinton campaign proved unable to hold onto voters in the rustbelt states who voted for Obama in 2012, then flipped to Trump in 2016. There is pressure on Bernie Sanders to lead such a movement during the next cycle of elections after 2016.<sup>18</sup> In the meantime, the Trump administration seeks to push through legislation and policy changes that will continue to redistribute wealth upwards, betraying working-class voters who were persuaded that he was the best candidate to take on the twin powers of Washington and Wall Street.<sup>19</sup> In all likelihood Trump's proposals will worsen the economic crisis that led to the discontent that put him in the White House as he seeks to repeal the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, which includes the Volker rule that prevents investment banks from speculating with other people's money.<sup>20</sup>

Class politics extends beyond the shop floor. What is lacking today in most industrialized countries are middle class and working class movements that include, but are not limited to, workplace and other economic issues. For example, the quality of public education in the United States has deteriorated over the past 20 years. Of course, budget cuts play a significant role in producing bloated classrooms, frayed facilities and teacher layoffs. But the problems of schooling are evident in the curriculum, too. Many urban high schools lack laboratories, computers and other basic technologies of science. The shortage of qualified math teachers has forced schools to assign humanities and social science teachers to fill the gap and they have been unable to offer advanced placement math such as calculus or even trigonometry. And the issues go beyond science and math. As is well known, Texas, whose politics have become extreme right, sets the standard for textbooks of all sorts; most publishers simply will not commission texts that take controversial positions on history, or other social science subjects. Thus, labor history is virtually absent in high school history textbooks. The struggles of the black freedom movement, if addressed at all, are cleansed and the key achievements of feminism and ecology are treated with deafening silence. In the wake of this retrograde situation there is no important movement for curriculum reform in the United States.

Given the strong tendency of some state administrations to even deny the climate crisis, the incidence of humanly caused environmental disasters is concentrated in states and regions where measures to ameliorate, if not solve, the environmental crisis are systematically refused. We can see the consequences of this refusal in Louisiana and other Gulf States where Hurricane Katrina and subsequent tornadoes in Alabama and Mississippi resulted in a level of devastation of lives and resources that was due largely to neglect. As recently as 2015, New Orleans' lower ninth ward is still in ruins, more than nine years after Hurricane Katrina.<sup>21</sup> The effects of Hurricane Irene are still being felt on the Atlantic coast. Joplin, MO, was all but flattened by a brief tornado, and some communities of New York State are still digging their way out of the destruction wrought in the wake of Hurricane Irene, in 2011. In 2012, New Jersey, New York and Connecticut suffered the horrendous effects of Hurricane Sandy, an event that left coastal communities devastated and proved that government agencies were ill-prepared to deal with the



disaster. The class dimension of these disasters is evident: most communities that were the most deeply affected have working class majorities, often black.

Finally, the financial crisis of 2007 is still with us. The cutting edge of the crisis was in housing mortgages. As is well known, from the 1990s banks were encouraged to make loans to borrowers with little or no equity. They were made at variable interest rates and many required the lender to pay only on the interest rate. In time, the bubble burst: the borrowers were hit suddenly with exorbitant payment requirements, even as the value of the property crashed. As many as four million homes were in payment arrears. The borrowers found themselves with a debt that was greater than the value of the houses. Some fled the homes, leaving only the keys behind. Most were served with eviction notices. Although the Federal government started a rescue program to prevent evictions, its terms were so stringent that only 700,000 borrowers were saved. More than three million houses went on the market at severely reduced prices in comparison to their last purchase prices. Home prices fell precipitously in the midst of America's first depression since 1939. It takes no Einstein to realize that most of those who lost their homes were working class.<sup>22</sup>

Like Katrina and other "natural disasters" of recent vintage, the working class has paid the price for the crisis, and the middle class – small farmers, some professionals, public employees – are not far behind. With mass layoffs in the public sector and an economy that is all but at a standstill, living standards have plunged; there is a housing "shortage" even as millions of homes are vacant. Homelessness among families with working parents as well as the unemployed has become one of the consequences of the housing crisis. Still, the Bush and Obama administrations and most European states bailed out the banks as their top priority. In short, with more than 14 million officially unemployed and stagnant wages, a weak labor movement and social movements that are tied to conventional electoral politics, the situation worsens with each passing day. And the workers and middle class pay for the profits and income of the financial corporations and the very rich. Moreover, even as the stock and commodities markets boomed and the Obama administration declared a recovery, good jobs remained hard to find for credentialed workers as well as those with less schooling. And the jobless rate remains stubbornly high.

There is good reason to believe that the long night of denial is reaching its end. What is missing are the forces that are prepared to reverse the one-sided class war being waged against the people by a tiny formation of financiers and their political supplicants. It is open to question whether the putative forces of opposition are prepared to join the battle. At this juncture it is premature to make predictions, but what is certain is that there are signs from the base of society that we are in the winter of our discontent.

This reader is, in many ways, unique.

## Notes

- 1 See Martin Glaberman, *Wartime Strikes* (Bewick Editions, 1980), Art Preis, *Labor's Giant Step* (Pathfinder Press, 1972), Jeremy Brecher's *Strike!* (PM Press, 2014), Mario Tronti, *Operai e Capitale [Workers and Capital]* (Einaudi, 1996), George Lipsitz, *Rainbow and Midnight* (University of Illinois Press, 1994), Michael Roberts, *Tell Tchaikovsky the News* (Duke University Press, 2014), and Stanley Aronowitz, *False Promises* (Duke University Press, 1992) and the *Death and Life of American Labor* (Verso, 2014).
- 2 The underlying assumption of the contents of this reader is the classical three-class model of social structure, based on the social relations of production suggested by Karl Marx and many who follow his perspective. We want to call attention to the relatively recent work of one of the editors, Stanley Aronowitz, who in his book *How Class Works* (Yale, 2003) argues, from a framework of social and

- political power, that classes emerge when a social formation – women, racialized groups, workers and so forth – forces society to address their demands. Aronowitz also claims that under these conditions “classes” emerge and disappear as classes if they fail to impose their demands or, having achieved a measure of success, are re-integrated into the prevailing power relations.
- 3 See Pun Ngai, *Made in China: Women Factory Workers in a Global Workplace* (Duke University Press, 2005).
  - 4 See the article “Behind China’s Wildcat Strike Wave” in *Labor Notes*, <http://www.labornotes.org/blogs/2014/10/review-behind-chinas-wildcat-strike-wave>, the *Atlantic Magazine* article “Rising Protests in China” <http://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2012/02/rising-protests-in-china/100247/>, and “China’s Workers Are Getting Restless” in *Bloomberg Business* <http://www.bloomberg.com/bw/articles/2014-10-15/chinas-workers-are-getting-restless>
  - 5 See Ralf Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (Stanford University Press, 1959), for a good example of this point of view.
  - 6 See *Rebel Rank and File* edited by Brenner et al. (Verso, 2010).
  - 7 See David Brody, *Steel Workers in America: The Non Union Era* (University of Illinois Press, 1988), and in the *New York Times*, “The Wage that Meant Middle Class,” [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/20/weekinreview/20uchitelle.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/20/weekinreview/20uchitelle.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)
  - 8 See the article published in *The Guardian*, “Anti-Austerity Syriza Party Sweeps to Stunning Victory,” <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/25/greece-election-vote-austerity-leftwing-syriza-eu>
  - 9 See the coverage in *The Nation* magazine: <http://www.thenation.com/article/195129/can-podemos-win-spain#>
  - 10 See the recent coverage in *The Guardian* here: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/28/podemos-spanish-elections-spain-anti-austerity-party> and here: <https://www.thenation.com/article/has-spains-podemos-party-squandered-its-prospects/>
  - 11 See the coverage in *The Guardian* here: <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2016/jun/04/what-are-french-strikes-about-and-will-they-affect-euro-2016>. See also coverage in the *New York Times* here: [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/13/world/europe/france-hollande-no-confidence-vote.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/13/world/europe/france-hollande-no-confidence-vote.html?_r=0)
  - 12 See coverage in the *Washington Post*, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/03/25/AR2006032501352.html>
  - 13 See coverage in *The Nation* magazine here: <https://www.thenation.com/article/the-deportation-machine-obama-built-for-president-trump/>
  - 14 See Paul Mason, *Why It’s Still Kicking Off Everywhere* (Verso, 2013).
  - 15 See Michael Yates’ piece in the *New Labor Forum* on this issue. <http://newlaborforum.cuny.edu/2013/03/06/we-are-the-99-the-political-arithmetic-of-revolt/>
  - 16 For more on the situation in Wisconsin, see Michael Yates’ book, *Wisconsin Uprising* (Monthly Review Press, 2012).
  - 17 For more on the Occupy movement see Todd Gitlin, *Occupy Nation* (It Books, Original Edition, 2012).
  - 18 See coverage in *Salon* here: [http://www.salon.com/2016/03/27/robert\\_reich\\_this\\_is\\_a\\_working\\_class\\_revolt\\_partner/](http://www.salon.com/2016/03/27/robert_reich_this_is_a_working_class_revolt_partner/)
  - 19 See the coverage in the *New York Times* here: [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/02/opinion/seduced-and-betrayed-by-donald-trump.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/02/opinion/seduced-and-betrayed-by-donald-trump.html?_r=0)
  - 20 See the coverage in the *Financial Times* here: <https://www.ft.com/content/7dec9a66-faa2-11e6-9516-2d969e0d3b65>
  - 21 See the coverage in *The Guardian* here: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/jan/23/new-orleans-lower-ninth-ward-condos-gentrification>
  - 22 See David Dayen’s reporting for Bill Moyers on this topic here: <http://billmoyers.com/2015/02/14/needless-default/>

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# How to Read This Book

*Michael J. Roberts*

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What makes this anthology unique in relation to other readers that address the issue of class is its multi-disciplinary approach. We have brought together texts drawn from three distinct epistemological traditions of academic research: political economy, social history and cultural studies. Each of these theoretical orientations provides a particular way to understand the phenomenon of class. The three main parts of this reader, The Working Class, The Middle Class and The Capitalist Class, include chapters drawn from all three of these theoretical orientations, although the perspective of political economy dominates The Capitalist Class, while the orientations of social history and cultural studies constitute the majority of chapters in The Working Class and The Middle Class. We also approach class in terms of intersectionality by including chapters by David Roediger, Nan Enstad, Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, and Jonathan Cutler that look at the ways in which class is mediated by race and gender and vice versa.

The most distinctive aspect of our book is that we embed the concept of class within the larger theoretical framework of the labor question, which means that class must be understood in terms of conflicts over and about work. As Hannah Arendt argued in her definitive text, *The Human Condition*, work is primarily characterized by the relationship between rulers and ruled. For us, this phenomenon must be included in what counts as class. Scholars and commentators who conceptualize class in terms of income and consumption frequently ignore the workplace and the asymmetrical power relations that structure it. This is a serious mistake. We agree with women's-studies scholar Kathi Weeks, who argues in her recent book, *The Problem with Work*, that "political theorists tend to be more interested in our lives as citizens and noncitizens, legal subjects and bearers of rights, consumers and spectators, religious devotees and family members, than in our daily lives as workers" (p. 2). In short, the reification of work permeates our culture. This book should be seen as contributing to the project of bringing the critique of work back into the analysis of class, a point of view which has been neglected in recent years. A critique of work not only questions the way in which work is organized, it also *imagines the possible liberation from work*.

One of the principal theoretical perspectives emphasized in this reader is that class, as a phenomenon, must be understood as a *relationship* rather than as a location. This way of looking at class is explained in great detail by E.P. Thompson in his classic work, *The Making of the English Working Class*. Thompson's perspective has provided a significant influence upon how we have organized this anthology. In terms of the organization of this reader, we have constructed The Working Class and The Capitalist Class parts so that certain chapters from each should be read together as a means to get a flavor for how class must be understood as a relationship constituted by the conflict between labor and

capital. In particular, the chapters in *The Working Class* by E.P. Thompson, Mike Davis, Art Preis, Michael J. Roberts, Jonathan Cutler, Ryan Moore and Robin D.G. Kelley should be read alongside the chapters in *The Capitalist Class* by Sven Beckert, Harry Braverman, Rhonda Levine, Benjamin Klinne Hunnicutt and Jefferson Cowie. Other selections in all three parts complement these ones as well as move in directions that provide unique ways to look at class in *cultural* terms.

In addition to the inter-disciplinary character of this reader, we have organized the reader so as to follow a rough chronology of key moments or periods in the history of class relations in the United States. We lead off *The Working Class* and *The Capitalist Class* with selections that look at the origins of capitalism in Western Europe, then move our focus to the US experience where we include chapters that examine important developments in the history of class struggle in the United States including: the conflict over the emergence of the wage-labor system in the early nineteenth century, the relationship between slavery and industrialization and its impact on race relations, the intersection between class and gender in the division of labor, the emergence of the fight for the 8-hour workday, the tumultuous period known as the “Gilded Age,” the emergence of scientific management and the concomitant struggle between capitalists and workers over control of the shop-floor, the political fight that produced the New Deal set of legislation followed by the Taft–Hartley Act in 1947, the influence of the counterculture on the labor movement in the 1960s, the corporate assault on the labor movement beginning in the 1970s, and automation and the jobless future. We then turn to globalization and the global crisis of capitalism in the twenty-first century in the chapter by Foster and McChesney on the global reserve army of labor. This chapter complements issues that we introduced in the general introduction, namely the emergence of a new form of class conflict in China and the explosion of the Arab Spring and the global Occupy Wall Street movement as responses to the meltdown of the global financial services industry. While most of the selections focus on the American experience, we have pointed beyond the US context by including selections from Kristin Lawler, Siegfried Kracauer and Serge Mallet that consider the contexts of Europe. It is our contention that a theoretical perspective which gives historical context to these new developments is crucial for an adequate understanding of the contemporary global capitalist system and the changing class relations that we are experiencing today. Below we discuss the three theoretical orientations that constitute the unique perspective of this reader.

The tradition of political economy situates the concept of class within a framework that seeks to understand the macro-structural dynamics of capitalist development. The selections in this reader that exemplify the point of view of political economy include the chapters by Harry Braverman, Karl Marx, Rhonda Levine, John Bellamy Foster and Robert W. McChesney, Teresa Ghilarducci, Stanley Aronowitz and William DiFazio, and Stanley Aronowitz. Political economy is necessary to, if not sufficient for, an adequate understanding of class because unlike many theoretical perspectives on the issues of class and “stratification,” political economy makes explicit what these paradigms do not: namely, the capitalist-economic *context* within which class distinctions are created and reproduced. Many academic treatments of class as stratification discuss the issues in terms of “occupational ladders” that seem to exist independently of the particular dynamics of a capitalist economic system. In other words, the treatments of class that define the phenomenon in terms of stratification reify the distribution of wealth and income in both ahistorical and universalistic terms. The specific dynamics of capitalism are ignored in mainstream discussions of class that discuss the issue in vague generalities

like “upper class,” “middle class” and “lower class,” as if all societies irrespective of place and time exhibit these characteristics. Perhaps the best example of this problem is in the field of sociology where the reification of class found its most sophisticated form within structural functionalism, including the now canonical text by Davis and Moore, “Some Principles of Stratification” (*American Sociological Review*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1944, pp. 242–249).

Part of what separates political economy (PE) from mainstream economics is that PE seeks to identify the specific features of capitalism that separate it from other modes of production, i.e. feudalism and socialism, at the same time as it explains how capitalism is rent with contradictions that keep the system in a constant state of crisis. Perhaps most important for the purposes of this reader, PE seeks to show how capitalism creates the conditions for its own transcendence through contradictions that are internal to, and constitutive of its development. As Marx argues in the *Grundrisse*, capitalists seek to use labor-saving technology to control workers, increase surplus value and expand the dynamics of capitalist accumulation to all corners of the globe not yet exposed to capitalism. The irony of this development is that this very same technology makes possible the radical reduction of time spent at work, which meant for Marx the possibility of a vast expansion of the so-called “leisure class.” Capitalist development points toward a future where robots will be doing more and more of the work in advanced “post-industrial” societies.

The possibility of working less depends upon the course of the class struggle, specifically whether or not workers can successfully fight for the shorter hours of work, which is an historical and political question that cannot be answered by an analysis which seeks to examine the dynamics of capitalist accumulation. In other words, a major theoretical problem at the heart of PE is the framing of labor as a dependent variable: capitalist development, it is often argued, happens at the expense of workers, who by definition are constituted theoretically as a mere category or variable in a framework which situates labor as an instrument used by capital. The theoretical framework of PE is unable to explain how workers constitute themselves as a class that opposes capitalist interests and the logic of capitalist accumulation. This brings us to the second epistemological perspective in this book: history.

Social history addresses the main problem with the intellectual tradition of PE: namely, its inability to explain how working people have responded and contributed to the development and history of capitalism on the one hand, and how capitalists have constituted themselves as a class opposed to workers on the other hand. In the tradition of PE, a major theoretical problem has been its neglect of everyday life, especially the ways in which working people and the power elite make sense of their situation inside capitalist social relations. Intellectuals working in the tradition of social history and labor history have sought to fill in the gaps created by PE through looking at the particular ways in which working people have played an important role in the various phases of capitalist development and the ways in which the capitalist class, in turn, has constituted itself in opposition to the labor movement. The chapters in this volume that are drawn from history include those by E.P. Thompson, Sven Beckert, Lawrence Glickman, David Roediger, Roy Rosenzweig, Nan Enstad, Robin D.G. Kelley, Benjamin Kline Hunnicutt and Jonathan Cutler.

The main focus in these chapters is on how class is something that “happens” in history, as individuals become aware of themselves as members of a class that exists in antagonism to another class: workers on the one side, capitalists on the other. What is crucial about

these selections from social and labor history is that they reveal how the development and history of capitalism does not produce class relations in any direct, or determined way as if a *telos* were present in history that directs the classes toward their destiny independently of the actions of actual individuals. In other words, capitalist development does not produce classes in a logical, predetermined fashion. Historians like E.P. Thompson have been careful to note that classes can only emerge if individuals develop a sense of class consciousness. The selections from E.P. Thompson, David Roediger and Lawrence Glickman focus on how workers came to understand themselves as a “class,” while the selections from Sven Beckert, Rhonda Levine and Jefferson Cowie look at how the capitalist class developed its identity as a capitalist class against the interests and actions of the working class. Class can also be undone, as the selection by Ryan Moore demonstrates, when workers lose their class consciousness for complicated reasons having to do with culture.

Other selections by Stanley Aronowitz, Siegfried Kracauer, Magali Larson, Andrew Hoberk, Serge Mallet, Justin Myers, and Andrew Ross examine the position of the middle class in relation to the working and capitalist classes, and how the middle class can, under certain historical conditions, identify with either workers or capitalists. Thus, while capitalist development has included the tendency to “proletarianize” the middle class, this does not mean that individuals from the middle class will automatically lose their sense of middle-class consciousness. In short, class consciousness is an historical phenomenon that can never be deduced from the structural location of individuals within the division of labor structured by capitalism. Class has a cultural dimension that is relatively independent of the economic dimensions in a given social formation of capitalism. This brings us to the epistemological orientation of cultural studies.

In some ways, cultural studies evolved out of labor history, especially the work of E.P. Thompson, but cultural studies emphasizes the aspects of everyday life that much of labor history has neglected, which followed from the narrow focus upon the institution of the labor union. Understanding the culture of the working class required an expansion of the field of vision beyond unions. Cultural studies seeks to look at the everyday life of workers in leisure spaces, in schools, in the political formation of the state and the family. Chapters in this volume that draw on cultural studies include selections from Robin D.G. Kelley, Nan Enstad, Michael J. Roberts, Ryan Moore, Roy Rosenzweig, Kristin Lawler and Sven Beckert. Here the focus is on the cultural dimension of class, namely the formation of the capitalist work ethic and the struggle against work that constitutes much of working-class culture. Cultural studies examines the ways in which changes in the political economy are handled in cultural terms by the working class, the middle class and the capitalist class.

Most important for the purposes of this book, cultural studies insists that class struggle is never fought *exclusively* on the economic terrain. Of course class struggle *is* about the fight over control of the labor process, the conflict over wages and the distribution of wealth more generally. However, the perspective of cultural studies has opened up a new dimension for analysis – the cultural dimension of class struggle – which is to say that language and lifestyle practices are also the site, or terrain, of class struggle. This leads to the other important contribution to cultural studies, literary criticism. The chapter by Andrew Hoberk in *The Middle Class* is a good example of how to study the phenomenon of class from the reading of novels. Among the novelists Hoberk examines as a way to understand the class consciousness of the middle class is Ayn Rand. David Roediger’s chapter in this volume looks at how the language used to describe class distinctions changed as the United States entered the period of industrialization, while E.P. Thompson

looks at how the phenomenon of *time itself* became the terrain of class struggle. The chapters by Roberts and Moore look at how forms of popular music are intimately linked to class struggle, but from different historical periods. The selection from Kristin Lawler looks at how the political-economic strategy of austerity in Europe must be understood as an attack on working-class culture. By bringing together the social sciences and the humanities, cultural studies provides a powerful framework for the investigation of class that fills in the gaps left by conventional research.

It is through such a multi-disciplinary approach that we seek to provide an alternative, more historically oriented and comprehensive way of examining the phenomenon of class, especially in light of the current crisis in global capitalism and the new forms of resistance we see today. We hope that our reader will provide a powerful theoretical orientation that will help activists and students who are struggling to make sense of the current crisis in our global capitalist system.





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# PART ONE

## The Working Class

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# CHAPTER 1

## Representing the Working Class

*Michael J. Roberts*

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The sometimes confusing array of ways in which the class relations in society are interpreted is not only a problem in the news media and the other various representations produced by the culture industry. The problem exists in the social sciences as well. In the social sciences, research on the American working class has been, to a large extent, framed by the contrast between the conceptual framework of historical materialism (the western Marxist tradition) and the dominant paradigm in social science, which includes foundational texts by Max Weber and Emile Durkheim. In the theoretical framework of historical materialism, the concept of class must be deployed within the wider philosophical and political context concerning the normative issue that is sometimes referred to as the “labor question”, whereas for conventional social scientists working in the dominant tradition the theoretical context that frames the analysis of the concept “class” plays a much more limiting role. In conventional social-science discourse, the issue of class is often distilled down to questions of description, method and accuracy of measurement. Indeed, the sometimes contentious discursive exchanges between those working within the framework of historical materialism and their interlocutors in the social sciences frequently get displaced through, and encoded by, academic debates concerning methodological procedures and techniques for measurement of empirical phenomena.

In conventional social science, the concept of class is typically separated, analytically, from the concept of work so that class is understood as an *outcome*, in order to frame the issue more generally within a theoretical context that is designed to map patterns of inequality in distributions of wealth and income.<sup>1</sup> In historical materialism, on the other hand, class is conceptually fused together with work, so that class is conceptualized in terms of *activity* rather than outcome. This difference approaches what Thomas Kuhn, in the *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, refers to as a paradigmatic incommensurability, because the manifestation of these differences reveals that in contrast to the framework of historical materialism, social scientists working within the dominant paradigm deny the existence of a working class that exists in antagonism with a capitalist or ruling class. A relationship of that kind simply does not appear in the research results produced by the dominant paradigm in social science.

To return to the normative dimension, it is also important to note that historical materialism does not break from the humanities, because to focus on production and work involves an examination of the *unfreedom* which pervades the workplace in capitalist

social formations. The critique of unfreedom in the workplace animates much of the research on the working class within the paradigm of historical materialism. While class and class struggle are core concepts for those working in the Marxist tradition, it is important to note that historical materialism is not itself a unified discourse in the social sciences, as there are several distinct intellectual trajectories that have developed in response to particular empirical problems. Failure to acknowledge these distinctions leads many conventional social scientists to incorrectly claim that the Marxist point of view suffers from crude economic determinism. Part of the problem is that conventional social science relies almost exclusively upon a reading of the *Communist Manifesto* to construct its understanding of the Marxist concept of class, ignoring all of Marx's more nuanced analyses of class relations and intra-class fractions, like *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and *The Class Struggles in France*, to say nothing of the sophisticated appropriation of Georg Hegel in the *Grundrisse* and the three volumes of *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. A truncated reading of Marx leads Weberians like John R. Hall, the editor of *Reworking Class*, to claim that "the once dominant Marxist theory that predicted a historically decisive struggle in the capitalist world between two classes – workers and owners – is widely recognized as inadequate" (p. 1). This volume should be seen as an attempt both to provide an alternative view of class as well as to correct some misinterpretations of the Marxist view on class.

## I

On the one hand, *what* is being studied differs from one paradigm of social research to another. For reasons having to do with methodological training in their disciplines, professional social scientists working in the dominant paradigm tend to ignore both the asymmetrical structural relations that constitute the labor *process* as well as the history of the transformation of the social relations of production. Instead, the preferred objects constituted for analysis are income, education and status levels – what mainstream sociologists refer to collectively as socio-economic status or "SES" for short. SES is the central organizing concept in the field of inequality studies in conventional social science, referred to as "social stratification." It is important to emphasize that the modifying term "economic," in the concept SES, is severely restricted to only indicate levels of income and wealth, phenomena that are said to allow for the expanded exercise of power in the *marketplace*. The legacy of narrowing the viewpoint of stratification studies to the space of markets was forged by Max Weber's attempts to merge sociological analyses with the marginal utility theory developed by the Austrian School of Economics, which included important figures such as Carl Menger, Friedrich von Wieser and Eugen Bohm von Bawerk. The reification of market interactions within conventional social science means that most stratification research focuses exclusively upon lifestyle differences, "life chances," and the unequal distribution of resources, but *not* on how wealth is produced in the first place. Weber himself argues in volume two of *Economy and Society* that "class situation is...ultimately market situation...the market is the decisive moment..." (1978, p. 928). This difference in orientation regarding the concept of class leads Weberians to construe class in terms of questions such as "What does an individual have?," and "What is an individual likely to obtain?," whereas in the tradition of historical materialism the questions are "What does the person do?," "What is the individual likely to do?" and "Will they maintain or change the existing social relations?"

In short, what happens at work during production is outside of the ordinary conceptual framework in the social studies of class inequality. For example, the so-called “occupational ladder” theorized by conventional sociology is understood as a continuum of social *status* ranks leading from one rung of the ladder up to the next all the way from bottom to top, leaving no conceptual room for understanding a break in the structure of the ladder that would separate individuals into distinct classes (and class fractions) with contradictory interests based upon their relation to the process of production as well as their opposing relationship to one another. Viewing class in terms of a status location on a continuous vertical ladder involves a conceptual process that constructs the phenomenon “class” as a *thing* that can be located in social space, whereas in historical materialism class is understood as an antagonistic *relationship* that takes place in time, as a phenomenon that *happens*. The difference between viewing class as a thing and understanding class as a relationship that develops historically turns upon epistemological differences that orient the direction and content of social research. This dissimilarity between the concept of *class* in historical materialism and the social-science concept of *SES* is only partly explained by methodological differences due to the preference for historical analysis among Marxists, and the preference for survey research and statistical methodology among conventional sociologists. The differences go *beyond* the contrast in methodology. Class and SES are notions that differ from one another in the sense described by Thomas Kuhn, where competing concepts exist within a larger context of incommensurable theoretical paradigms. In short, the issues at hand regarding class versus status are not reducible to questions regarding the proper procedures of measurement. Measuring is ultimately not the issue.

Rather than beginning and focusing the analysis upon the conditions of poverty and inequality (outcomes) as in the conventional paradigm, the tradition of research in historical materialism begins with laboring *activity* in the analysis of capitalist society because this way of fusing the concepts of class and work places an emphasis on the *agency* of individuals. By setting the focus on the practices of working people, the researcher is able to reveal the ways in which workers exercise a certain amount of power within the struggles that condition the forms of the workplace and their everyday life outside the workplace. The conventional focus on class as an outcome, however, implicitly assumes a relative disempowerment of workers, since they are mapped onto the bottom of the distribution of wealth, power and status. Mapping and measuring class as outcome conceals and silences working-class agents.

Exploring the region beyond the “market” is the *raison d’être* for historical materialism. This is not to say that Marxists ignore market dynamics, especially labor market formations, but to ignore the moment of production results in a one-sided point of view on economic activity in general that distorts the understanding of the class relation in capitalist social formations. In an effort to address this weakness in conventional social science, contemporary Marxists continue to analyze the process of proletarianization: namely, the de-skilling of workers in all segments of the economy through the relentless separation of mental and manual labor that follows from the application of specific forms of technology designed to dominate workers on the shop-floor of the workplace, in both blue- and white-collar working environments. The knowledge of the production process as a whole is wrested away from the minds of workers on the assembly line (as well as office workers isolated in cubicles) and situated within the manuals and computer programs of engineers and computer programmers working for management. Ultimately, this knowledge *itself* becomes a force of production as it is objectified within machines

that displace workers on the factory floor and position them as mere appendages of the machines. Key figures in this tradition of sociology include Harry Braverman and Michael Burawoy, who, despite being recognized in the field of sociology, still constitute the minority perspective in the field of stratification and inequality studies.<sup>2</sup>

The process of proletarianization is not limited to manufacturing sectors in the economy. White-collar workers, service-sector workers, and skilled workers in the biotech fields have all been subject to the process of proletarianization. In recent decades, medical doctors who work for health-maintenance organizations (HMOs) have organized themselves into unions as a response to the relative proletarianization of their field. Doctors are among the groups of workers who have shown the fastest rate of growth in new union membership in the United States, as they resist the growing bureaucratic structures of HMOs that threaten to diminish the autonomy of doctors working on the hospital floor. In 1972, one of the first unions for physicians was organized, which today includes dentists under the name Union of American Physicians and Dentists (UAPD). The UAPD exists under the umbrella of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). There is also the Doctors Council in New York City, which is affiliated with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). Both of these cases demonstrate that income and education (SES) do not determine or constitute class, for while professional physicians as a whole earn an average yearly income of roughly \$270,000, these doctors' unions have been organized to fight against employers for better working conditions, which is a fundamental issue for the labor movement more generally. Professional physicians have very good "life chances" in the Weberian sense, but they also sometimes constitute themselves as a class in terms of their activity; namely, they see their interests as workers to be in conflict with the interests of their employers (HMOs). This phenomenon is far outside the purview of the dominant paradigm in social science, which is incapable of explaining how medical doctors actively seek collective representation of their interests *against* their employers. In a rather rudimentary manner, conventional social science understands "doctor" as merely a status position near the top of the occupational ladder.

This does not mean, however, that Weberian themes are incommensurate with historical materialism. On the contrary, as we will argue below, there is a way to displace the age-old Weber/Marx antinomy concerning the concept of class within sociology by shifting the analysis *away* from concerns about measurement and occupational ladders, and *toward* framing an understanding of how workers resist work and challenge the power of capitalists to organize the economy throughout various changes in the social formation of capitalism. When the sociological lens shifts to a focus upon the cultural struggle against work, the conceptual wall between Weber and Marx becomes rather porous. We will return to this shift in analysis later, in section III of this essay.

From the point of view of historical materialism, the process of proletarianization is a *tendency* within capitalist development, not a *telos* in an Hegelian sense, or a "law" of motion within a framework of social physics as developed by Auguste Comte and his followers. Because proletarianization is a contingent aspect of capitalist development, Marxists focus on historical analysis to explain the particular conditions that make possible the emergence of various processes of proletarianization in particular sectors of the economy. This tendency is referred to as part of the *logic of capital accumulation*, and because class is understood within historical materialism as a relationship and not a thing, the logic of capital exists in perpetual tension with the *counter-logic of labor*, i.e. resistance exercised by workers against capitalist working conditions, if not against work