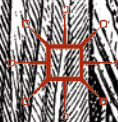


Edited by
David M. Hart,
Gary Chartier,
Ross Miller Kenyon,
and Roderick T. Long

Social Class and State Power

Exploring an Alternative Radical Tradition



Social Class and State Power

I do not claim to have discovered either the existence of classes in modern society or the struggle between them. Long before me, bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this struggle between the classes, as had bourgeois economists their economic anatomy. My own contribution was 1. to show that the existence of classes is merely bound up with certain historical phases in the development of production; 2. that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat; 3. that this dictatorship itself constitutes no more than a transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society.

—KARL MARX

David M. Hart • Gary Chartier •
Ross Miller Kenyon • Roderick T. Long
Editors

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macmillan

Editors

David M. Hart
Indianapolis, Indiana
USA

Gary Chartier
La Sierra University
Riverside, California
USA

Ross Miller Kenyon
Los Angeles, California
USA

Roderick T. Long
Auburn University
Auburn, Alabama
USA

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For
Jorie Blair Long
Murray Rothbard
Lalé Welsh
Leonard Liggio
Walter Grinder

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For a work on violence and exploitation, this collection has in fact emerged quite peacefully.

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¹Among Matt's many contributions: he's invested hours in the process of standardizing the references here. As much as possible, endnote style and the way in which sources are listed in endnotes have been rendered consistent throughout, as has the orthography of referenced sources—and the orthography of the text itself where this has been necessary to integrate edits smoothly. References have also occasionally been updated, and no gaps have been left in the numbers of the endnotes even when notes have been removed.

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It's hard to imagine that without the commitment of Leonard Liggio, Murray Rothbard, and Walter Grinder to retrieving and extending the tradition of classical liberal class analysis, this book would have been conceived, much less published. They showed us the way, and we thank them.

INTRODUCTION

[M]en placed in society . . . are divided into two classes, *Ceux qui pillent*,—*et Ceux qui sont pillés* (those who pillage and those who are pillaged); and we must consider with some care what this division, the correctness of which has not been disputed, implies.

The first class, *Ceux qui pillent*, are the small number. They are the ruling Few. The second class, *Ceux qui sont pillés*, are the great number. They are the subject Many.

—James Mill, “The State of the Nation” (1835)¹

Classical liberalism and libertarianism have embraced a distinctive understanding of class, which we call Classical Liberal Class Analysis (CLCA). On this understanding, class membership is constituted not, as on Marxist and similar views, by relationships to the means of production (though these are certainly implicated in various ways) but rather by relationship to predatory power. This distinctive understanding possesses substantial illuminating power, and it is a vital component of any classical-liberal or libertarian political theory. This is so because it helps to make clear that the libertarian or classical liberal understands, is sensitive to, is concerned about those deep-seated frustrations that give rise to movements like Occupy! and the Tea Party. Perhaps more importantly, it also helps to underscore the fact that the libertarian or classical liberal can offer an effective response to these frustrations that is consistent with her own political philosophy—and so is not *ad hoc*.

¹James Mill, “State of the Nation,” *London Review* 25 (April–July 1835): 6.

In this book, we seek to excavate CLCA, which emerged during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries before it was forgotten, only to be rediscovered by Murray Rothbard and his circle of friends (in particular Ralph Raico and Leonardiggio) in the 1950s and 1960s, and which has exerted a certain influence on the modern libertarian movement. The introduction serves to highlight this distinctive approach, explain how we will explore it throughout this book, distinguish a range of sub-traditions within CLCA, consider the question of how the classes with which CLCA is concerned might be identified, distinguish CLCA from Marxist class analysis (while noting that proponents of CLCA can join Marxists in discerning a nonrandom relationship between class membership and access to the means of production), and point the way forward toward the continued development of this stimulating tradition.

I. DISCERNING AN ALTERNATIVE TRADITION

When one hears the word “class,” one usually thinks of Marxist-inspired social theorists, who talk about the exploitation of the “working class” by the “capitalist class,” which owns the factories in which the workers labor away producing valuable goods but who do not receive the “full value” of what they produce; thus they are “exploited.” Or more recently, one thinks of those who rail against the “1 percent,” the “wealthy elites” of “Wall Street” who own 90+ percent of “society’s wealth” and who have “rigged the system” so that they continue to receive “excessive profits” at the expense of “the rest of us.” Other common understandings of class have their origins in the work of Max Weber on class and status,² or perhaps in the elaboration by C. Wright Mills and others of “power-elite” theories.³

However, this initial reaction would be wrong, or, rather, incomplete, because it ignores a set of much older classical-liberal theories of class and exploitation which predate Marxism and which in fact partially inspired Marx’s own ideas about class, developed during the 1840s and 1850s. In this anthology, we want to present some samples of CLCA.

²See, for example, Max Weber, *Sociological Writings*, ed. Wolf Heydebrand (New York: Continuum 1994); Max Weber, “The Rational State,” *General Economic History*, trans. Frank H. Knight (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Transaction 1927).

³C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: OUP 1956).

II. THE SHAPE OF THE ALTERNATIVE TRADITION: VOCABULARIES AND ACTIVITIES

This long but relatively unknown other tradition is quite diverse, but the variations have a number of features in common:

1. Societies can be divided into two antagonistic groups, most simply identified as “the people” and their “rulers,” defined in virtue of access to political (i.e., coercive) power within a given society. One of these groups, “the ruling few,” “exploits” or “plunders” the other by taking the latter’s property without its consent or by passing laws which benefit the former at the expense of the latter. The vocabulary used to describe this relationship is quite varied and has included the following:
 - “the ruling few” versus “the subject many” (Bentham, James Mill)
 - “ceux qui pillent” (those who pillage) versus “ceux qui sont pillés” (those who are pillaged) (James Mill)
 - “the plunderers” versus “the plundered” (Bastiat)
 - “the conquerors” versus “the conquered” (Thierry, Spencer, Oppenheimer)
 - “tax-payers” versus “tax consumers” (Calhoun) or “the budget eaters” (Molinari) or the “caterpillars” (the Levellers)

2. This political arrangement is unjust and should be changed so that the people, the industrious producers of wealth, can keep their own justly acquired property. In order to bring that change about, classical liberals and radicals have engaged in various activities such as the following:
 - participating in revolution (Overton, Paine, Bastiat)
 - attempting gradual political reform (Bentham, Mill, Calhoun)
 - organizing mass meetings and protests to lobby governments (Cobden, Bastiat)
 - exposing the nature of state power through journalism and writing books (Godwin, Leggett, Mill, Wade, Spooner, Tucker)
 - teaching and researching in colleges and universities (Hodgskin, Blanqui, Sumner)

The key period during which traditional CLCA emerged in a coherent form was roughly the one hundred years between 1750 and 1850, a period which, not incidentally, coincided with the Enlightenment in Europe and North America and the liberal revolutions which accompanied the Enlightenment in America and France in the eighteenth century and across much of Europe in 1848. It continued to evolve during the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century before petering out as classical liberalism declined as a political ideology and was replaced by various forms of socialism and welfare statism until it began to revive in the post-World War II period.

III. INTELLECTUAL CURRENTS AND COUNTER-CURRENTS

The intellectual tradition we are interested in representing in this anthology is not a rigid or monolithic one, but rather a family of approaches which shared a number of values, such as a belief in the value of individual liberty, property rights, the justice of uncoerced labor and trade in a free market, very limited government or even no government at all, and opposition to the use of coercion to acquire property or legal privileges for one group at the expense of others. This family of positions includes traditional classical liberals like Adam Smith, Richard Cobden, and Frédéric Bastiat; radical individualists like Thomas Paine, William Godwin, Lysander Spooner, and Benjamin Tucker; and Classical and Austrian School economists like Ludwig von Mises; as well as advocates of other types of libertarianism, both “Left” and “Right,” which emerged in the 1970s.

Chronologically speaking, we believe that there are nine ideological currents of thought which have contributed to the formation of CLCA. We have attempted to give each one some representation in this anthology, although reasons of space have forced us to exclude many others of importance.

The first current makes up what might be termed “the prehistory” of the tradition. Included in this group are some early modern and early eighteenth-century thinkers who made the rather crude distinction between “the people” and “the King (or Prince) and his courtiers,” such as Étienne de La Boétie, the Levellers Richard Overton and William Walwyn, who talked about rulers as “conquerors” or parasitical caterpillars eating the people’s livelihood, and the eighteenth-century Commonwealthmen John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon who talked in very Roman terms about

tyrants, their hangers-on, and the deep corruption in the British state. From this group we include a short essay by Richard Overton.

The second current is the Anglo-Scottish Enlightenment, which includes thinkers like Adam Ferguson, John Millar, David Hume, and Adam Smith, who were interested in the nature of productive labor and in determining who should be understood to engage in it, and developed theories about “rank” within societies and a multi-stage theory of history (such as slavery, feudalism, commerce) each of which had a corresponding ruling elite whose members benefited from their privileged political position. The third current comes from the French Enlightenment. Several thinkers, especially among the Physiocrats (like Turgot), had a similar stage theory of history which was to have a profound impact on nineteenth-century ideas about class in both the classical-liberal and Marxist camps. Of these two groups we have limited our selection to just Adam Smith, since their work is quite well known.⁴

A fourth important current comprises Radical Individualists and Republicans. These thinkers were influenced by the American and French revolutions and were active in England, America, and France. They developed ideas about oligarchies (both aristocratic and mercantile), the growing importance of public debt and central banks, the role of an expanded military and its elites which controlled the empire, and the opposition of established political elites to the rising lower orders who wanted to participate in politics, such as working-class men and women. The main sub-branches of this group included Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Vicesimus Knox, William Cobbett, and Percy Shelley in England; Thomas Jefferson, John Taylor, John Calhoun, and William Leggett in America; and Jean-Baptiste Say, Benjamin Constant, Charles Comte, Charles Dunoyer, and Augustin Thierry in France. The latter were particularly important in the development of CLCA because of the special problem in France created by the Restoration of the monarchy and the aristocracy after 1815, the legacy of Napoleon’s militarism and centralization of the state, and the rise of a centralized bureaucracy and the “place-seeking” (job-seeking) which took place within the French state. From this large group we have selected texts by Paine, Godwin, and Knox in England, Leggett and Calhoun in America, and Thierry in France.

⁴A history of the four-stage theory can be found in Ronald L. Meek, *Social Science and the Noble Savage* (Cambridge: CUP 1976).

The Philosophic Radicals and the Benthamites in England constitute the fifth intellectual current. The two main thinkers in this group were Jeremy Bentham and James Mill, who had a profound impact on the thinking of diverse radicals in the first half of the nineteenth century in England, such as John Wade and Thomas Hodgskin. Bentham's idea of the "sinister interest" of the ruling elite and James Mill's contrast between the ruling few and ruled many were particularly influential. These ideas led John Wade to write an extraordinarily detailed catalog of exactly what groups and individuals in the British ruling elite benefited from taxpayer's money. We have included extracts from the work of all four of these thinkers in the anthology.

A sixth current comes from the Classical Political Economists and their supporters. The English branch of the school got side-tracked by their labor theory of value and theory of rent which led others (such as Marxists and other socialists in France like Louis Blanc) to argue that employers did not pay workers the full value their labor produced and hence "exploited" them, or that the rent paid for land was unearned by the landowner. However, two of the founding members of the Classical School, Adam Smith and David Ricardo, were strong supporters of free trade, and political agitators like Richard Cobden adapted their economic theory into an understanding of class they used to criticize the landed oligarchy which ruled Britain and benefited from tariffs at the expense of ordinary consumers. Other topics in which Classical School economists were interested which were related to class and privilege included the condition of the working class men and women (J.S. Mill) and slavery (William Stanley Jevons). The French members of the classical school were interested in the productive role played by the entrepreneur (J.B. Say), whom they argued was not a parasite or exploiter, the idea of the existence of an "industrial class" (Charles Comte and Charles Dunoyer), the importance and essential productivity of nonmaterial goods or "services" (J.B. Say and Frédéric Bastiat), the economics of slavery (Heinrich Storch and Gustave de Molinari), the continuing problem of the centralization of government power (Alexis de Tocqueville), the growth of bureaucracy and "place-seeking" (Dunoyer and Molinari), and the nature of organized, legal "plunder" (Bastiat and Ambroise Clément). From the English Classical School we have an extract from Richard Cobden, and from the French extracts from Adolphe Blanqui, Bastiat, Charles Renouard, and Molinari.

A seventh cluster is made up of the nineteenth-century American individualist anarchists. The thinkers of this school, partially inspired by the French anarchist P.J. Proudhon, challenged the authority of the state

(Benjamin Tucker and Lysander Spooner). But they and their fellow travelers also addressed a wide range of contemporary social issues, including the status of women (Voltairine de Cleyre), the relationship between labor and capital (Tucker, J. A. Labadie), money (William B. Greene), land tenure (J. K. Ingalls), and free love (Moses Harman). Tucker and Spooner highlighted in different ways the link between state action and economic privilege. While the individualists were deeply rooted in the classical liberal tradition, they were also deeply engaged with social and political radicals from other schools of thought, whom they seem to have felt comfortable viewing as allies even if also as intellectual sparring partners. The excerpt from Tucker we have included here encapsulates the individualists' view of the state as the source of the class rule that the Marxists and their allies (mis)attributed to the market.

With the rise of sociology as a separate discipline in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the eighth current of classical-liberal thought about class, the Sociological School, emerged. From this school we get the idea of the militant versus industrial types of society (Herbert Spencer and Molinari), “the forgotten man” (i.e., the ordinary taxpayer) and rule by a plutocracy (William Graham Sumner), the circulation of elites (Vilfredo Pareto), the nature of status and rank (Max Weber), and overall theories about the growth of the modern state (Molinari, Gaetano Mosca, and Franz Oppenheimer). Oppenheimer in particular is important because of his later influence on Murray Rothbard in the 1950s and 1960s. From the Sociological School we have included extracts from Spencer, Sumner, and Oppenheimer.

The reappearance of classical liberalism and libertarianism after World War II led to a rediscovery of CLCA, especially in North America; this rediscovery is the source of the ninth intellectual current featured in this book. It comprises the Austrian and Public Choice schools of economic thought, as well as the modern libertarian movement. During World War II, Ludwig von Mises turned to a form of economic sociology with his writings on bureaucracy (1944) and the total state (Nazism and Stalinism) (1944), and his general theory of interventionism (1940).⁵ Yet he refused to embrace the idea of “class” (perhaps because it smacked too much of Marxism), preferring

⁵Ludwig von Mises, *Bureaucracy*, ed. Bettina Bien Greaves (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund 2007); Ludwig von Mises, *Interventionism: An Economic Analysis*, ed. Bettina Bien Greaves (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund 2011); Ludwig von Mises, *Omnipotent Government: The Rise of the Total State and Total War*, ed. Bettina Bien Greaves (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund 2011).

instead to use the older term “caste” in his writings.⁶ As a graduate student attending Mises’s seminar at New York University, Murray Rothbard played the central role in the rediscovery of CLCA, drawing on components from Calhoun, Bastiat and Molinari, Oppenheimer, and Nock, which he integrated with the economic theory of Mises. Rothbard’s synthesis inspired two younger scholars, Walter Grinder and John Hagel,⁷ to take his ideas further with an Austrian-inspired class analysis of “state capitalism” in the mid-1970s. In a recent paper, Jayme Lemke has urged modern Austrian economists to revisit this work from the 1970s.⁸

Another sub-stream appeared beginning in the 1960s, as the key players in the Public Choice school, James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock,⁹ applied their version of free-market economics to the study of rent-seeking, the politics of bureaucracy, and the “Leviathan” state. While they did not explicitly embrace a theory of class, their work fits in very well with CLCA. There has also been an interesting contribution by Margaret Levi, who applied a rational-choice perspective to an analysis of the state and class rule, which she appropriately called “predatory rule”; this appears to be a clear link back to mid-nineteenth-century classical liberal theories of class.¹⁰ We have regretfully omitted selections from these authors for reasons of space, and because of our primary interest in highlighting the main currents of the historical tradition rather than

⁶Ludwig von Mises, *The Clash of Group Interests and Other Essays* (New York: Center for Libertarian Studies 1978 [1945]) 1–12.

⁷Walter E. Grinder and John Hagel, “Toward a Theory of State Capitalism: Ultimate Decision-Making and Class Structure,” *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 1.1 (1977): 59–79; and John Hagel and Walter E. Grinder, “From Laissez-Faire to *Zwangswirtschaft*: The Dynamics of Interventionism,” *The Dynamics of Intervention: Regulation and Redistribution in the Mixed Economy*, ed. Peter Kurrild-Klitgaard, *Advances in Austrian Economics* 8 (Amsterdam: Elsevier 2005) 59–86.

⁸Jayme S. Lemke, “An Austrian Approach to Class Structure,” *New Thinking in Austrian Political Economy*, ed. Christopher J. Coyne and Virgil Henry Storr, *Advances in Austrian Economics* 19 (Bingley, UK: Emerald 2015) 167–92.

⁹See several works by Tullock in *The Selected Works of Gordon Tullock: The Rent-Seeking Society* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund 2005); *Bureaucracy* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund 2005), especially “The Politics of Bureaucracy” (1965); and *The Social Dilemma of Autocracy, Revolution, Coup d’Etat, and War* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund 2005), especially “The Exploitative State” (1974) and “The Goals and Organizational Forms of Autocracies” (1987).

¹⁰Margaret Levi, “The Theory of Predatory Rule,” *Of Rule and Revenue* (Berkeley: U of California P 1988) 10–40, first published as “A Theory of Predatory Rule,” *Politics and Society* 10.4 (1981): 431–65.

examining all of its current permutations. Thus, from the post-World War II group of libertarian class theorists, we have included extracts from works by Mises, Rothbard, Childs, Grinder and Hagel, Hans-Hermann Hoppe, and Roderick Long.

IV. IDENTIFYING CLASSES

A useful approach to class analysis unavoidably involves not merely talking in the abstract about class but also actually identifying particular classes. Classical liberal and libertarian thinkers have offered various strategies for identifying the rulers and the ruled. There are obvious difficulties with the strategies some theorists have proposed—like analyzing class in terms of net tax consumption and similar variables. We are all tax consumers in one way or another, even if some of us benefit more than others. The difficulty lies, arguably, not only in the complexities associated with performing the needed computations and making the needed accounting decisions (how to allocate this or that benefit, etc.) but also in the focus of this sort of analysis, familiar though it is from such class theorists as Calhoun and Rothbard, on the outcome of state action.

Of course, the growth of the regulatory-cum-administrative state has meant that state benefits can't all be seen in terms of cash transfers. Tariffs would have played a significant role in shifting wealth to privileged groups in the eras of Smith and Say, Bastiat and Calhoun. But today state regulations of all kinds also help to confer class position. These include everything from occupational licensing rules to building codes to institutional accreditation requirements (for entities like banks and hospitals). Artificial property rights—especially rights to “intellectual property”—are also obviously vital. And while these factors, along with straightforward subsidies and tariffs, help to shift wealth and influence to well-connected groups, they do so in complicated and subtle ways.

It's not just the multiple sources of class privilege that should be seen as relevant in constituting classes from a libertarian/classical-liberal perspective, however. Equally important is the role of those who possess or seek privilege in *influencing* or *effecting* grants of privilege. And it is this additional factor—related to the springs of state action and not merely its outcomes—that helps to distinguish the rulers and their allies on the one hand from mere beneficiaries of state action on the other. (Defining beneficiaries of state privilege in narrow terms as net tax receivers may have been especially convenient for the pro-slavery Calhoun, since this allowed many slave owners to qualify as members of the exploited class, whereas

most CLCA theorists would have assigned slaveholders unequivocally to the exploiter category.)

Except in the fantasies of some naïve culture warriors, single mothers benefiting from government financial assistance do not constitute an effective power bloc. While those who receive such assistance may, indeed, acquire more from the state than they pay in taxes, they are not members of the ruling class or closely associated with it, since in no obvious sense are they in a position to move the levers of power, nor are they, in general, seeking to do so. No doubt state actors do sometimes confer financial benefits on the poor and marginal to keep them pacified or to promote other benefits sought by the powerful and well-connected; and no doubt wealthy elites sometimes encourage the conferral of such benefits for this reason. But when this sort of thing occurs, it doesn't somehow make the poor and the marginal into politically efficacious actors.

It is also worth emphasizing that, while poor people may sometimes receive more in tax revenue than they pay in taxes, treating them as net consumers of state benefits will often make sense only if we ignore the multiple disabilities imposed on them by the state,¹¹ not to mention the “subsidy of history” effected by massive asset theft by wealthy and well-connected elites.¹² State actors and their allies have thus both actively dispossessed poor people (with obvious, even if not always inescapable consequences for their successors in interest) and shackled them with constraints that make achieving economic well-being difficult. When these factors are taken into account, it is much less clear that many poor people, even if they do receive state-conferred benefits, qualify as net beneficiaries of state action.

Whether they do or not, however, the active role played by elite factions and their allies in securing state benefits for themselves (and imposing regulatory and other costs on others) distinguishes these groups from the economically marginal in an important way. This distinction helps to justify referring to these groups as elements of the ruling class (or as that class's upper- and upper-middle-class associates) quite apart from the specific benefits they receive.

¹¹See Charles Johnson, “Scratching By: How Government Creates Poverty As We Know It,” *The Freeman*, Dec. 2007 <<https://fee.org/articles/scratching-by-how-government-creates-poverty-as-we-know-it/>>; Gary Chartier, “Government Is No Friend of the Poor,” *The Freeman*, Jan. 2012 <<https://fee.org/articles/government-is-no-friend-of-the-poor/>>.

¹²See Kevin A. Carson, “The Subsidy of History,” *The Freeman*, June 2008 <<https://fee.org/articles/the-subsidy-of-history/>>.

V. THE MARXIST DETOUR

In the mid-nineteenth century, the classical-liberal approach to thinking about class was taken up by Karl Marx, altered considerably, and then diverted into an entirely different theory of class. Ralph Raico and Tom Palmer have documented how Marx borrowed key ideas from the classical-liberal tradition but emphasized the Smithian and Ricardian errors concerning the labor theory of value and built upon the foundation of these errors a theory of class based upon the inevitable and necessary exploitation of workers via the payment of wages by employers.¹³ When Marx wrote as a journalist, as in *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (1852),¹⁴ he reverted to an approach closer to CLCA; but when he wrote as an economist in *Das Kapital* (1859) and elsewhere he increasingly abandoned CLCA and used a more “Marxist” Ricardian approach.

The intellectual error which Marx introduced into class theory—the mistaken view that class rule is rooted in market exchange, particularly in payment for labor—was exposed during the twentieth century when Marxist and socialist states were erected following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and welfare states took shape in the West following World War II. The emergence of a new exploiting ruling class of party bosses, factory managers, and military elites in explicitly communist states, and of economic elites enriched by state-secured privilege in tandem with increasingly powerful and insular bureaucracies in overtly social democratic western societies should have been impossible under socialism according to Marxist class theory. According to CLCA it was both inevitable and entirely predictable. So long as there is a state with the power to coerce and groups who wish to use that power to achieve their political and economic goals, there will inevitably emerge a class of rulers and groups of potential beneficiaries who will exploit the ordinary working and tax-paying public. Classical liberal class theorists working in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries would not have been at all surprised by the

¹³Ralph Raico, “Classical Liberal Exploitation Theory: A Comment on Professor Liggio’s Paper,” *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 1.3 (Sum. 1977): 179–83; Ralph Raico, “Classical Liberal Roots of the Marxist Doctrine of Classes,” *Requiem for Marx*, ed. Yuri N. Maltsev (Auburn, AL: Mises 1992) 189–220; Tom G. Palmer, “Classical Liberalism, Marxism, and the Conflict of Classes: The Classical Liberal Theory of Class Conflict,” *Realizing Freedom: Libertarian Theory, History, and Practice* (Washington, DC: Cato 2009) 255–75.

¹⁴Karl Marx, “The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon,” *Surveys from Exile: Political Writings*, ed. David Fernbach (New York: Vintage 1974).

appearance of new forms of class society in Russia, China, Cuba, or Venezuela. In fact, they would have expected it.

Also appearing, interestingly, in the same period was a non-Marxist version of the labor theory of value allied with CLCA. Kevin A. Carson, working in the tradition of the American individualist anarchists, has sought to rehabilitate the labor theory of value and to recast it in terms compatible with the marginalist and subjectivist insights of modern economics; but Carson's version of the labor theory, unlike Marx's, does not carry the implication that wage labor is inherently exploitative, while Carson's version of class theory identifies the state as the chief agent or enabler of exploitation.¹⁵

VI. CLASS AND THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION

A particular source of tension between CLCA and Marxist class theory might be thought to concern the relationship between class membership and ownership of the means of production. Social class in the Marxist and related traditions is constituted by relationships to the means of production, so that the ruling class just is the class that owns the means of production. The state, on this view, serves as the executive committee of the ruling class and safeguards the property rights claimed by this class. By contrast, social class in the classical-liberal-cum-libertarian tradition is constituted by relationships with predatory power. Does this mean that, on this view, answers to questions about the means of production are irrelevant to identifying the ruling class and the associated upper and upper-middle classes or to understanding class dynamics and class rule?

The short answer is no.

- (i) For CLCA, ownership of the means of production will sometimes serve as a signal of class position. While class position is not constituted by ownership of the means of production, a relationship with predatory—ordinarily state—power increases the odds that someone will have access to the means of production. This is true for multiple reasons. (a) The state may directly provide someone with monopoly privileges, privileges without which ownership of this or that productive asset would be legally impermissible. (b) The state

¹⁵See Kevin A. Carson, *Studies in Mutualist Political Economy* (Charleston, SC: BookSurge 2007).

may use confiscatory power to acquire a productive asset and transfer it to a favored person. (c) Someone may be able to pay for the acquisition and maintenance of a productive asset precisely because she has received a contract from the state the fulfillment of which involves using the asset. (d) Someone may be able to acquire and maintain a productive asset simply because she is wealthy in virtue of state-secured privilege. (e) An intimate relationship with the state may further access to social networks that facilitate acquisition and maintenance of productive assets. (f) Politicians and senior bureaucrats can use their positions of state power, and so of class position, to acquire productive assets or the resources needed to acquire such assets, and so, even if they are not already wealthy, to become owners of the means of production in virtue of their preexisting state positions.

- (ii) It will also be true for CLCA that access to the means of production may give someone access to state power and thus to state-secured privilege. This will, again, be true for multiple reasons. (a) Wealth, even legitimately acquired wealth, may be used directly to exert influence on state actors. (b) Business relationships with the state will facilitate access to state actors, and simple access can enhance influence. (c) Business relationships with the state can create indirect opportunities for those who own the means of production to do non-monetary favors for state actors in their official and unofficial capacities. (d) Wealth can be used to influence the climate of public debate in ways that influence state actors to confer privileges on holders of productive assets.

Thus, while for CLCA one is not a member of the ruling class or its satellite classes simply in virtue of owning productive assets, owning productive assets can serve as a pathway to membership in the ruling class or its satellite classes and as evidence that one belongs to these classes. Proponents of CLCA can agree, therefore, with Marxist theories and their cousins who understand ownership of the means of production and class membership as belonging together. (Sumner's discussion of plutocrats and plutocracy provides one way into thinking about the relationship.)

This helps to explain why CLCA can readily find common ground with populist movements like Occupy! or the original Tea Party. While CLCA has no commitment to the idea that wealth inequality as such is morally or politically objectionable, it can regard actually existing inequalities as frequently problematic for two reasons. (a) These inequalities not infrequently

result from state-secured privileges. (b) They also can be and not infrequently are used to facilitate the acquisition of such privileges. Thus, while not all inequalities are objectionable from the perspective of CLCA, many actually existing ones will be. Proponents of CLCA will wish sharply to distinguish wealth acquired peacefully through the direct or indirect satisfaction of consumers from wealth acquired primarily as a result of state-secured privilege, and will not wish to endorse the politics of envy practiced by some populists. But they can and should join with populists in condemning those inequalities that result from state-secured privilege.

VII. LOOKING FORWARD

The notion of class continues to offer a fruitful basis for political critique. Many radical thinkers have emphasized the importance of class analysis as a powerful tool for use not only in understanding but also in changing the world. CLCA emphasizes the constitutive link between class position and systemic violence. In so doing, it enables us to see what is persuasive, but also what is deficient, in alternative views that focus on group identity or market position.

CLCA offers both scholars and activists the opportunity to respond effectively to contemporary concerns about such issues as wealth concentration, police violence, and the military-industrial complex in ways that highlight the essential role of the state in making these social phenomena possible. It thus enables radical advocates of freedom to make common cause with a variety of protest movements across the ideological spectrum without compromising their commitment to liberty.

An immensely rich tradition has developed and extended CLCA over the last four centuries. We hope in this book to spur not only appreciation for that tradition but also ongoing participation in its refinement and extension. This will obviously take different forms as different thinkers engage with the tradition and with each other. Proponents of CLCA can be expected to differ with each other regarding the relationship between the approach to class analysis they advocate and concerns related to industrial organization, gender and ethnocultural identities, and even the role and significance of the state itself. But our hope is that giving the tradition a name and introducing it to scholars across a range of disciplines and to activists representing a range of perspectives will enable it to grow, to thrive, and to continue contributing to a critical and transformative engagement with power and the defense of human freedom and peaceful social cooperation.

CONTENTS

Part I	Classic Works of Classical Liberal Class Analysis	1
1	Richard Overton, “Monopolists as Frogs and Vermin” (1641)	3
2	Adam Smith, “On Conspiracies, Monopolies, and Unproductive Labour” (1776)	7
3	Thomas Paine, <i>The Rights of Man</i> (1792)	11
4	Thomas Paine, Letter Addressed to the Addressers on the Late Proclamation (June 1792)	19
5	William Godwin, “Of Courts, Subjects, and Pensions” (1793)	25
6	Vicesimus Knox, <i>The Spirit of Despotism</i> (1795)	33
7	Jeremy Bentham, “Causes of All Mischiefs,” <i>Plan of Parliamentary Reform</i> (1817)	39

8	Jeremy Bentham, “How the Demand for Political Fallacies Is Created by the State of Interests,” <i>The Book of Fallacies</i> (1824)	47
9	Thomas Hodgskin, “On Obedience as the Object of Legislation” (1832)	51
10	William Leggett, “The Lordlings of the Paper Dynasty” (1834)	59
11	James Mill, “On Those Who Pillage and Those Who Are Pillaged” (1835)	63
12	John Wade, “The Aristocracy and the Oligarchy” (1835)	71
13	Adolphe Blanqui, “The Class Which Does Not Kill or Pillage” (1837)	81
14	Richard Cobden, “England Is a Perfect Paradise for the Aristocracy” (1845–49)	87
15	Frédéric Bastiat, “The English Oligarchy” (1845)	95
16	Frédéric Bastiat, “The Physiology of Plunder” (1847)	99
17	John C. Calhoun, “Tax Payers versus Tax Receivers” (1849)	107
18	Charles Renouard, “Robbers as Parasites” (1852)	117
19	Gustave de Molinari, “The Nobility as Conquering Plunderers” (1852)	125

20	Augustin Thierry, “The Emancipation of the Bourgeoisie” (1853)	133
21	Herbert Spencer, “The Class-Bias” (1873)	141
22	Herbert Spencer, “The Militant Type of Society” (1882)	147
23	Lysander Spooner, <i>No Treason. No. VI. The Constitution of No Authority</i> (1870)	153
24	Lysander Spooner, <i>Natural Law Contrasted with Legislation</i> (1882)	161
25	William Graham Sumner, “The Forgotten Man” (1883)	167
26	William Graham Sumner, “Democracy and Plutocracy” (Undated)	175
27	Benjamin R. Tucker, “The Four Monopolies: Money, Land, Tariffs, and Patents” (1888)	179
28	Franz Oppenheimer, “The Economic Versus the Political Means of Acquiring Wealth” (1908)	189
29	Albert J. Nock, <i>Our Enemy, the State</i> (1935)	195
30	Ludwig von Mises, “On Castes, Classes, and Group Interests” (1945)	203

Part II Contemporary Interpretations of Classical Liberal Class Analysis	211
31 Murray N. Rothbard, “The Anatomy of the State” (1965)	213
32 Roy A. Childs, Jr., “Big Business and the Rise of American Statism” (1969, 1971)	233
33 Walter E. Grinder and John Hagel, “Toward a Theory of State Capitalism: Ultimate Decision-Making and Class Structure” (1974)	255
34 Hans-Hermann Hoppe, “Marxist and Austrian Class Analysis” (1990)	277
35 Roderick T. Long, “Toward a Libertarian Theory of Class” (1998)	297
About the Editors	331
Index	335

PART I

Classic Works of Classical Liberal Class Analysis

Richard Overton, “Monopolists as Frogs and Vermin” (1641)

Abstract The English Leveller Richard Overton uses biblical references like plagues of frogs and “Diabolical *Parasites*” to criticize those who have government-issued monopolies for the sale of goods like soap, playing cards, butter, salt, and tobacco which they use to exploit ordinary consumers. He wittily appeals to Parliament for help in putting an end to “the Tyranny of these insulting Projectors.”

Monopolers by their nefarious Projects, and impious exactions, have contaminated the Land with such a contagious exulceration of wicked impositions, that I may with a coequall sympathie, assimilate them to the *Frogs of Ægypt*. First, In regard that those Frogs were the second Plague that was brought upon the *Ægyptians*: So these Monopolers (in respect that Bishops had the priority) were the second Plague, which with disastrous aspersions, did infect our Nation. Secondly, As those Frogs came unto *Pharaoes* Bed-chamber, and upon his Bed: So these Diabolicall *Parasites*, did creep into our Kings bosome, with their Phariticall Calumny. Thirdly, Those Frogs did come upon all the people in *Ægypt*, throughout their Territories: And who is there in all our Kingdom, that have not beene infected by the contagion of their venenosive aspersions: they were a Nest of Wasps, which did Tyrannically sting the Kings loyal Subjects with their exacting impositions: They were a swarme of Vermine, which did pollute sincere purity, and like the *Frogs of Ægypt*, did over-creep the Land. They warmed themselves at other mens fires, and though the peoples fingers ends were a cold, by

regard of their impious Project, yet they would alwayes remember to say with *Mantuan*, *Optimum est alieni a frui pecunia*. They sip't of honest mens cups, and did distend their purses in their Bacchanalian ryot, for they drowned themselves in *Bacchus* Fountaine, while other men payd the reckoning. They did alwaies share with the Butler in his Box, yea they grew so fat and plump with damned Projects, that it was easier for *Hercules* to beate the Triple-headed Cerberous out of Hells Stygian Portals, then for us of late, to speake against these cursed Projectors, who abused the Triple Crowne.

But (we thank the all-directing providence of the mighty and Almighty *God*) we have found the like successe with *Hercules*, and by the inflexible Justice of the *Parliament*, we shall with him, drag these Hell-hounds upon the earth, who did eradicate the well planted branch of Plenty. They were heretofore so Epidemically strict, that they would not bate us a pin in their exactions; they have worne a Vizard a long time: But a Vizard sayd I? Their pride was a sufficient Vizard, for it was no marvaile that no man else could know them, when they knew not themselves. But when the *Parliament* shall once unface these, they will prove as bad as any cards in the packe. They were *Janus*-like, and had two Cloakes to hide their knavery; and like the Pythagorean Monster, they did threaten to devoure the whole Commons at a mouth-full. In *Ægypt* the thirsty Dog could never lap of the River *Nilus*, but the Crocodile would assault him immediatly. Neither in our Land could any honest man, whom dire necessitie by compulsive coercion required to allay his sitiating thirst, sip at the odoriferous Spring of *Bacchus*, but incontinently he was assayled by these cursed Crocodiles, the rubbish of Babylon, Honesties Hangman, fomenters of Impietie, Iniquities prodigious Monsters, Plenties execrable Foes, Envies individuall Companions, detestable Enemies to loyall Subjects; and in a word, that I may fully paint them out, The Devills Journey-men. The *Romans* were never in more danger of the *Sabines*, than wee have beene of these pernicious members: the *Sicilians* never feared the *Basilisk* more, nor the *Cretans* the *Minotaure* neither the *Athenians* that pestiferous Serpent *Epidaurus*, than we have justly feared these wicked Dragons of implety. They are like the *Grecian* Horse, in the midst of *Troy*, under pretence of safety, but at length consumed the whole city: So these firebrands of iniquitie would have extirpated the flourishing plenty of the Land, but (thanks be to God and the righteous Parliament) they are now extinguished. For as a rotten member *Ense recidendum est ne pars sincer a trahatur*, ought to be cut off, least it infect, and contaminate the whole body; so ought these wicked members of the Common-wealth to

be executed with the Sword of Iustice, who have already too farre polluted the body of the Realme. Tis a plausible assimulation which *Hippocrates* observeth, that in the body naturall, as it must be truely purged, before it can be truely sound: so likewise in the body politicke, unlesse these improbous malefactors be purged out, it can never be truely sound.

Their very name Monopolers doth stigmatize them under the brand of knavery, which is derived from *monos* which signifies in English, *Onely*: so that Monopolers, are the *Onely Polers* of the people, which have abused them by their Projects: But now (alas poore men!) they are intruss'd and like to be whipp'd. Their very Projects themselves are set against them: Their Coles which they did aggerate are ready to consume them: The Butter, which before greased their pockets, now melts in their mouthes: The Sope scorne to be projected any longer, and will invert its first Letter S. into R. and become a Rope to them rather. The Salt is ready to powder them to Tiburne: The Cards scorne that they should play the Knave any longer: The Pinnes could pin their Heads to the Gall-house, The Wine threatens to lay them dead—drunke: but hang them they are so crafty, that although they fall downe in a Wine-Seller, yet they know how to rise up agine in a Tobacco-Shop, but I hope before they rise there, they will first rise up at the Gall house: where I'le leave them—By these, and the like enormities have our Land beene too farre overspread, it hath lately flourished too luxuriously in impiety, which did accumulate such insupportable burthens to the weather-beaten Commons of this Realme, that they were almost everted. But thankes be to the all-disposig omnipotence of immortall God, who have alwayes preserved this Kingdome from innumerable evils, and have kept it as the apple of his eye. I say thankes be to his Supremacy, who among other evils have preserved us likewise from the Tyranny of these insulting Projectors. But we now solely depend upon the Parliaments exemplary piety and great Justice, of whom we beg with all humility, and with affectionate servency to the truth, doe supplicate that they would with expedition extinguish these cursed firebrands of the Land, who like *Samsons* Foxes have consumed the Lands and Possions of the Commons. Wherefore let every true hearted Subject enumerate his expresse thankfulnessse to Almigty God for the preservation of this Kingdome, and the multitude of his favours irrigated thereon with all alacritie.

Richard Overton (1631–1664) was an actor, playwright, and Leveller pamphleteer during the English Revolution. He had his own secret printing press and wrote many articles for the Leveller journal *The Moderate*. His