

Notes towards a class analysis

- 1.. With the dissolution of primitive communal organisation, society begins to differentiate into separate, and finally antagonistic, classes.
- 2.. " The history of all hithertoe existing society is the history of class struggles.
Freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guildmaster and journeyman, in a word, pppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes. " (C.M.)
- 3.. The transition from one epoch or mode of production to the next has brought into being new classes, differing from the old in their relationship to production, but not in their fundamental content,- a basic antagonistic contradiction between those who own the means of production and those who don't.
- 4.. Capitalism is the latest stage of this historical process...but with one vital difference. For the first time in history, a stage has been reached..." where the exploited and oppressed class - the proletariat - cannot attain its emancipation from the sway of the exploiting and ruling class - the bourgeoisie - without, at the same time, and once and for all, emancipating society at large from all exploitation, oppression, class distinctions, and class struggles. " (Preface to English Edition of the C.M. of 1888, Engels)
This is the historical mission of the proletariat, and the historical task of the Party of the Proletariat.
- 5.. Historically, the class struggle has never been a mechanical battle between absolute forces. By the very nature of social production, classes interact, and this interaction has produced intermediate classes, whose characteristics have varied with the changing character of the mode of production, and the prime combatants. Moreover, each class is a dynamic whole, whose parts are synthesised by common relationship to production, yet differing ~~KKKKKKKK~~ in other aspects.
- 6.. In the present epoch, the epoch of the revolutionary transformation of society, it is essential that the Party of the Proletariat should grasp and understand the internal dynamic of the bourgeoisie, our enemy. But more important, we must understand the internal dynamic of our own class - the proletariat, and the nature and role of the intermediate classes.

1.
Mao asked the question... 'Who are our friends and who are our enemies?'... This question was not only important for the subjective development of the revolutionary struggle, but for the objective understanding of that very struggle.

7.. This task is particularly important in Britain today in the light of the rapidly developing crisis, the deteriorating industrial situation, and the growth of fascism.

8.. We should try to avoid the trap of subjectivism in our approach to class...

As the Albanian comrades point out....

" In order to determine the place to which this or that man belongs, one must not judge from his education, culture and special skills, but in the first place from the place he occupies in the system of social production, from his relations with the means of production, from the role he plays in the social organisation of labour, and consequently, from the quantity of the income he receives, and the way he receives it. "

9. What then are the major class forces operating in our society which form the base for our strategy and tactics of revolution? In what follows, we do not want to get bogged down in deciding whether a particular person is in this or that class. We are dealing with broad principles, and there is a great need for more detailed investigation, which we hope will emerge out of the conference and future struggles to build the party.

10.. The Bourgeoisie

In their relationship to the means of production the particular aspect of the mode of existence of the bourgeoisie, and the common unifying factor, is the ownership, use, control, and accumulation of capital.

" Capital is not a thing, but a definite social relation, said Marx. Things - means of production and all other kinds of commodities - in the hands of the bourgeoisie in themselves are not capital. Only a definite social system makes these things into means of exploitation, converts them into carriers of that social relation which we call capital. Capital is " a special, historically definite, social production relation " (Lenin) "(Leontiev - Political Economy, p. 92.)

Capital is not the same as money or wealth. It is the ownership of capital that enables the bourgeoisie to transform money into capital and thereby accumulate more capital, and wealth.

Engels, takes this point further...in 'ON CAPITAL', p.37....

"....not every amount of money is capable of being converted into capital; ~~kkkk~~ there is an extreme minimum for it; the cost of a unit of labouring power and of the means of labour necessary to keep it going. Suppose the rate of surplus value to be 50%, our infant - capitalist would be required to be able to employ 2 workmen in order to live, himself, as a workman lives. But this would prevent him from saving anything; and the end of capitalist production is not merely preservation, but also and chiefly increase of wealth. To live twice as well as a common labourer and to transform one half of the surplus value produced into capital, he would have to be able to employ 8 workmen. He might certainly take his share of the work, along with his workmen, but he would still remain a small master, a hybrid between capitalist and labourer. Now, a certain development of capitalist production renders it necessary that the capitalist should devote the whole of the time during which he acts as a capitalist, as capital personified, to the appropriation and control of other people's labour and to the sale of its products. The restrictive guilds of the Middle Ages attempted to check the transformation of the small master into a capitalist by fixing a very low maximum to the number of workmen which each was allowed to employ. The owner of money or commodities changes into a real capitalist only then, when he is able to advance, for the purpose of production, a minimum sum far higher than his medieval maximum. ' Here, just as in the natural sciences, the correctness is proved of the law discovered by Hegel that mere quantitative changes, at a certain point, imply a qualitative difference'. The minimum amount of value required to change an owner of money or commodities into a capitalist varies for different stages of the development of capitalist production, and for a given stage of development, it varies for different branches of industry...."

Historically, capital has passed through 3 phases....mercantile, industrial, and monopoly finance capital. Today in Britain, all 3 are merged together, but dominated by the latter...

It is in all of the above context, that the bourgeoisie may be divided into 3 basic strata....

1.....Monopoly capitalists

the smallest group, but most dominant and powerful nationally and internationally: industry, banks, insurance, merchants....

2.....Large scale individual or small groups of capitalists.

in competition with monopolies but powerful enough to stand alone..

~~kkkk~~ May be partly linked with monopolies; industry, small banks or finance houses, merchants, services, landlords...

3.....Small scale individual or small groups of capitalists

less significant economically, in desperate struggle against monopolies and finance capital for survival; threatened with

being thrust down into the ranks of the petty-bourgeoisie, smaller industrialists, merchants, landlords and owners of services..

11.. The Working Class

In their relationship to the means of production, the particular aspects of the mode of existence of the working class, and the unifying factors can be summarised as follows....

- "....i) deprived of ownership of the means of production..
- ii) have to sell their labour power to the capitalist class..
- iii) Directly take part in productive work or in the spheres of services and circulation..
- iv) create surplus value for the capitalist. " (Albanian article)

A worker does not depend on the degree of his skill or tools of work, whether simple or modern, or mental in relation to manual. Nor does it depend on the amount of his wage packet.

The working class comprises the vast majority of society. Whilst distinctions between those workers who are skilled vs unskilled, or receiving wages vs salaries, or 'manual' vs 'mental' can be made, they are only relevant in determining levels of organisation, or consciousness, willingness to struggle, etc...They have no objective class distinction..

What is more important today in Britain is an objective differentiation of strata in relation to production...On this basis, the most significant divisions are...

1. Productive workers

These may be skilled or unskilled, but relate directly to the production of commodities;

2. Non-productive workers.

Again they may be skilled or unskilled, but relate only indirectly to the production of commodities.

3. Agricultural workers

It is the first group - productive or industrial proletariat - that forms the heart of revolution, historically and at present. The very nature of collectivity which forces large numbers of workers into productive units to produce a common product is the basis of the collective consciousness of socialism. This is the reason why historically organisation, socialist ideology, and the trade movement is so strong here. Collective exploitation breeds collective resistance and struggle and the search for answers. Imperialism has created greater and greater industrial enterprises and hence the base for its own demise. It is here that the party of the proletariat has to root itself.

5.

But the development of Imperialism has also necessitated a wide expansion of the non-productive sector. This is particularly important in Britain today. This sector is partly organised in collective units on a large scale and partly not, and out of necessity it has organised and advanced its trade unions, strengthening the collective consciousness and ideology of socialism. Its interests are those of the industrial proletariat.

Agricultural workers, on the other hand, are organised into smaller units, and while their interests as productive workers are similar to those of the industrial proletariat, they are less able to struggle collectively. A small proportion of them may have 'plots' of their own, but apart from this, they are automatic allies of the industrial proletariat.

Another distinction within the working class which has relevance to our strategy and tactics is the difference between state vs. non-state employees..

Non-state employees have a direct relationship to their employers as exploiters, and tend to see them as enemies against whom they must struggle. But, they have not yet related this struggle to all employers and the state, by the very nature of the 'local' productive process, but this consciousness is developing rapidly, and strengthening it is our task among them.

On the other hand, state employees have an ill-defined boss or employer. There is more difficulty in relating directly to an exploiter or exploiting class. They do however have a more direct relationship to the state, which we have to strengthen and link to the bourgeoisie as a class.

12.. The Middle-class or Petty bourgeoisie

These are neither capitalists nor workers, though the upper strata strives to be capitalist, and the lower strata struggles to avoid becoming workers, in many cases, unsuccessfully..

We have already referred to the economic basis for this group in Engels' quotation above...

The particular aspect of the mode of existence of this group is personal ownership, use and accumulation of money or wealth with only an indirect link to primary capital accumulation and ownership. They own in small measure some limited means of production and tools, and exploit it as individuals or small groups to accumulate personal wealth as distinct from capital. The economic base is formed by small shopkeepers, contractors, shareholders, landlords, owners of services...The latter includes dentists, GPs, pharmacists, lawyers, architects, accountants, stockbrokers, plumbers, electricians, garage owners, etc...etc.. They are divisible into 3 strata - upper, middle, and lower. In the communist manifesto, Marx refers to the fate of the lower

stratum....." The lower strata of the middle-class - the small trades-people, shopkeepers, and retired tradesmen generally, the handicraftsmen and peasants - all these sink gradually into the proletariat, partly because their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which Modern Industry is carried on, and is swamped in the competition with the large capitalists, partly because their specialised skill is rendered worthless by new methods of production..."...And elsewhere, ..." The lower middle class fights against the bourgeoisie, to save from extinction their existence as fractions of the middle class. They are therefore not revolutionary, but conservative. Nay, more, they are reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history. If, by chance, they are revolutionary, they are so only in view of their impending transfer into the proletariat, they thus defend not their present, but their future interests, they desert their own standpoint to place themselves at that of the proletariat. " C.M.

Under imperialism, this lower stratum is still present but in flux as described above...~~Who specifically is~~ Who specifically is in it has yet to be determined for us today. It includes those who are part workers in the sense that they work in productive or service units, but at the same time maintain individually owned enterprises. There is great mobility between this lower stratum and the working class, but as a consequence of the development of imperialism and the working class, Marx's comments as to their reactionary nature are less appropriate today, though these comments certainly apply to the middle stratum of the petty bourgeoisie. This group is a potential ally of the working class, and links with it should be strengthened.

At the other extreme there are those who strive to accumulate and use capital. They strive to emulate and move upwards, but face fierce competition from small scale capitalists who are continually being forced downwards into the petty bourgeoisie. Their interests are essentially bourgeois. They are reactionary and as a group they are allies of the bourgeoisie. This is the upper stratum.

And inbetween are the bulk of the petty bourgeoisie, many of whom may be won to revolution by the strength and power of the working class. As a ~~class~~ ^{group} they vacillate, but never firmly side with the proletariat.

While the whole class is relatively less stable than the prime combatants as an economic force, they form the economic base for petty bourgeois ideology which has great significance inside the ranks of the working class.

Petty bourgeois ideology is the ideology of small scale, personal accumulation of wealth as against the collective.

It is not the same as bourgeois ideology which is the ideology of power, of capital ownership and accumulation. The bulk of the petty-bourgeois does not want to become capitalists as such, but they do want to possess in some small measure some means of production and to use them to ammass personal wealth. They want enough to leave in comfort and retain their entrepreneur, individual identity and belongings. They shun and do not accept the collective, unless it involves small groups of similar minded individuals. As a group, particularly the middle stratum, they are reactionary, but important in the struggle.

13. While the central struggle and issue is between the working class and the bourgeoisie, we have to defeat petty bourgeois ideology among the ranks of the working class by counterposing our own working class ideology, Marxism-Leninism. To do this we have to strengthen our base among the proletariat in general, and the industrial proletariat in particular. We have to win over to our side the lower stratum of the petty bourgeoisie, and neutralise the middle stratum. The upper stratum we must expose ruthlessly as we expose the bourgeoisie itself. We can only neutralise the middle stratum, and perhaps win over some of them directly, if we have a strong working class base. At the same time we must make use of all contradictions among the bourgeoisie itself, and among the petty-bourgeoisie to show to the mass of workers the real nature of capitalism and the way to defeat it. The triumph of Marxism-Leninism over bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideology is only possible if we root ourselves in our base, through mass work and example, strengthening the links and solidarity among all workers and winning allies.

14. We have a great task ahead, nothing short of 'changing the world'. Whilst what we have written can only be draft and general, we need clarification. Is this correct? What are the more specific divisions around which our strategy and tactics can develop? We submit that the petty-bourgeoisie does exist and is important as a class, though we cannot be precise. Precision is for the developing movement to clarify...