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The Working Class

Introduction

Twenty years ago I started working on a book that 'aimed to find out how those who comprise the heart of the working class are faring, and what they're doing about it' (Donaldson, 1991: vi). Subsequently, globalisation has, if anything, made the inequality between classes even more obvious over the last two decades, and class has been the topic of lively discussion. The *Wall Street Journal* in 2005 and the *L.A. Times* late in 2004 both ran a multi-part series on the concentration of wealth and income in the U.S.A. In May 2005, *The New York Times* commenced a series of eleven articles, 'Class Matters', based on the work of a team of reporters who had spent more than twelve months 'exploring ways that class influences destiny'. The journalists found that inequalities between classes were accelerating and that class had come to play a greater role in the life of ordinary people over the last three decades (Scott 2005; Scott and Leonhardt 2005). With this increasing polarisation have come changes in the composition of the working class itself. This paper traces the origins of the concept and uses some of the ideas of Karl Marx and Antonio Gramsci to define the working class today and to elucidate its size, dimensions, consciousness and activity.

Origins

The term 'proletariat' comes from 'proletarius', who was a classical Roman belonging to the bottom strata of the population. It appeared intermittently from the 14th century meaning rabble or knaves, emerging in Samuel Johnson's (1755) dictionary as 'mean, wretched, vile or vulgar'. By the 1830s and 1840s with the emergence of the labour movement, it had assumed its modern meaning and was used by Jean Simonde de Sismondi in 1837 in his *Studies on Political Economy*. It appeared in German in 1842, and was first used by Karl Marx in 1844, although the older meaning of vagabonds and nomads lingered. Followed by 'solidarity' and 'exploitation' in 1841, 'socialism' first appeared in written English in 1837, whence it replaced 'agrarianism' the term applied in the early decades of the 19th century to movements seeking to change established property relations (Bestor, 1948: 263, 273, 277; Bodemann and Spohn, 1986: 11, 12; Claeys, 1986: 83; Thoburn, 2002:439).

Having explained in the final volume of *Capital* that he was now going to discuss class, it was rather inconvenient of Marx then to die, leaving only a page or so on the subject. Still, as we will see, there are plenty of insights in the many books, manuscripts, pamphlets, articles and letters that he and his closest friend, Friedrich Engels wrote together and apart, including in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party.*

The word 'communist' was scarcely eight years old in 1847 when the Communist League commissioned Marx and Engels to write its programme. It was to be a mobilising pamphlet, a call to join the revolutionary momentum building in Paris, Prague, Vienna, Berlin, Frankfurt and Milan. In *The Manifesto,* Marx and Engels define the working class as 'those who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital'. A few pages earlier, they conjure with the composition of the working class, saying that the bourgeoisie 'has converted the physician,

the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the researcher into its paid wage labourers' (Marx and Engels, 1848/2004: 64, 68).

Two earlier drafts of *The Manifesto, Draft of a Communist Confession of Faith* (June 1847) which was produced at the first congress of the Communist League and its redraft by Engels, the *Principles of Communism* (October 1847) both contain very clear definitions of the working class.

> The proletariat is that class of society which lives exclusively by the sale of its labour and not on the profit from any kind of capital (Engels, 1847/2004a: 137).
>
> The class of the completely propertyless, who are compelled therefore to sell their labour to the bourgeoisie in order to obtain the necessary means of subsistence in exchange. This class is called the class of the proletarians or the proletariat (Engels, 1847/2004b: 139)

In these drafts, Engels differentiates the working class from the almost 4 million people in the south of the United States of America still enslaved who were accounted as 'things' not 'persons'; from serfs who still existed in Hungary, Austria, Poland and Russia; and from handicraftsmen and manufactory workers who, like serfs, and in distinction to the working class, have some access to and some control over limited productive resources, and who still exist today (Engels 1847a/2004: 108; Engels 1847b/2004: 141-142).

Today, the working class still comprises those who have no control over significant productive resources other than their ability to work for those who do. They sell this ability to others over a significant period of their lives and, when they are unable to sell it or have no more of it left to sell, they rely on the wages of others and, in some countries, on pensions and benefits which come from the taxes paid by the working class as a whole.

The Manifesto's optimism about the capacities of the recent working class was based on the emergence of four new conditions. Large-scale factory production had lead to an increase in the size and density of the working class. 'The proletariat not only increases in number; it becomes concentrated in greater masses, its strength grows and it feels its strength more' (Marx and Engels, 1848/2004: 70). Competition, crises and unceasing technological change, threatened workers' livelihoods and 'collisions between individual workers and individual bourgeois take more and more the character of collisions between two classes' (Marx and Engels, 1848/2004: 70). At the same time, 'enhanced means of communication created by big industry place the workers of different localities in contact with one another. It was just this contact that was to centralise the numerous local struggles into one national struggle' (Marx and Engels, 1848/2004: 70-71). Edited by Charles Dickens, the first cheap English newspaper the *Daily News*, had appeared in 1846, at a time when railways, which *The Manifesto* specifically mentions, had more than 2,500 miles of track. With these new means of communication, workers are better able to form combinations. The bourgeoisie are compelled to seek their support against feudal elements, against recalcitrant members of its own class

and against the bourgeoisie of other countries, 'propelling the proletariat into the political arena', and they must supply workers 'with a significant amount of educational elements' (Marx and Engels, 1848/2004: 71). With organisation, motivation, communication and education all in place, the proletariat was ready to make history (So and Suwarsono, 1991:41).

But the revolutions of 1848 were defeated in that same year, and in 1852 Marx reflected on this turn of events in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Marx recalls Sismondi in the Preface: 'People forget Sismondi's significant saying: The Roman proletariat lived at the expense of society, while modern society lives at the expense of the proletariat'. *The Eighteenth Brumaire* is more sober than *The Manifesto* . Bold generalisations and sweeping statements are replaced by an analysis of concrete events in a particular time and place – France 1848-1852. Marx broadens his class analysis beyond the two fundamental classes to include the peasantry, the petty-bourgeoisie and the lumpen-proletariat. Class fractions within the bourgeoisie are identified. Economic conditions remain necessary but are no longer a sufficient condition of working class organisation and militancy. The state appears as a player within the social formation with some degree of autonomy from the ruling class. Ways of living, culture and political organisation are discussed as factors shaping class struggle, as are tradition, nationalism, ideology, class mobility and leadership. Classes are made and remade. Alliances between classes and class fractions shift, are unstable. The revolution is not inevitable; history is contingent, made by those who live it in ways they don't always choose (So and Suwarsono, 1991:48-49).

The general principles of Marx's class theory sketched in *The Manifesto* and refined in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* are further elaborated in *Capital,* the first volume of which appeared in 1867. Class happens when, in order to live, large numbers of people are systematically forced by their lack of access to productive resources to give a large part of their life's activity, more than what they need to keep themselves alive, to others purely because these do control this access (Wood, 1995: 108). As a necessary condition of survival, people must give up part of their lives simply in order to live. The nature of the compulsion to 'give away' years of one's life, and how this arrangement is organised and sustained, is what class is all about. And as Marx noted, the only way to understand this, why and how 'surplus labour is pumped out of direct producers', is to have a good, close look at 'the empirically given circumstances' that systematically require some people to give to others part of their time and effort or the results of them. In capitalism, workers acquire the means to live only by entering into a relationship with capitalists in which they are obliged to produce more than they will consume and give up the difference. A necessary condition of a worker's existence is a relationship to another who appropriates part of his or her labour or product. Class is not the only form of oppression, or necessarily the most frequent, violent or constant form of social conflict. But it is the only constantly recurring conflictual social relationship that emerges from the social organisation of production itself, and which creates the very conditions of human life. Thus the working class is the only social group with *both* a practical interest in resisting exploitation and with sufficient power to end it (Wood, 1995: 103, 109).

Classes are by definition social relations of inequality and power in a way that other differences need not be. An 'identity' is not a social relation, and class is fundamentally that. Capitalism can accommodate and use non-class differences, but it does not require them. It is 'structurally indifferent' to the social identities of those it exploits, even while they remain within its ambit. The totalising logic of capitalism means that all spheres and identities come within its determinative force; its system of social property relations; its expansionary imperatives; its drive for accumulation; its creation of the market as a necessary, compulsive mechanism of competition and endless growth; its impetus to commodify all social life (Wood, 1995: 245).

The limits of democracy are far from being reached even in the most liberal of capitalisms, but even the attainment of formal equality, equality before the law, equality of opportunity, does not dissolve class relations. Indeed a fragmented, disconnected plurality of identities and differences sits well with commodification and the ever-restless market. Heterogeneity in itself offers no challenge to the systemic, overarching totality of capitalism, which, after all, shapes and sustains it while imposing a deeper global homogeneity: the allocation and use of time, the commodification of work, leisure, sexuality, emotion, resources, production, consumption and of human life itself (Wood, 1995: 258, 259, 260, 283).

Production Relations

Gerald Cohen (1978) shocked quite a few scholars by arguing in *Karl Marx's Theory of History* that class may be defined 'structurally', 'with more or less (if not, perhaps, "mathematical") precision by reference to production relations'. It is quite possible, and necessary for the purposes of profitability, to calculate with great accuracy, the number and type of workers required for the operation of particular types of machinery and equipment in specific industries and businesses in particular times and places. A businesswoman establishing a hairdressing salon will calculate with precision the space required, the number and type of hairdryers, basins and so on to install, and the number and type of workers needed to operate them, and will adjust these in relation to the customer base she establishes. In Wollongong, the massive technological change in the steel industry in the eighties (Donaldson and Donaldson 1983) that has reduced the number of steelworkers from 23,000 to less than 4,000 with no diminution of output, is another case in point, as older technologies were replaced by job displacing ones. In this way, then, it is quite reasonable and sensible to see the working class as formed by the creation of jobs fashioned by the forces of production, as a set of existing places filled by people. Real people choose through the mechanisms of formal and informal education, through training and the operation of the labour market, through ambition, desperation, skill and luck, to 'fill' these already existing places, and thus the working classes is constantly forming and is never static or 'completed'.

It would be rather foolish to suggest that technology and its changes do not effect the constitution of the working class itself. The sorts of paid work that people do and the industries they work in are always changing. The past three

decades have seen great changes in the composition of the working class. Technological change has swept the banking, retail, health, maritime, building, manufacturing, education, coal and steel industries. By the late eighties in New South Wales, more clerks were employed than tradespeople, and there were more salespeople than plant and machine operators and drivers together. More people laboured in community services than in construction and transport and storage combined, and more were found in wholesale and retail than in manufacturing. The typical union member thirty years ago was a male employed in a factory, port or mine. Now he or she is more likely to work in an office, hospital, store or educational institution (Donaldson, 1991: 4)

The 'service sector' and in particular, the 'culture industry' will continue to expand both in terms of those within them and in their influence on all spheres of life. News Corporation magnate Rupert Murdoch enthused of the digital future that 'It is difficult, indeed dangerous, to underestimate the huge changes this revolution will bring or the power of the developing technologies to build and to destroy not just companies but whole countries' (Gibson, 2006: 5). We are only beginning to sense where microchip, robotic and microbiological technologies will take us, but growth in 'immaterial' or 'intellectual' production, work which creates immaterial products – knowledge, information, communication, human relationships, emotional affect - is certain to continue (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 108). These workers use symbolic tools and techniques in organised bodies of knowledge (Connell and Crawford, 2005: 3). Their jobs require substantive training, whether or not the training is relevant to the work performed, and the proportion of workers who strive to attain new or to increase existing qualifications has been rapidly increasing; already an estimated 90% of Australians will receive post-secondary education of some form in their life times.

Like other workers (e.g. Donaldson 1987), immaterial workers value and try to attain and maintain workplace relations involving collegiality, individual autonomy and human dignity against mounting insecurity and workplace pressure. Very many think they have been successful in doing so, though less so in the universities and in the public service (Connell, 2005: 22). There may be an 'underlying tension between the capitalist class and the higher-education-based intelligentsia' (Connell and Crawford, 2005: 12) but the extent to which paid time to think, reflect, share is a *necessary* part of immaterial labour, as essential, say, as money and credit cards are to the work of a checkout operator, is still unclear. So is the degree to which employers can more effectively and efficiently control and direct (and hence erode) mutuality and freedom without killing the goose that lays the golden egg. Some are seeing this sense that profit-making in immaterial production may require reasonably unfettered critical thinking, as a useful strategic development. But Marx's contemporary, Charles Babbage (in Cooley n.d.: 36) did warn in 1830:

> We may have already mentioned what may perhaps appear paradoxical to our readers, that the division of labour can be applied with equal success to mental as well as to mechanical operations, and that it ensures in both the same economy of time.

The extensive application to clerical work of this 'same economy of time' has already shown 'that capital could control mental work processes as easily as manual ones' (So, 1980/81: 50).

Immaterial labour is work in which there is less and less room for autonomy, initiative or humane workplace relationships. Workers performing this sort of labour are experiencing an increasing assertion of external control, as well as working conditions that are simultaneously increasingly technologically sophisticated, labour intensive and hierarchically structured. Immaterial workers, the great majority of whom are employed in large corporations, government agencies, large partnerships, universities and community organisations, mostly work in hierarchies where they are supervised by and supervise others (Connell, 2005: 21). Whether or not, or to what extent, intellectual work can defy fragmentation and intensification, the fate of other forms of paid work under capitalism, remains to be seen, but what immaterial labour is not, is the harbinger of a 'new class'.

The factory system, paradigmatic yet for all forms of paid work, including immaterial labour itself, was not a 'technical necessity' but was about breaking the power of the guilds, and curtailing the independence and strength of the household economy. Machine technology was not 'the reason' for the factory. In fact, in many cases, new machines were introduced *after* their operators had been assembled in the new factories. The way a society is organised affects the nature of technological change within it, what is counted a cost and the pattern of costs (Mackenzie and Wajcman, 2003: 14). The fact that some machines 'worked' and others didn't was not intrinsic to the technology. As late as 1784 a type of weaving loom in France was preferred *because* it employed twice as many workers, a situation that would be inconceivable today (Mackenzie and Wajcman, 2003: 15). It is simply not accurate to say that the new capitalist relations of production were a *consequence* of the new means of production (Dickson, 1974: 71-78), that 'the base was driving the superstructure' for the 'productive base' itself exists in social, juridical and political forms. Marx seldom employed the base/superstructure metaphor which has 'always been more trouble than it is worth' (Wood, 1995: 22, 49) and is of limited use.

The introduction of new technology became and remains as much part of the day-to-day tactics in the conflict between labour and capital as it was and is part of the overall strategy of capital accumulation. Cyrus McCormack's manufacturing plant in Chicago at the time of the alleged Sacco and Vanzetti Haymarket bombing, introduced technology producing an inferior and more costly product which, having broken the back of the craft union, was abandoned three years later (Winner, 2003: 31). Media magnate, Conrad Black, made no secret of the fact that the ‘introduction of the most modern newspaper technology in our new plants’ in Britain and his decision to import production personnel from Canada with the enthusiastic support of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was about crushing the unions (Black, 1993: 345). As Scottish academic Andrew Ure noted in 1835 in his *Philosophy of Manufactures*, 'when capital enlists science in her service, the refractory hand of labour will always be taught docility', (in Dickson, 1974: 79), a point echoed

later by Marx (*Capital* 1, 1, 14: 464), who knew his work well: machinery 'is utilised as the most powerful weapon in the capitalist arsenal, as the best means for overcoming the revolts against capital'.

Economic reasoning and technological reasoning are often inseparable; technological decisions are also economic decisions – technology is inextricably part of society, and market competition means that technical change in one enterprise can exert enormous pressure for changes in others, and that enterprises can never stand still. It is mistaken to think of 'technology' and 'society' as separate spheres influencing each other: they are mutually constitutive (Mackenzie and Wajcman, 2003: 13, 23). What matters is not so much the technology itself, but the social formation in which it is embedded and which it supports. Technology plays a political role related to the distribution of power and the exercise of social control, and its development is essentially a political process. It sustains and promotes the interests of those dominant in the society within which it is developed (Winner, 2003: 29; Dickson, 1974: 10). The dominant model of hierarchical organisation and control become incorporated in, and hence come to coincide with, the technology that is developed in capitalist societies. The social relations of production become reflected in the means of production; technology and social patterns reinforce each other in a material and ideological fashion. Choices get fixed in the means of production themselves. The productive sphere is defined by its social determinations (Dickson, 1974: 11; Wood, 1995: 22; Winner, 2003: 32).

The forces of production are shaped by the conscious choices of real people. Decisions about how, where, and in what to invest; about what constitutes a reasonable rate of return; and about how to deal with those people, organisations, or governments who might assist or impede the unceasing movement of profit-making, are the work of capitalists and their functionaries, individually and collectively. Governments and workers, both of whom are anxious to attract and retain various forms of investment on which, in the end, livelihoods depend, also affect these decisions. The rate of change of the technologies is pushed ahead by competition between capitalists and by the pursuit of better wages and conditions by organised workers. As Marx observed, class struggle itself is a driver of technological innovation, a process through which the working class continuously makes itself 'relatively superfluous' (*Capital* 1, 7, 25: 783).

Family-households, Kinship

The physical separation of the family-household from social production is a central feature of capitalism, but older modes of production still persist within the capitalist social formation. In any social formation more than one mode of production will subsist. Within a capitalist social formation, a plurality of modes of production exist in articulation with each other, that is, their ways of connecting and interpenetrating shift depending on a whole host of things, the most crucial being their relation to the dominant mode of production, capitalism, which confers fundamental unity on the social formation (Donaldson and Good, 1988; Wolpe 1980).

> In all forms of society (or social formations) there is a specific kind of production which predominates over the rest, whose relations thus assign rank and influence to the others. It is a general illumination which bathes all other colours and modifies their particularity. It is particular ether which determines the specific gravity of every being which has materialised within it (Marx, *Grundrisse*: 106-7).

Markets, trade, and cities have existed throughout recorded history (Wood, 1995: 119; Vogel 1995: 59, 62). So has simple commodity production, the production of use values, and the sale of surplus use values on the market. This is a particularly common form of work and livelihood, even in well-established capitalist nations, and it is one that is seldom considered. Family-households, when they engage the market as productive units, constitute their own mode of production, simple commodity production, which pre-existed capitalism and will doubtless outlast it. Outwork whose 'invisible threads' bind an army of home workers to the commands of capital (*Capital* 1, 15, 8: 591) is as old as capitalism itself and is one of the ways the family-household is integrated into the market economy, for frequently members of the outworker's family are involved in the production of commodities at home. There are 330,000 identified outworkers in Australia, a number set to increase with the growth of outsourcing and cyber-work (Greig, 2002: 9).

Australians owed family and friends an estimated $12 billion in 2005 (Croucher, 2005) and family-households and family businesses are the main drivers of an underground economy which is worth about 15% of the Gross Domestic Product and has grown by 20% since 1967, despite the Goods and Services Tax which has affected it not all (Bajada, 2005). Activities within and without the family-household are strongly gendered, with 65% of the unpaid work in Australia performed by women, and 65% of the paid work undertaken by men. Although many women in full-time employment regularly work more than 60 hours per week, on average, Australian men and women worked about 50 hours per week, with men contributing 35 hours paid and 15 hours unpaid and women 19 hours of paid and 31 hours of unpaid work (Ironmonger, 2000: 61, 62: Bittman 2000: 111).

The labour of social reproduction, the production of social relations, human life, social assets and values, is as essential to the survival of most Australians as wage labour. Domestic labour is unlike other forms of work in that it appears very difficult to lessen the time spent in it. It cannot be reduced in the way that paid work can, even when domestic labour time is reallocated. It can be made less intense, divided and dispersed, and yet, it seems, not lessened in its totality (Donaldson, 1996: 45). While technology, especially electricity, gas, sewerage, piped water and contraception, has drastically changed patterns of household productive activity, especially the effort required for much of it, the total time spent on housework seems to change little. The aggregate time that the family-household spends in housework has remained largely constant since the 1920s, but the type of work the time is spent on, has not. While cooking, washing and ironing times have declined, time spent shopping and travelling-to-shop and with children, have all risen (Bittman, 1995).

Unpaid work soars with maternity, which is the centre of the family-household and of a web of indispensable social, emotional and political relations that celebrate and sustain it. Wives/mothers are the key managers of family time. Within the family-household, it is mainly women who decide who is to do what, and when. They also determine, to a large extent, how the time free from paid work and domestic labour is organized to fit in with the rhythms of family life. It is women who allocate and direct this time and, within the very real and determining constraints of the wage relation, control how it is spent by themselves and by other members of the family-household. They struggle to create meaning out of conditions of precariousness and scarcity, to provide a measure of security in an uncertain world, and to make opportunities for sociability and enjoyment. These familial social ties, together, as we shall see, with those beyond the family-household, have, after all, proved for the working class the only really reliable defences against misfortune in the past, and it is out of them that the structures of community and class are built and sustained (Donaldson, 1996: 41).

Relatives, friends and neighbours provide for no payment almost half of all childcare in Australia. Grandparents (particularly grandmothers) provide 25% of all the care for children under five years-old, contributing $74.5 billion worth of childcare per year (Bittman, 2000: 113; Bone, 2005:84). Close to one in five Australians had a disability in 1998, and about nine out of ten of these live at home. Two-thirds of the 2.3 million people providing unpaid care for the disabled, and fourth-fifths of principal carers are family members. About three quarters of the care that enables disabled and elderly people to remain in their homes is provided outside the market, and unpaid caring work is worth double the expenditure by all levels of government on welfare services in Australia (Bittman and Thomson, 2000: 101, 102, 103; Fisher et al, 2004: 25).

The work of kinship, the maintenance of intra-familial ties and the organisation of cross-household gatherings, is largely undertaken by women. Kin networks are sources of practical and emotional support and sociability. Family and friendship networks tend to be found within a neighbourhood and working-class women also take on the work of 'neighbouring' and 'play pivotal roles in defining and nurturing community networks'. Particularly those women who are at home during the day, shape, define and police the boundaries of their neighbourhoods, especially those who have lived for some time and who have friends in their neighbourhood (Warr 2005: 292, 293; Stevenson, 1994: 224; Hughes and Black, 2002: 68).

In addition to sharing childminding and care of the elderly or sick, cooking, cleaning, shopping, nurturing, counselling and lending small amounts of money are all services exchanged between women. The emotional and psychological support provided by this ongoing system of exchanges, this gift economy, is vital for social reproduction (Ginsborg, 2005: 98; Rapp 1976: 288; Rubin 1985: 134, 135). Such kin-centred networks which characteristically involve the provision of emotional support and the sharing of work, money and goods, are sometimes the only means of survival. Conduits of emotional and

practical support, they can be the difference between continued family existence and ruin (Masterman-Smith, 2005: 227; di Leonardo, 1987: 448).

Surprisingly, perhaps, a recent review (Boase and Wellman, 2006; see also Robinson et al, 2002; Wellman et al, 2002) of the now quite substantial sociological literature on internet use, reveals that it is 'integrated into the rhythms of daily life' and strengthens existing friendships and relations with neighbours, leading to a denser social life, particularly amongst immaterial workers who have ready access to and skills in using the new communications technology.

For Yanagisako (1977: 222, 219) 'access to economic resources . . . and political alliances that translate into power are significantly affected' by these inter-household supportive networks. But the relationships between networks, paid and unpaid work, class formation and action do not stop there. Lois Bryson (1992: 238), for instance, has suggested that 'the home itself can be seen as a site of anti-capitalist struggle' and di Leonardo (1987: 441, 451) sees family-households as places of political struggle, vehicles for political resistance, indivisible from society and economy.

The politics of social reproduction, then, are not limited or limiting. These networks are part of 'community control' (Rapp 1978: 289), for working-class women are drawn into politics in many ways, one of which is through issues that threaten their networks' stability and survival. Politics can develop with awareness that the well being of the family-household is connected to the welfare of the community. The family-household is often the first moment of civil society. A discussion around the kitchen table, a meeting in the sitting room, may grow beyond family and friends, to alliances and social bonds that underpin and shape new organisations that advance and protect the interests of working family-households and their networks (Warr, 2005: 302; Ginsborg, 2005: 99; Wilkinson and Bittman 2002: 43). These organisations and networks and the family-household itself, have at their disposal a communications technology far more powerful and immediate than newspapers and the railways that so impressed Marx and Engels in *The Manifesto*.

Civil Society

Marx's and Hegel's usage of the term 'civil society' is far different from it's meaning today (Nielsen, 1995: 42). For Marx, it included the market, the economic order, and contrasted with political society, and it disappeared from his writings, for reasons he explains in the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Green, 2002: 6). But perplexed by the power of the Catholic Church and by fascism's ability to rule by assent, Antonio Gramsci reintroduced the concept and made it central to his thinking. For him, civil society is a complex, sturdy and powerful structure like the system of fortresses and earthworks on the battlefields of World War 1 (Gramsci, 1998: 207, 208, 235, 239) and includes 'the ensemble of organisations commonly called 'private' ' particularly organisations that shape consciousness, such as families, cultural institutions, publishing houses, the media, universities, churches, workers' clubs and trade unions (Gramsci, 1998: 245; Bates, 1975: 353; Green, 2002: 6). With the addition of social movements, 'third-sector'

(non-government, community, voluntary) organisations and professional associations, and excluding the media oligopolies, a definition of civil society as 'not the market, not the state', is quite common currently, although, as Joseph Buttigieg (2005: 39, 43) very cogently explains, for Gramsci the distinction between the state, civil society and the economy is 'merely methodological' for there is no 'thick line' between them, and they are separable for heuristic purposes only.

When Marx wrote in *Capital* (1, 7, 23: 716, 724) that 'capital presupposes wage labour; wage labour presupposes capital. They reciprocally condition each other's existence; they reciprocally bring forth each other', and that 'incessant reproduction is the absolutely necessary condition for capitalist production', he knew what he as talking about. Only 45% of the 706.3 million hours that Australians worked in 1997 involved paid work; 55% was unpaid activity involving housework, childcare, shopping and volunteering (Ironmonger, 2000: 61, 62: Bittman 2000: 111). Calculations based on various wage rates and time use data, put the value of total unpaid production in Australia at between 50% and 69% of the recorded Gross Domestic Product or about 40% of the total economy (Donaldson, 1996: 47; Ogle, 2000). This unpaid work is necessary for the existence of the working class, to 'reproduce the muscles, nerves, bones and brains of existing workers, and to bring new workers into existence', to develop, accumulate and transmit skills from one generation to the next and to care for those preparing for or unable to engage in work (*Capital* 1, 7, 23: 717, 719).

The time spent in unpaid voluntary and community work in Australia in 1992 was greater than that spent in finance and business services and almost equalled that spent in the manufacturing sector. Volunteers donated about $37 billion worth of time and services to other households in 1997, directly or through organisations and groups (Ironmonger, 1998: 20; 2000: 69, 70). Estimates vary, but probably about two out of three adult Australians are involved in formal or informal voluntary activities. Just over half contribute unpaid time to a group or organisation, and about a quarter are active in two or more (Hughes and Black, 2002: 62).

Immaterial workers, particularly university graduates and professionals, especially those out of work or working part-time, are more likely to give their time to non-profit organisations; and low-income households in poorer areas are more likely to provide informal assistance to neighbours and to their communities. People in high-income households and living in posh suburbs are less likely to contribute to the organisations of civil society or to provide informal support, meeting their needs instead through the market (Fisher et al, 2004: 28, 29, 31, 34).

While Adamson (1987/88: 335-6) fears that 'we face a social world in which the power of the corporate-bureaucratic structures is so great as to threaten the very existence of civil society and even the private sphere as we know them', subaltern groups have developed a plethora of movements and organisations that in various ways carry on the war of position in civil society. As Gramsci saw it, the ruling class uses the organisations of civil society to

impede the crystallisation of an oppositional political culture, to mobilise popular consent for the status quo, to maintain its hegemony. The working class contests this project within civil society itself, influencing the existing institutions and establishing its own (Parekh, 2004: 18; Pearce, 2004: 63; Wainwright, 2004: 103; Nielsen 1995: 56; Adamson 1987/88: 331). Civic battles are often waged around schooling and its related activities, around hospital waiting lists, public health services, public transport, and bus shelters. Campaigns against the privatisation of health, transport, education, water and energy are the 'new focus of an increasingly global civil society' (Wainwright, 2004: 105). Following the earlier producers' and consumers' co-operatives have come cultural workers' associations, research institutions, working women's centres, workers' health centres, migrant resource centres, organisations of housewives, the aged and the unemployed which confront the challenges of daily life and, within clear and obvious constraints, demonstrate how aspects of social life can and should be (Glasius et al, 2004: 10).

Size and Consciousness

The different and changing tasks that workers are paid to do sometimes gets confused with the composition of the working class, as has been the case in some attempts (e.g. the Ehrenreichs, Geoff Sharp and the *Arena* group, Erik Olin Wright) to explain class boundaries, particularly that between the working and the middle class. Supervisors, managers, foremen seem to pose problems for these thinkers that can be solved by placing them in a 'new class' or in 'contradictory class locations' because they control the labour of others, even though in *Capital* (I, 4, 13: 450) Marx describes supervisors as 'a special kind of wage labourer'. Variations in power and responsibility are no stranger to working-class life: carpenters have delegated authority over builders' labourers, teachers have teaching assistants, plumbers have plumbers' mates, scientists have lab assistants, fitters have tradesmen's assistants, lecturers have tutors, nurses have nurses' aides, bricklayers have brickies' labourers, librarians have library assistants and so on. No one would want to say that these people are part of a 'middle class'. Directing the work of others as part of the work of co-ordinating the labour process does not distinguish classes. The co-ordination of work is necessary in any and every mode of production, including non-exploitative ones. Of course there are tensions between the various occupational categories that capital creates, but this hardly puts their occupants into different classes. The conflicts of interest within the working class are many – supervisors and supervised sometimes clash; part-time casual workers get annoyed with permanent full-time workers who see them as a threat to their own positions; within an enterprise those who work 'in the office' and those who work 'on the floor' each feel despised by the other. But differentiation, and even hostility, is not the same as class division. Between these people are not the fundamental and irreconcilable conflicts of interest that exist between wage-labour and capital, each of which constitutes the very being of the other. To the contrary, what these heterogeneous and stratified forms of labour have in common is the sometimes submerged, sometimes overt but always present tension over the terms and conditions of their work, the ever familiar stuff of security, conditions, work intensity, hours and pay (Meiksins, 1987: 171-172).

Along with its composition, the size of the working class changes, too, of course. Marx (*Capital*, I, 5, 16: 647; 7, 25: 828) suggested (unexpectedly) that in his day, the proletariat might have comprised as much as two thirds of the English population, and almost half of the Belgian. A study of the U.S.A. claims that the working class has grown from 20% of the population in 1780 to 62% in 1880 to (a rather high) 91% in 1990 (Spector, 1995: 332). Estimates of Canada and Australia place their working classes at 75% (Livingstone 1976) and 70% of the respective populations (Fieldes 2005).

But while 'sheer numbers are a potential source of power', and structural contradiction, whereby the success of one group of people means harm to another, is an objective condition built into the very existence of capitalism, its expression and outcome are not (Naiman, 1996: 15-16; Meiksins, 1987: 163, 172; Seccombe and Livingstone, 2000: 50). These cannot be assumed or 'read' from the description of a structural location (Wood, 1995: 97-98). A study of Canadian factory workers noted, 'we can conclude on the basis of this and other research, that a class outlook . . . is not a natural or automatic outgrowth of deprivation and exploitation in industry' (Tanner, 1987: 193).

The process of production and appropriation does not directly unite people who form a class. They occupy similar positions in the productive process but work in widely divergent forms of it. Workers are never actually assembled directly into class organisations. They are at best assembled into productive units, offices, laboratories, shops, factories and so on. Here it is probably true that 'the context-specific views of most people who come to occupy similar positions in an organisation will tend to converge over time' (Seccombe and Livingstone, 2000: 23), but this is not 'directly given' by the processes of production and appropriation in which they are involved (Wood, 1995: 91, 95). Indeed, individual workers can be 'on hostile terms with one another as competitors' (Marx and Engels, *German Ideology*, in So, 1991). Workers are often 'resistant and think only of solving their own economic and social problems for themselves, and have no ties of solidarity with others in the same conditions' (Gramsci in Levy, 1986:43). Constant uncertainty and unpredictability has produced a strong vein of conservatism in the working class. Workers are directly and personally dependent for the meeting of their own needs on the success and continued existence of the organisations that employ them. It is perfectly rational to seek to appease those whose wealth and power make them the main determinants of their life chances, to obey and make the best of a bad situation, and to cling to the defences of working-class life which have worked in the past. When times are good, it pays to make hay while the sun shines and to trade broader objectives for more personal satisfactions (Blackwell and Seabrook, 1985: 35, 36, 45). But even a decent wage and some security within which to raise children sometimes require more than this to achieve, and these defensive and conserving instincts can link with impulses toward co-operation and solidarity which also derive from working class experience in paid work and outside of it (Seccombe and Livingstone, 2000: 56; Blackwell and Seabrook, 1985:36).

In the world of paid work, it is *relatively* easy for workers with the same employer to see that they have interests in common, and even that they share something with others elsewhere with the same skills and/or working in the same type of job. "People who become aware of a shared risk or opportunity decide to pool their resources and bind their individual fortunes together . . . to the furtherance of their joint interests" (Seccombe and Livingstone, 2000: 24). But 'class' is bigger than the relationship of a group of workers to a particular employer and to others immediately similar to themselves. It implies a connection extending beyond the immediate processes of production, spanning particular localities (and times, too). How is the call-centre worker, the bank teller, the deep-sea diver connected? Edward Thompson's (1978: 85, 290, 298) answer, of course, is that workers have in common their experiences of paid work and the life that this affords. Lived experience of the delights and tribulations of paid employment and the struggle for happiness and security outside of it, shape social consciousness. In this process, Seccombe and Livingstone (2000: 25, 42) note the importance in "promoting a sense of cultural affinity and shared values, of friendship, sharing, support and solidarity among kin, neighbours and workmates ". It is among these people that workers align their direct experience with their general assessments of class and their place in the world.

How this consciousness of common experience, is expressed (or not) in "vehicles of group assertion", cohesion, common pursuits, ambitions, and activities is the stuff of sociology, politics and history (and political strategy). Forms of group membership and solidarity can persist for decades and centuries, and yet trade unionism is embraced by a minority of working-class people, and working-class political parties seldom obtain a majority of their votes (Seccombe and Livingstone, 2000: 25, 26, 36). To understand why some classes succeed in building and maintaining oppositional structures and others fail, requires an analysis of a multiplicity of social forces, which Gramsci termed 'the relation of forces' in each situation, including life and activity in civil society itself (Billings, 1990: 11). Sociologists and historians seem reluctant to discuss the particular ways of life and culture, the common outlook and interpersonal ties, what Bodemann and Spohn (1986: 10) identify, after Gramsci, as the 'organicity' , of classes. Sociology, politics and history characteristically deal with these in isolation – labour history, sociology of leisure, political economy, gender studies and so on. We're slow to take seriously what Marx called in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, 'the wealth of social relationships, mode of life, interests and culture', to see them in their totality and interrelation, as 'conjugated quite literally by class antagonisms', which are themselves unstable and affected by the changes in classes and their relations (Bodemann and Spohn, 1986: 16).

Class values derive from class biographies and everyday experiences of social inequality; a sense of belonging, and not belonging; a sense that one's fate is shared with some, but not others (Hughes and Black, 2002: 60; Masterman-Smith, 2005: 215). The working class has never been a single entity, or homogenous, and yet in this complex tangle of the particular and the diverse, there is a sameness in workers' stories about the stuff of their lives: the ways they deal with schooling, work, unemployment, sickness, birth,

death, hardship and good fortune 'resound like the chorus of some antique tragedy' across cultures and ages (Blackwell and Seabrook, 1985:39). A recent study of workers in the U.S.A. and France confirmed what other studies (eg Donaldson 1996) have found, that family life and friendships provide the basic meanings and satisfactions in life, and that paid work is an often-unsatisfactory means of sustaining them. Money, ambition and success are considered far less important than family and friends, hard work and good character (Levison, 2001). In sharp contrast to the world of the market, altruism, mutuality, care and neighbourliness underpin the domestic economy and civil society, for they simply could not function in their absence (Blackwell and Seabrook, 1985:25). Class-consciousness is formed at work, in households, neighbourhoods and communities. It does not simply 'happen at work'. If anything, it's just as likely that workers take it to work with them, or that it develops in the experience of the interaction between the family-household and the workplace, which 'reverberate' upon each other (Donaldson, 1991:98; Levison, 2001).

Experiencing deprivation and feeling hardship is not enough. Connecting felt dissatisfaction with a way of understanding the world which offers a realistic way of changing it, requires a plausible political language (Blackwell and Seabrook, 1985:46). As *The Eighteenth Brumaire* makes very clear, the intensity of class feeling varies as conditions change, battles are won and lost and strength of the contending classes varies. A low level of the use of the concept of 'class' does not signify its absence, but is a signifier of the relative strengths of contending social forces (Meiksins, 1987: 163). The rise and fall of the idea is a consequence of class activity. 'De-class' analysis, the invisibility and 'the death of class', and images of classlessness, the end of history seem strongest when the working class is disorganised and quiescent. According to Yo (1991:46, 55, 56) part of class struggle is struggle over class. The fate of a social group is bound up with the word that names them, but the power to impose recognition of the name depends on the group's capacity to appropriate a common name, to mobilise around it, and to 'commune within its unifying power' (Bourdieu, 1986: 477).

Class-consciousness, then, can be clarified, intensified, mystified, diluted. But one of the most curious things is that it won't go away. In the U.S.A., the General Social Survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Centre at the University of Chicago has interviewed a nationally representative sample of 35,000 adults nearly every year since 1972. Over 26 years, between 1972 and 1998 (the most recent year for which data is available), between 43% and 48% of respondents have identified themselves as working class. Bearing in mind that these yearly samples are of the population overall not of the working class itself, this is a very significant proportion. According to historian Peter Rachleff, "There really must be something going on if we find people continuing to identify as workers because there's so much stacked against them doing that" (National Opinion Research Centre, 2005; Heath, 1998).

The question of class consciousness is about the conditions under which it emerges, about what Gramsci considered to be the 'slow and prosaic work' of cultural reshaping in the war of position; about how the individualist logic of

the market gives way to a moral collective commitment; and how workers move from fear, intimidation, isolation and helplessness to confidence, courage, determination and community; from the defence of pressing immediate interests, to supporting others' actions; from the immediate, necessary and local to having, as Gramsci put it, 'an exact notion of one's own power' to construct a new world (Urbinati, 1998: 385; Yo, 1991:48, 55).

Kinship, family life, forms of household, housework, friendship, neighbourhood, patterns of settlement, paid work, leisure, language, ways of communicating, cultural activities, class-specific moral-cultural expressions, class-specific ways of life, indeed what Bourdieu calls 'habitus', this is the substance of class (Bodemann and Spohn, 1986: 10, 14). Edward Thompson (1980: 213, 231) was clear that the English working class had developed because of the efforts of 'strongly based and self-conscious institutions, trade unions, friendly societies, educational and religious movements, political organisations, periodicals' together with 'working-class intellectual traditions, working-class community patterns, and a working class structure of feeling'.

Consciousness emerges out of activity and activities come out of awareness. Workers may develop comradeship, solidarity and democratic relationships that may connect with or develop into movements, networks and organisations (unions, parties, community associations) and may lead to the establishment of less immediate and broader objectives (So, 1991: 44, 49). However they may come about, the movements, networks and organisations develop strategies (legal, extralegal, illegal, cultural, political, social) and mobilise resources (money, time, influence, material infrastructure), which both express and develop the ideas of class.

The opposition, for its part, fears a coalescence of the class and seeks to fracture, fragment, divide it along lines of gender, occupation, industry; along any fault line available: union versus non-union; public versus private; permanent versus casual; old versus young; skilled versus unskilled; educated versus uneducated; manual versus mental; local versus international; part-time versus full-time; home-makers versus paid workers; consumers versus producers; country versus city; employed versus unemployed; renters versus owners; wage earners versus beneficiaries. The organisations of the working class, on the other hand, attempt to conceive and actualise complexity and heterogeneity as a resource. Like its size, the class's diversity is its great strength. Spanning ages, ethnicities, sexual preferences, skills, aptitudes, locations and a large number and variety of subcultures, there is almost nowhere the working class is not, and nothing it cannot do.

Conclusion

As Masterman-Smith (2005: 109) points out, successive industrial relations reforms have made on-the-job organising increasingly difficult, time-consuming and costly, and the successful outlawing of solidarity strikes In Australia has criminalised those who act industrially in support of workers outside their own workplaces. This may mean that actions outside of the workplace, particularly in the realm of civil society, will necessarily assume greater political significance.

But one of the structures that unite civil society and the world of paid work is that of time itself. In general, time is structured largely by the organizations for which people work for money, and employers are its main controllers. 'They transform life-time into working-time' (*Capital* 1, 7, 25: 799). This temporal order is still largely governed by the speed of an increasingly capital-intensive machine system, whose rate does not follow the rhythm of life, has little to do with the phenomena of nature, and, even yearly, seems to accelerate.

Life and life's events simply cannot be organized like industrial time, and industrial time does not bend to the requirements of human living. Over a lifetime, falling in love, giving birth and child-rearing occur according to different experiences of time, and biological imperatives such as eating and sleeping impose their own time constraints. Similarly, the pattern of the rituals of the family-household - the ceremonies of life, love and death, of success and failure – involves experiences of time and its passing that are not amenable to the industrial clock (Donaldson, 1996: 40).

Nonetheless, industrial time takes precedence over other forms of time. Time with others outside paid work and time alone give way to its demands. Time scarcity is passed down a hierarchy of social times. Time pressures within the organizations of paid work are resolved by methods involving greater work intensity, longer hours, and night and weekend work. These reduce the amount of 'interaction time'-time with workmates at work, family and friends at home-which in turn leads to a greater scarcity of time for and with ourselves. Because the time we have is definitely finite, the taking of time for one set of activities necessarily means taking it from others. The stratification of time is such that personal time is the most consistently sacrificed, as the time needs of the family-household are above our own, and the needs of the paid workplace take precedence over them, and over time for building and sustaining the organisations and networks of civil society.

Those who buck the imperatives of this strict hierarchy of time, as serious parents must, pay a penalty. Rachel Power (2005: 25, 26) suggests that current feminists are attentive once more to 'the real barrier to happiness: the organisation of work', arguing for the 'obvious need' for extensive changes in paid work, taxation, industrial relations and family policies to allow for a decent family life and for the raising of children, on the basis that all mothers and fathers have the right and responsibility to earn and to parent.

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