

Class, place and industrial revolution • *CRAIG CALHOUN*

Looking at the period of the 'classic' industrial revolution – about 1780–1840 in Britain, slightly later in the USA and on the European continent – a number of recent social historians have noted the importance of local community relations to what they call class struggle (see, among many, Thompson, 1968; Foster, 1974; Aminzade, 1981; Smith, 1982). By contrast, I shall try to specify the historical process further by suggesting that two different sorts of social relationships are at stake. Community is built of direct relationships; class, on the contrary, is made possible as a form of social solidarity only by the development of large-scale systems of indirect relationships. In Marxist theory in particular, class refers to social collectivities constructed not haphazardly on the local scene but at the level of the whole social formation under terms dictated by the dominant mode of production. Class is not at issue wherever there is hierarchy, nor class struggle wherever workers challenge the authority of bosses or employers. To be salient in the class struggle engendered by capitalism, classes – bourgeoisie, proletariat – must be organized at the same level as capital accumulation. Because of their smaller numbers and greater resources, élites (including members of the bourgeoisie) are likely to achieve some such organization before classes or 'masses'. It is as weak to describe workers' struggles caught within the bounds of locality – in Oldham alone, say, or even all of Southeast Lancashire – as comprising 'class struggle' as to describe the local industrial

organization as comprising (rather than reflecting, or being shaped by) capitalism; each must be understood in terms of a larger scale and more complex sort of integration.

My argument, then, is as follows:

(1) It is necessary to distinguish between class struggle and popular mobilizations on the basis of community or other direct interpersonal relationships.

(2) It is necessary to recognize that even at the level of capitalism, classes are not things, but must be composed of interpersonal relationships. These relationships are indirect rather than direct.¹

(3) Communications and transportation infrastructures are an essential part of the material basis for class struggle (and other large scale collective action) but were only developed adequately to this purpose as capitalism's continuing industrial revolution progressed past the level it had attained in the first third or even half of the nineteenth century.²

(4) Class struggles tend to be caught within certain limits imposed by capitalism and capitalist democracy while movements based on direct social relationships (free social spaces) have more potential to avoid the reification of abstract, indirect relations and therefore to develop alternative, sometimes radical, visions. My presentation is more theoretical than empirical; the historical examples I give are mostly British.

Class and the transcendence of locality

It is the nature of capitalism to create an enormous and normally expanding system of production and distribution of commodities:

The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country . . . in place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations. . . . The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization (Marx and Engels, 1848, p. 488.)³

Marx expected the working class to attain international solidarity on a scale comparable to the international organization of capital and

capitalist enterprises. The spreading scope of capitalism is accompanied, however, by the introduction of a split between that large-scale integration and various local systems of direct relationships. Though one's work in a capitalist society will nearly always tie one into such a large-scale system of indirect relationships, one's bonds of affect and mutual support may remain local.

In the new class-segregated communities, individuals and families address the marketplace. Whereas precapitalist communities were shattered by the penetration of new kinds of markets protected by the umbrella of the states, capitalist communities are defined by market relations. 'Household and occupation,' Weber stresses, 'become ecologically separated, and the household is no longer a unit of common consumption' (Katznelson, 1979, p. 230).

Production and consumption, work and community become largely distinguishable phenomena, carried out through distinct sets of relationships. Moreover, the organization of consumption no more necessarily unifies people who live near each other than that of production necessarily unifies those who work at a common trade or for a common employer. Not only do production and consumption engender cross-cutting patterns of association, but each gives only a weak disposition to solidarity. This puts new organizational problems before any attempt to build solidarity on the basis of positions within the relations of production. As the capitalist system grows, the object of any working-class struggle is removed from direct relationships, from immediate locality. Neither workplace nor residential community includes the 'enemy' to be confronted nor is composed of a sufficiently broad network of relationships to reach all those concerned. Large-scale organization of indirect relationships becomes essential.⁴

That class struggle should be understood as taking place on such a large scale is suggested by Marx, who defined the working class as coterminous with capitalist exploitation.⁵ To see class everywhere and in every epoch renders the term an abstract tool for categorization, devoid of specific historical content. There is nothing inherently wrong with using the language of class in this broad way; it simply should not be thought that such usages bear much relationship to Marxist theory, with its stress on historically delimited abstractions, and its primary concern for the class relations of capitalism. In developing a theory of social *action*, one learns more by keeping some concept to refer only to collectivities or relations at the level of the 'system' as a whole, large-scale integration.⁶ In this sense, the notion of class is distinctively

(though not uniquely) relevant to the modern period. Class refers not just to any interest group, but to a particular sort of collectivity which influences our actions more than those of our ancestors; the dominance of which, indeed, is only made possible by modern technology and social organization.⁷ But, Marx and most of his followers have failed to consider the organizational difficulties of working-class organization on this scale, its dependence on formal organizations and on the presence of a developed infrastructure of communication and transportation.

In the early nineteenth century, class struggle, at least the struggle of proletariat against bourgeoisie which Marx proposed, was impossible. It was not just unclear, immature or doomed to defeat. In an important sense, it was impossible. The problem lay not with insufficient class analysis, but with an inadequate infrastructure. Capitalist societies had not yet built the transportation and communications systems which would enable co-ordination of activity at the class level.

By the end of the century, this had changed in most of Europe. Precisely as capitalism was being internationalized on a new scale, and just as joint-stock corporations were coming to predominate, so too class struggle became an option. Just as the corporation was an organizational response to larger-scale social and economic integration, drawing on new technologies of control and co-ordination as well as new social arrangements making systems of indirect relations easier to bring off, so class-based organizations were an attempt to give workers the ability to mobilize for struggle on a comparable scale.⁸ Neither class struggle nor corporations were the only options open; they were not inevitabilities amenable to scientific discovery, but they were *newly practical* options. This aspect of the discontinuity of industrial revolution is of interest not just for purposes of historical chronology but because of what it can tell us about the nature of modern class struggle and other modes of popular politics.

Capitalism and large-scale social integration

One of Marx's most important points about capitalism was that it creates a social 'totality' in a sense in which one was not present before.⁹ This totalization is the integration of indirect relations into a singular system. This does not do away with the direct interpersonal

relationships which predominated before capitalism; they continue to co-exist with it, and new sorts of direct relationships are created in capitalist societies. Modern society is not distinguished, Katznelson insightfully has observed, by the contrast between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*, but rather by that between a society in which *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* were intimately bound to one another, and one which severed them (1979, p. 206). The split between work and community has been as fateful as that between classes:

Emerging competing class capacities came now [i.e. with capitalism] to depend on the character of the connections made between the motion of capitalist accumulation, the ways they informed the social relations of work, community, and citizenship, and the ideological and organizational links made between these differentiated arenas of social life (Katznelson, 1979, p. 229).

The dynamics of value and commodities, labour and capital, unify an ever larger range of economic activity, eliminating various local specificities and autonomies in favour of the single dominant integrative principle of capital accumulation through appropriation of surplus value. As Engels wrote:

[Before capitalism] exchange was restricted, the market narrow, the methods of production stable; there was local exclusiveness without, local unity within; the market in the country; in the town, the guild.

But with the extension of the production of commodities, and especially with the introduction of the capitalist mode of production, the laws of commodity production, hitherto latent, came into action more openly and with greater force. The old bonds were loosened, the old exclusive limits broken through, the producers were more and more turned into independent, isolated producers of commodities. It became apparent that the production of society at large was ruled by absence of plan, by accident, by anarchy; and this anarchy grew to greater and greater heights. But the chief means by aid of which the capitalist mode of production intensified this anarchy of socialized production was the exact opposite of anarchy. It was the increasing organization of production, upon a social basis, in every individual productive, establishment. By this the old, peaceful, stable condition of things was ended. . . . The local struggles begot in their turn national conflicts. . .

Finally, modern industry and the opening of the world market made the struggle universal (1880, pp. 96–7).

In looking at specific workplaces, Marx and Engels stressed the importance of the sort of social organization of production which numerous manufacturers were pioneering and Charles Babbage and Andrew Ure were analysing and propagandizing during their lifetimes.

Outside of the factory, however, they paid relatively little attention to patterns of social organization *per se*. Indeed, they tended to assume that capitalism would not allow coherent national or international economic organization, or the state as we know it.¹⁰ Their economic analyses were focused almost exclusively on the indirect relationships created among people by the system of value and capital.

By contrast the key political groups and movements of Marx's and Engels's lifetimes – those which formed the basis for their ideas of working class radicalism – were based predominantly on direct relations. This was true of struggles in France at least through the Paris Commune of 1871 (note the local specificity of that ill-fated red republican venture), true also of all pre-Chartist and most Chartist struggles in Britain, and of German mobilizations through the early days of the social democratic party. Only near the end of his life did Engels have to grapple with the development of a complex party organization designed to mediate relations and co-ordinate activity (including electoral participation) among members of a truly large-scale working-class movement.

Nonetheless, Marx's analysis of the fetishism of commodities is one of the most important bases for coming to grips with the nature of indirect social relationships. The commodity form is a template for analysis of reification, including the reification of social relationships. Fetishism of commodities occurs because:

the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour . . . it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things (Marx, 1867, p. 17).

The relationships formed in the production and circulation of commodities are a basic model for considering the potential reification of all sorts of indirect relationships. Marx and Engels, however, did not give comparable attention to analysing the fetishism of organizations – e.g. the treatment of a capitalist corporation as a fictive person in courts of law, or the treatment of the proletariat as a singular entity in Marxist-Leninist theory. Nor did Marx and Engels attempt to explore in any depth the place of either direct or indirect social relationships in political action. There is, thus, no strong account of social organization *per se* in any of Marx's or Engels's writings. One result of this is that as

classes are deduced from the economic theory, their collective action is presumed to follow simply from rational recognition of common interests. Marx and Engels offer scattered comments on how concentration in cities, organization in large factories, or experience of local struggle might help to build class consciousness. But they bequeath as a problem to generations of later Marxists the question of just what sorts of relationships create classes capable of struggle within or against capitalism.¹¹

Classes, as Przeworski suggests, are not settled data prior to the history of concrete struggles:

Classes are organized and disorganized as outcomes of continuous struggles. Parties defining themselves as representing the interests of various classes and parties purporting to represent the general interest, unions, newspapers, schools, public bureaucracies, civic and cultural associations, factories, armies, and churches – all participate in the process of class formation in the course of struggles that fundamentally concern the very vision of society. . . . The ideological struggle is a struggle *about* class before it is a struggle *among* classes (1977, p. 371).

Classes become important social bases for collective action when society is knit together through large-scale systems of indirect relationships. The working class and the bourgeoisie are the broadest (but not the only) classes demarcated by reference to the relations of production. Not all the conditions of class formation, however, are economic, ideological, or even political. Social organizational conditions encourage some directions of class formation and discourage others. The very centrality of the sorts of parties Przeworski mentions is given in part by these organizational conditions. There must be some framework for achieving class solidarity. The more sustained and contrary to existing institutional arrangements any course of collective action is, the greater the intra-class social solidarity it will require.

Communities offer pre-existing relationships as a potential foundation for collective struggle; in much of Europe, overlap between community and class forms of organization has been a key source of strength for class struggle. Where classes have less prior social solidarity on which to draw, they are weaker. 'Purity' of class foundations may not be a predictor of social strength at all. Unlike communities and other collectivities formed through direct interpersonal relationships, classes take on subjective existence primarily through the creation of some manner of complex organizations; these organizations mediate the

relationships of members of the class to one another. Direct relationships alone cannot give the class collective agency. The organizations of class struggle – from trade unions to labour parties – replace (or supplement) communities and related informal associations in the same way that corporations (especially those which split ownership from management) replace partnerships and owner-operated businesses.

In fact, the archetype for both processes is the development of the modern state.¹² Over a period of hundreds of years, the development of absolutist and eventually parliamentary states reduced the role of personal control and co-ordination in favour of formal organizational structures. The direct, personal relations of domination characteristic of both feudalism and the cities which grew in late medieval Europe were replaced by the indirect relations of bureaucracy. Though medieval cities were socially quite different from their rural surroundings, the relations of artisans, merchants and other urban dwellers shared with feudalism proper a dependence on direct personal relationships. The cities formed self-contained and largely autonomous wholes within the parcelled framework of feudalism. Katznelson points out how 'citizenship began to give way to class as the defining relation of city life' when expanding market relations intersected with the rise of the absolutist state:

Although market relations at the local level were divorced from the communal meanings of citizenship at the very moment they were joined to the growing political authority of the absolutist state, both the national (indeed, international) and local processes that changed the character of the social structures of late medieval cities shared a common pivot – an enlarged and defining role for market relations (1979, p. 219).

The state was not only a model for corporations and class organizations, but part of the process which produced them. It not only made a broader organization of markets possible, but it sundered the autonomy and unity city life had maintained in both economic and political spheres. Aside from differences in content, this made possible a transformation of the scale of state functioning. States became simultaneously more permanent, more efficient and more powerful. Marx recognized much of this, and made numerous suggestions of the importance of what has since come to be called the relative autonomy of the state apparatus (Marx, 1871 among many; Poulantzas, 1973, sect. IV). That is, while still maintaining that states rule on behalf of a

ruling class, he qualified the rather broad assertion of the *Communist Manifesto* that the state is simply a committee managing the interests of the ruling class. Marxists since have taken this line of reasoning much further (Poulantzas, 1973 and Anderson, 1975, for example) and in some cases have drawn on Weber's famous analyses of the development of the modern state apparatus.

Similarly, Marx and Engels noticed the importance of the emergence of joint-stock corporations, seeing them as at once purer forms of capitalist enterprise and steps on the way to socialization of production (Marx, 1885; Engels, 1878, pp. 380–1). But Marx had little of substance to say on the subject primarily because corporate enterprise only came to predominate after his death. Generations of thinkers have grappled in detail with the question of how the growth of corporations is to be assimilated into the Marxist theory of capitalism. Perhaps the most famous issue is that of whether the displacement of owners from the direct operation of the companies, and the creation of a class of managerial employees, fundamentally changes the nature of the enterprise or the class structure.¹³ As in the case of state apparatuses, corporations built out of indirect relationships proved more permanent, efficient and powerful, by and large, than their more personalistic predecessors. As was the case for states, corporations also greatly increased the scale of social integration in the respective spheres of operations.

One might have expected Marxist thinkers to apply some of the same logic to conceptions of classes and class struggle. In fact, they have failed to do this, largely because of a persisting confusion between the relational conception of classes of exploiters and exploited which is yielded by the Marxist theory of capitalism, the notion of class-in-itself turning into a transcendently rational class-for-itself which Marx derived from Hegel, and the actual radical movements which have demonstrated the potential for insurgency and even revolutionary transformation (and which have even on occasion spoken the language of class) but which have not been founded on the basis of class (Calhoun, 1982, 1983a). Whatever the reasons, though Marxists have debated the relationship between class and party at length, they have not considered that it might be much like that between state and citizenry, or corporate management and widely dispersed owners.

Classes – at least the Marxian proletariat and other 'mass' or popular classes (the sort with which Przeworski is also concerned) – are too large and widely dispersed to be mobilized on the basis of

direct interpersonal relationships. For these collectivities to provide the basis for sustained, effective insurgencies their members must be linked to each other through some mediating agency. Trade unions work in this way for their members, and are thus in direct line of development of class struggle (as Marx thought) and not necessarily to be distinguished from a more revolutionary class consciousness (as Lenin suggested). Trade unions and working-class political parties do vary in the extent to which they *represent* loosely organized constituents, or *organize* those constituents for direct participation in action (the latter comes much closer to Marx's conceptualization of class struggle). In either case, this sort of mobilization differs significantly from that which is based on direct relations such as those of the local community. Moreover, it depends on a level of communications and transportation infrastructure which had not been developed prior to 1840 if, indeed, it was sufficient then.

This reconceptualization of popular political movements turns on a recognition that the industrial revolution was far from over and done with in the middle of the nineteenth century. On the contrary, industrial revolution – as Marx and Engels rather presciently remarked in the *Communist Manifesto* – is an ongoing process essential to capitalism:

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society (1848, p. 487).

This must include not just material technology but the social organization of labour – factories themselves and assembly lines as well as steam engines and spinning jennies. In an 1895 introduction to a new printing of Marx's 'The Class Struggles in France, 1848–50', Engels observed how mistaken he and Marx had been to think that the 1848 revolution marked a climax or even near climax in the political struggle against capitalism. The reason was that, far from witnessing the 'death-throes of capitalism' he and Marx had been witnessing its birth pangs. Capitalism went on developing, revolutionizing the European and world economies in the second half of the nineteenth century (and up to the present day). Only in the course of this development, did capitalism create class societies and the social conditions necessary for collective action on classwide bases. Even then, class definitions were not settled, but subject to continuous struggle during continuing industrial revolution:

the proletariat could not have been formed as a class once and for all by the end of the nineteenth century because capitalist development continually transforms the structure of places in the system of production and realization of capital as well as in the other manners of production that become dominated by capitalism (Przeworski, 1977, p. 358).¹⁴

Infrastructure and class formation

It was not in the early days of industrialization, but rather in its hey-day from mid-nineteenth century on, that the organizations of class struggle and the infrastructure on which they depended began to mature in the advanced Western societies. The strong bonds of traditional communities provided a basis for most of the radical reaction against capitalism essential to the failed revolts of early nineteenth century Europe and for most successful social revolutions. At varying rates from mid-century on, formal organizations with the administrative and technological ability to transcend place have come to predominate as the bases for such class struggle as characterizes 'mature' capitalism.¹⁵ This struggle developed along with railroads and telegraphs, though the technologies which made it possible also made its repression easier. It developed along with clipper ships and steam power, though the escapes they made feasible offered migration as a viable alternative to continued struggle. But even forced migrations could join with newly efficient postal services, cheap printing presses and all the new infrastructural technologies to spread the theories and practices of class struggle. Trade unions and workers' political parties grew through diffusion, not just parallel invention. Though the European idea of socialism never triumphed in America, Europeans and their ideas played vital roles in generations of American radicalism and labour struggle. Though the ideology might not have been new, the organizational strength of the British general strike of 1926 could hardly have been achieved a hundred years earlier.

Consider just how substantial the advances in infrastructural technology during the nineteenth century were, and what differences they made for the capacity to co-ordinate collective action on a large scale (e.g. that of Great Britain).¹⁶ In the mid-1750s, it took ten to twelve days to travel from London to Edinburgh; by 1836 less than two days were required (Bagwell, 1971, p. 42). As late as 1751, the fast coach between Oxford and London took two days; coaches could make

the trip in six hours in 1828; railroads did not cut the trip to under two hours until the late nineteenth century. Modern road building, river channel improvement, canal construction and steamboat transport were all underway by 1830, and going strong by 1870.¹⁷ Clipper ships and other improved sailing vessels enjoyed their brief glory from 1830–60. The original Liverpool–Manchester railroad was opened in 1830. Nationally, operating mileage and especially passenger transportation remained negligible until mid-century. Only then, and only fairly gradually until about 1870, did it take off as an important means of travel (Bagwell, 1971, p. 110). It is also worth noting, as Bagwell's data indicate, the gradual process by which rail transport ceased to be a luxury and became a part of ordinary life for more and more workers and other third-class passengers. In 1871 approximately 200 million third-class tickets were sold; by the 1910s the number exceeded 1200 million. During this period there was negligible change, by comparison, in first- and second-class ridership, which remained under 100 million.

Communications technology did not develop much faster. Though printed periodicals were common by the late eighteenth century, and popular consumption of them was politically important by the early nineteenth century, the heyday of the mass popular press did not arrive until the middle third of the nineteenth century, if then (Hollis, 1970; Perkin, 1957; Webb, 1955). Postal service based on a uniform, relatively low rate was introduced to Britain in 1840 (the International Postal Union followed in 1874). The Dover–Calais telegraph inaugurated direct long distance communication in 1851.

In short, through most of the eighteenth century, England was intensely localized; neither transport nor communication could lead to a ready co-ordination of activity – economic or political – around the Kingdom. Despite fears to the contrary from contemporary élites, the eighteenth-century politics of riot was based on this localism, and declined as a political tactic with national integration and increase in size of population aggregates (Bohstedt, 1982). Riots certainly occurred in nineteenth-century cities, but new means of both coercion and co-optation were available to contain them, and the absence of communal ties minimized the extent to which effective bargaining could take place between rioters and élites. It took the better part of the nineteenth century, however, before infrastructural developments really offered effective transcendence of locality to most English people.¹⁸ Goods transportation and the extension of markets helped to

pave the way for greater movement of people, communication, and national social integration. But we must not be misled by the numerous excited accounts of contemporaries who found fast stage coaches or even the first railroads to be indicative of an extraordinary ease of communication. This sort of national integration was limited, and closely focused on a few élites able to afford both the costs and the time for travel until well along in the nineteenth century. Any national 'working class solidarity' before this integration could only have been of the loosest sort; one must assume, therefore, that accounts of working class action before mid- to late nineteenth century refer to local groupings, not the national or international class defined by Marx's *Capital*.

In fact, the chronology of popular activity supports this contention quite well. The early nineteenth-century improvements in road transportation helped to make Chartism possible. It was a transitional movement, drawing its support largely from members of declining and threatened craft communities, but also providing the first occasion for large-scale national political participation by members of the industrial working class. From the 1830s, unions began to achieve stable development, leading eventually to enduring national organizations. Doherty's National Union of Cotton Spinners dates from 1829; the Operative Builders' Union from 1831; the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union offered its prototype for national union among trades in 1833. All of these unions were dependent on close-knit local groups and dominant personalities, though they began the process of elaborating formal organizations. In 1851 they were joined by the 'New Model Unions', led by the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, and through the 1850s and 1860s there was a series of small but significant political victories giving a clear legal basis to trade union organization (e.g. The Friendly Societies Act, the Molestation of Workmen Act and the amendment of the Master and Servant Act). At the end of the 1860s the Trades Union Congress got off the ground, though it did not have any permanent organization until the formation of its Parliamentary Committee in 1871. The 1870s were also a period of final struggles for the old, intensely local, jealously craft-based unions (see Postgate, 1923, ch. 14, on the builders).

From this point on the organizations of labour are familiar because they have endured; they have endured in part because they were able to establish permanent organizational structures based on contributions from workers relatively stably employed in the occupations which

capitalist industry fostered (rather than those it persistently or recurrently attacked). British unions never achieved the level of national industrial co-ordination of those in some other countries; the craft and local heritages remained stronger. Nonetheless, they were enduring national actors by the 1880s, based on organizations representing large collectivities of workers only loosely integrated among themselves, related largely, in fact, through the indirect means of common union membership. On these grounds, similarly, were based the Independent Labour Party (founded in 1893) and its fellow tributaries into the stream of the modern Labour Party.

The limits of class struggle

In Britain, class struggle was incipient in Chartism and grew through the remainder of the nineteenth century. It followed a similar trajectory, beginning somewhat later, in most of the other capitalist democracies. Class struggle grew as a part of capitalism, but not because exploitation or suffering became more intense. It grew because of the growing number of workers *within* capitalist industrial organizations (as opposed to those living and working in traditional or transitional craft communities and work structures).¹⁹ It grew because political arrangements allowed it, by creating in capitalist democracy an arena for class compromise.²⁰ And class struggle grew because new infrastructural technologies made it possible to create viable large-scale organizational structures.

This gives us a crucial insight into the nature of class (and related) struggles. The contraposition often made between political and economic struggles stems from capitalist democracy's sundering of work and community. It is not a matter of stages of maturation in a social movement. In particular, it is not the basis for a division between 'trade union' and 'class' consciousness, nor between reformism and revolutionary radicalism. On the contrary, at least within relatively open and democratic English society, both trade unionism and working-class politics were generally reformist.²¹ This was not an accidental limitation, nor an ideological aberration, but was the result (at least in part) of the nature of mobilization and organization of large collectivities through indirect relationships.

It is implausible to abandon popular struggle through complex

organizations in a society which remains organized on an extremely large scale through a centralized system of indirect relationships. But it would be a mistake not to recognize (a) that such struggle is characteristically limited, and (b) that there is an enduring role for more directly democratic struggles based on community and other direct relationships.

The limits to class struggle and other action on the basis of indirect relationships come largely from the essential role played by large formal organizations. These organizations are necessary to the co-ordination of action at the same level at which capital and political power are centralized. They are, however, distinct from the classes they represent. Their members may come to act on interests different from and sometimes conflicting with those of their constituents. Those constituents are encouraged to view the 'goods' offered by such organizations as only some among a range of options, a view accentuated by the extent to which such large organizations depend on members' financial contributions rather than their personal participation. Because such organizations are typically separate from local community life, and themselves constitute an alternative community only for a relatively small number of activists, they appear as non-essential consumer goods rather than an essential part of life. And such organizations must work within the framework of capitalist democracy, competing for a variety of short-term gains as well as potentially more fundamental changes in social organization. These issues apply even where leadership of such organizations works in the best of faith to avoid Michels's 'iron law of oligarchy' (1949).²²

There is also little in the ordinary experience most supporters have of class-oriented or other similar organizations – trade unions, political parties, etc. – to build an alternative social vision. Members may certainly read theoretical, historical or literary works proposing or inspiring alternative visions, but the activities of membership itself are the activities of organizational life, purchases of goods and services, indirect social relationships, and centralized systems of co-ordination much like those of capitalist organizations and conventional political parties. This is not an avoidable flaw but an essential part of collective action enduringly organized at this scale.

Participation in movements based on direct social relationships, by contrast, offers an often intense experience of a different kind of social organization. It is more likely to involve the whole person, rather than a single role, a segmented bit of time or a simple financial donation.

Whatever the ideology or traditions of such a group, its very social relationships suggest an alternative social vision. Especially where they draw on pre-existing communities, such movements also seem extensions of the relationships essential to ordinary life, not consumption goods chosen by discretion. This gives them a strength and a potential radicalism missing from most organizations based on indirect relationships and thus from most class struggle.

'Populist' movements and others based on direct relationships have, of course, their own intrinsic limits. The most notable, perhaps, is their virtual inability to sustain integration and co-ordination of activity at a level comparable to that of capital or established political élites for any length of time. Closely related is their lack of an organizational framework through which to pick up the reins of government should they succeed in ousting incumbents. If victorious in revolution (rather than more moderate struggles) they are unlikely to become rulers. Such potential insurgencies are limited also by the extent to which capitalism has disrupted local communities and other networks of direct relationships, by the split between community and work, and by the compartmentalization of different segments of most of our lives in modern capitalist societies.

Because capitalism produces social integration of unprecedented scope, centralization and intensity of co-ordination, capitalist democracy must work primarily through organizations of indirect relationships. There is, moreover, little hope that a viable socialism could assume capitalism's material wealth without its pattern of large-scale social integration; there is also little reason to idealize a more fragmented past. But this does not mean that direct democracy is entirely obsolete or limited to the narrowest of local matters. In the first place, a populist political campaign (distinct from class struggle) might well succeed in capturing a greater governmental role for localities, and in making local governmental institutions more participatory. This in turn might help to build the social solidarity for future struggles, in some of which direct, communal relationships might provide crucial support to participation on class lines. Beyond this, social movements based on direct social relationships are – whatever their explicit aims – exercises in direct democracy. Just as a variety of labour laws, guarantees of civil liberties and similar provisions legitimate and provide part of the basis for class struggle in capitalist democracy, so nurturance of community-level institutions may build the 'free social spaces' crucial to direct democracy.²³

The socialism of class struggle is based on indirect relationships, and generally oriented to reforms which would not challenge the overwhelming predominance of such relationships which capitalism has brought about. Such socialism must be complemented by direct democracy if a stronger and more stable place is to be made for direct social relationships. Class struggle is an essential means of action within the sphere of large-scale social integration, but it is neither a radical challenge to it nor exhaustive of the bases for democratic collective action in pursuit of the genuine interests of workers (and others). Because class struggle is a *part* of capitalism – or at least capitalist democracy – it shares capitalism's tendency to transcend direct relationships, including those of locality. It depends upon advances in the technology and social organization of communication in order to achieve its space-transcending co-ordination of collective action.

Notes

- 1 The issue is avoiding the reification of relationships into entities (cf. Lukacs, 1924). As Therborn writes:

Classes are not actors in the same sense as individuals, groups or organizations are, decision-making actors bringing about events or 'monuments', such as programmes, codes, etc. A class can never make a decision as a class. . . . Classes act through the actions of individuals, groups, and organizations (1983, p. 190).

Compare the way in which Abercrombie and Urry reject the reification implicit in the structuralist approach, only to casually accept the notion of classes as entities:

We shall treat class places as elements of real entities – classes – while the causal powers of those entities are actuated, among other things, by the processes of class formation (1983, p. 109).

In order to understand and transcend the reification of class, we need to distinguish direct from indirect relationships. Direct relationships include both what sociologists have called primary relationships (knitting together whole people in multi-dimensional bonds) and secondary relationships (linking only through specific roles). Indirect relationships, by contrast, are mediated through complex organizations and often through impersonal means of long-distance communication; though ultimately enacted by individuals, they minimize the transparency of the connection.

The individuals may never meet; indeed, as in markets, they may never be aware of each other's specific existence, though of course they will know that someone buys their products.

- 2 That is, both (a) capitalism achieved a greater scope and internal integration, and (b) the infrastructural developments necessary to working-class action lagged behind those enabling co-ordination among élites and the successful administration of capitalist enterprises and capitalist democracy. Similarly, though I shall not discuss it here, infrastructure is inadequate to class struggle (in this sense of nationally or internationally integrated movements) in many or even most Third World countries today.
- 3 See Headrick (1981) for a modern account of the importance of technological innovations, including communications and transport, to the capacity of European imperial powers to penetrate, effectively administer and exploit their colonies around the world.
- 4 Any purely localistic account of class struggle must face the question (which Foster, 1974, for example, slides over) of just how purely local movements can be described as based on the working class created by national or international capitalism. The account tends to become, in Foster's case, paradoxically voluntaristic, and the conception of class to lose all distinctive analytic purchase. One of the virtues of Perkin's (1969) analysis of the 'rise of a viable class society' over Thompson's as well as Foster's account of class struggle is that it makes clear the importance of the emergence of class solidarities on a national scale:

The essence of class is not merely antagonism towards another class or classes but organized antagonism with a nationwide appeal to all members of one broad social level (p. 209).

While Marxists may, of course, regard the notion of a 'broad social level' as an imprecise account of class foundations, Marxist historians have, unfortunately gone to an opposite extreme and forgotten the importance of the scale on which Marx envisaged class relations and class struggle.

- 5 This is the fundamental idea of the relations of production – that the bourgeoisie and proletariat are defined by their relationship to each other, the necessary exploitation of the latter by the former (Marx and Engels, 1848, Sect. I; Marx, 1867, pp. 717–18; 1885, p. 33; 1932). See also, however, Przeworski's observation that 'the concept of proletariat seems to have been self-evident for the founders of scientific socialism' (1977, p. 353). One must question, however, Przeworski's belief that this was because class identities were quite clear in the mid-nineteenth century; though the debates were less arcane, arguments over the demarcations of boundaries were common and even the 'proletariat' was not clear-cut. On his chosen example of France in 1848, see Calhoun (1983b) and references cited therein.

- 6 On some of the genealogy of the term 'class', including development away from usage to designate any classificatory category, see Calvert (1982). Marx himself vacillated between gradational and relational concepts of class, though the weight of his account settles on the latter. The proletariat, thus, is not just 'lower' or 'poorer' than the bourgeoisie, it is defined in the relation of exploitation by and struggles with the bourgeoisie. In the *Class Struggles in France* and the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, nearly every grouping with distinctive 'objective' interests is referred to as a class. In this weak sense, peasants, though 'like a sack of potatoes', are a class. But in the stronger sense of *Capital*, peasants lack both the internal solidarity and the distinctive relation to another class which participation in the 'totalizing' system of capitalism gives to the working class.
- 7 In Marxist theory the bourgeoisie and proletariat are the key classes, but another theory might hold that other classes connected primarily by indirect relationships are the primary collective actors in systems of large-scale social integration and conflict. In eighteenth-century England, and in general in the cities and small regional economies of pre-industrial capitalism, there were groupings and collective actions of workers which may plausibly be described in the language of class (cf. Neale, 1983a, pp. 292–4). Though these may share some elements of 'orientation' with later working class organizations and mobilizations, they are crucially different in as much as their small scale (both numerical and geographical) allows for their cohesion to be achieved entirely or almost entirely through direct relationships.
- 8 Harold Perkin's (1969, pp. 107–24) discussion of a revolution in social organization, including a dramatic rise in scale, makes clear this discontinuity (which other historians have sometimes, surprisingly, minimized).
- 9 We need not make an extreme, categorical assumption about totality, but rather need only to accept the tendency of capitalism towards totalization. A variable is more useful than an *a priori* assumption. That is, capitalism tends to create a singular 'whole' in a way not characteristic of such segmentary social forms as feudal and many tribal societies. The insight is related to Durkheim's (1893) distinction of mechanical from organic solidarity, though Marx's specification of a causal mechanism producing wholeness (capitalist integration – organic solidarity) goes beyond simply a societal division of labour. Durkheim's conception is flawed by failure to recognize that different criteria for solidarity are employed in his analyses of mechanically and organically solid groupings. The latter have more solidarity only through *indirect* relationships; they generally have *less* through direct relationships. For that reason, they lack much of the socio-psychological closeness of constituent groups within mechanically solid societies. Durkheim fails to give any weight to the significance of scale or population size. Marx, interestingly, had a concept of relative population

density based on communications and transport technology which might almost have been linked to a Durkheimian notion of 'dynamic density':

A relatively thinly populated country, with well-developed means of communication, has a denser population than a more numerous country with badly developed means of communication. In this sense, the northern states of the U.S.A., for instance, are more thickly populated than India (1867, p. 473).

Marx applied this, however, primarily to the circulation of commodities and the division of labour in production, not to political relations or social solidarity as such. Nonetheless, Marx and Engels did make centralization of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the state one of the general measures proposed by the *Communist Manifesto*.

- 10 See Przeworski (1977, p. 395) though one must question the extent to which Marx and Engels developed their views through an accurate appreciation of capitalist intransigence (Przeworski's implication) as opposed to a failure to grasp the directions of capitalist development, even during their lifetimes. Certainly the political economists Marx was happy elsewhere to take as examples of the bourgeois thinking of the day were advocates of many of the state-building innovations against which Marx expected opposition to be longer-lasting and fiercer than it was. That Marx and Engels did not anticipate the dramatic growth of the capitalist state is no doubt connected to their expectation of the withering away of the state in socialism.
- 11 Wright (1980) points out how Cohen's (1978) powerful reconstruction of Marx's technological determinism reproduces precisely this problem of 'class capacities'.
- 12 See Kantorowicz (1957) on the origins of the corporation in the legal theory of the late medieval state.
- 13 Cf. Berle and Means (1932); Berle's later statement (1960); Burnham (1941); and many others since. A summary of debates on how this affects the Marxist theory of class structure can be found in Abercrombie and Urry (1983). Much of this debate is an unhelpful taxonomic quarrel over who has what class interests; Marxists have given much less attention to the organizational capacities which make this sort of capitalist enterprise possible (though for recent exceptions see Mandel, 1975; Scott, 1979; Burawoy, 1983).
- 14 Przeworski goes on to consider the important question (beyond the scope of this paper) of whether increasing labour productivity diminishes the size of the classical proletariat and creates a new split:

the process of proletarianization in the sense of separation from the means of production diverges from the process of proletarianization in the sense of creation of places of productive workers. This divergence generates social relations that are indeterminate in the class terms of the capitalist mode of production, since it leads

exactly to the separation of people from a socially organized process of production (1977, p. 359).

- 15 The extent to which direct relationships supplement indirect class relations is a major predictor of political strength of self-proclaimed class movements – e.g. socialist or labour parties – and the weakness of such juncture between class and community is a major reason for ‘American exceptionalism’ from the European socialist model. See my brief discussion in Calhoun (1984). The instances of class struggle to which we may point are only approximations to the ‘pure’ vision of solidary class action embodied in Marx’s theory.
- 16 In considering the circulation of commodities (if not in his political writings), Marx clearly recognized the importance of the new infrastructural technology:

The chief means of reducing the time of circulation is improved communications. The last fifty years have brought about a revolution in this field, comparable only with the industrial revolutions of the latter half of the 18th century. On land the macadamised road has been displaced by the railway, on sea the slow and irregular sailing vessel has been pushed into the background by the rapid and dependable steamboat line, and the entire globe is being girdled by telephone wires (1894, p. 71).

Of course new technologies of transport and communications also allowed for the creation of larger corporations and an international division of labour. This then could be used to manipulate workers’ collective action by creating a conflict of interest between workers of rich and poor countries.

The global telecommunications revolution, combined with dramatic improvements in transportation systems has made it much easier for the bourgeoisie to organize capitalist production globally, producing parts for consumer goods in ‘world market factories’ in the third world. This has meant that it is easier for the bourgeoisie to manipulate national and global divisions within the working class and to isolate technical-coordination from direct production (Levine and Wright, 1980, p. 66; see also Mandel, 1975 and Bluestone and Harrison, 1982).

It must be remembered, however, that these developments, though technologically novel, merely continue a trend in which the integration of capitalist organization stays one step ahead of the integration of the working class. On a more localized nineteenth century counterpart, see Gregory (1982).

- 17 See Heaton (1960), and Bagwell, (1971) for general sources on transportation developments.
- 18 Much the same story, with slightly later dates and a few other qualifications, based especially on the centrality of Paris, could be written for France; see Price (1975).

- 19 This is part of the material basis for accounts, like Perkin's (1969), of how a 'viable class society' could develop in nineteenth-century England. Of course, the proportionate decline of employment in capitalist industrial organizations is greatly changing the terms of class struggle, though not necessarily its essential nature – at least as struggle has so far defined the collectivity 'working class'.
- 20 In 'capitalist democracy' (Przeworski, 1980a,b; Przeworski and Wallerstein, 1980), bargaining and struggle are shaped by capitalist social organization as well as hegemonic culture in such ways that non-revolutionary opportunities to satisfy real, felt interests are open to workers and other groupings (which might overlap with or include that of workers). See also Thompson (1965) on the enormous investment workers have made in the institutions of non-revolutionary reform.
- 21 Part of the impact of New Model Unionism and the growth of modern working-class institutions was a separation between political and economic organizations which had not obtained earlier. See Stedman Jones (1982) on the essentially political definition of Chartism.
- 22 Increasing size of collectivities has a built-in tendency towards increasing oligarchy (Mayhew and Levinger, 1976). Size is also generally correlated with an increasing division into sub-groups (Blau, 1977). One should note, though, that Blau's deductions concern rates of interpersonal interaction – i.e. direct relationships. No collectivity can mobilize effectively completely without direct relationships. The question remains open, however, of to what extent intermediate associations of individuals linked by direct relationships will be incorporated (and will serve to incorporate their members) into the larger whole. I have argued elsewhere that this is essential to democratic participation in large organizations (Calhoun, 1980).
- 23 See Evans and Boyte (1982) for an explication of the idea of 'free social spaces'. The role of black churches in the USA civil rights movement is one of their archetypical examples. The notion goes beyond freedom *from* the incursions of established authorities to freedom *to* develop social strength.

Class and space

The making of urban society

• Edited by *NIGEL THRIFT*
and *PETER WILLIAMS* •

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