

**THE FUTURE OF INTELLECTUALS
AND THE RISE OF THE NEW CLASS**

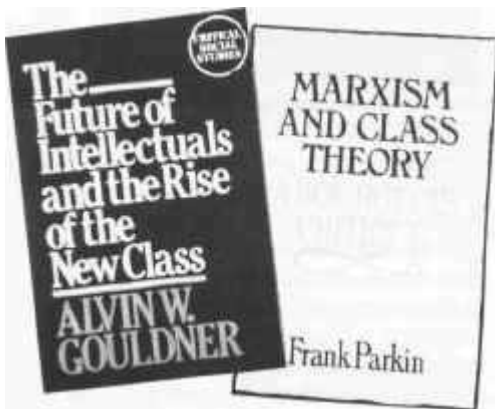
A Gouldner

Macmillan 1979, 180p. £3.95

**MARXISM AND CLASS THEORY:
A BOURGEOIS CRITIQUE**

F Parkin

Tavistock 1979, 235p. £6.95



Two recent books raise difficult and controversial issues with respect to classes and their role in the historical process.

Alvin Gouldner, the leading critic of American social science, seeks to shatter the

complacency of Marxists.

'The spectre that had been said to be "haunting Europe" was an illusion. To claim that the protagonists in modern class struggles were proletariat and capitalist class was an illusion.'(p9)

Frank Parkin flamboyantly gives the subtitle 'a bourgeois critique' to his latest book *Marxism and Class Theory*. Before more serious discussion let me share my pleasure in his caustic attack on the academic exponents of modern Marxism.

'This is not necessarily to suggest that the new breed of Marxists are less dedicated than the old to the revolutionary transformation of society; their presence at the gates of the Winter Palace is perfectly conceivable, provided that satisfactory arrangements could be made for sabbatical leave'. (Preface)

But to more serious issues! I want to deal separately with issues raised by Gouldner and Parkin and then to return to a common issue posed by both.

Gouldner, writing almost in note form (with hints of a play on Marx's famous *Theses on Feuerbach*), sets out a series of theses which revolve around 'The New Class'. The new class, of intellectuals and technical intel-

ligentsias, are in contention for social, economic and political power in both the capitalist West and in the 'actual socialism' of Eastern Europe. His analysis depends upon his contention that this new class is 'profoundly flawed'; it is morally ambivalent and politically divided. It is 'a centre of whatever human emancipation is possible in the foreseeable future', but it is, at the same time, anti-egalitarian, forming a new hierarchical elite.

Why is the new class a class? Gouldner argues that he applies the most general Marxist criteria of class analysis defining a class as those sharing a common relationship to the means of production. This common relationship is that the new class shares the same relationship to 'human' or 'cultural capital'. This argument is dependent on his 'extension' of Marx's concept 'capital' by insisting that increasingly production and the extraction of surplus value are dependent on an increasing input of stored knowledge (technical know-how, etc) in the process of production. Thus cultural capital goes hand in hand with money capital in the production of commodities.

Hence it follows for Gouldner that those,

who, through their differential appropriation of education and technical knowledge, share a 'common relation to the means of production', therefore form a 'class'. Additionally he argues that this new class is bound together by a shared culture. Here he 'borrows' from Basil Bernstein to insist that the new class forms a 'speech community' in that it shares what he rather pompously calls a CCD (culture of critical discourse). (A stand must be taken against the rampant incursion of the reduction of Marxism to initials; the time has come to drive out all ISAs, CMPs, and now CCD¹!). It is the identification of cultural capital as a form of capital that must be examined. Gouldner does not claim to be a Marxist, he proclaims himself as a Left neo-Hegelian. Yet he sticks deceptively close to many classical Marxist terms; and in the present context links 'cultural capital' to the general concept of capital. But what validity does this exercise have?

Marxist economic analysis is not at its clearest with regard to the role of knowledge/education/skill in the production process. Capital is that which enters into the production process such as to serve the expansion of value. 'Knowledge' enters production from two sources, (i) congealed past knowledge embodied in constant capital and (ii) technical knowledge in living labour. It should be recalled that Marx is not at his most convincing in reducing 'skilled' to average labour and offers little guidance in analysing knowledge as part of the relations of production. But it seems clear that to designate an extension of the concept of 'capital' to include cultural capital is unwarranted. Capital has the essential property of circulating through commodities and as money in the process of its self-expansion. Knowledge and skill are necessary conditions for human production².

These considerations suggest that the simple extension of Marx's concept of capital to include 'cultural capital' is a dubious exercise; to achieve it would require a lot more work than Gouldner's bald assertion. Yet it is critical to his argument; his contention that the intellectuals form a class is dependent upon it.

Yet I would not want these critical remarks to detract from the importance of Gouldner's subject — the role of intellectuals in the modern world. This importance can, however, be recognised without insisting that a new class exists. Indeed the characteristic that Goulder draws out well, of intellectuals having a contradictory role; on the one hand an immensely progressive potential, enhanced by their expanding numbers and ever more sensitive location in economy, state

and civil society, but on the other their monopolistic protection of group interests and commitment to hierarchical systems points to the advantage of treating intellectuals as a social stratum and not as a class.

Frank Parkin seeks to 'take on' Marxist theory of class. Yet his critique is not very convincing. He makes a major play on the inability of 'class analysis' to account for the role of ethnic, racial, religious and sexual factors in politics. But Marx's analysis of class makes no such claim. I am quite prepared to agree with Parkin against any interpretation of Marxism which purports to reduce race, ethnicity, religion, etc, to class factors³, and to go further and agree that Marxists have too frequently fallen into this trap. But to go that far with Parkin does not justify his blanket damning of Marxist class analysis.

Having rapidly dispatched Marxism he goes on to elaborate an alternative which is based on Max Weber's idea of 'social closure'. Closure refers to those processes whereby groups or classes act to restrict resources and benefits to a limited category of beneficiaries. Thus intellectuals using their preponderant access to academic and technical knowledge through the elevation of professional qualification and credentials restrictively protect group interests and deny access to others. This process along with the protection of the institutions of property constitute his conception of capitalism.

Two important points may be briefly made. First it is not private property in general that has any necessary relation to capitalism but rather specific forms of property and accumulation that are distinctive of capitalism. Second, of course the idea of 'closure' describes processes that occur in capitalist and other societies; but the existence of this process does not constitute a basis on which classes are formed. The error of this position can be seen through two simple examples. The 'commanding heights' are not reserved to the holders of professional qualifications, but to the holders of capital. Workers exercise 'exclusion' through job protection by means of apprenticeship and entry restrictions, but these powers are minor compared to the overwhelming power of exclusion exercised by capital.

Far from advancing an alternative to Marxism, Parkin produces ideas that may be regarded as supplementing class analysis, but on their own they are incapable of accounting for the phenomenon of class division.

Despite all other differences Gouldner and Parkin share one important feature. Both insist on the applicability of their form of class analysis to both capitalist and socialist society. Marxists, particularly those within the Communist movement, have found it

extremely difficult to come to grips with the reality of the social structures of 'actual socialist' societies. The massive discrepancies in social power and the existence of large masses of subordinated population can only be denied if blinded by dogma that state abolition of private property removes the problem of classes.

Both the authors under discussion offer accounts of the class structure of socialist societies, one in terms of the contradictory position of the intelligentsia in socialist society, and the other in terms of the privileged closure of access to power and decision-making. It is not possible to discuss the merits of these positions in the scope of this review; rather I want to stress two aspects of the problem.

First I want to insist on the importance of the principle of historical specificity in Marxist theory. The analysis of different modes of production, such as capitalism and socialism, cannot be undertaken in terms and concepts developed in the analysis of capitalism and then made universal and applied unproblematically to the analysis of socialist societies. But it is even more important to insist that the principle of historical specificity cannot be used to justify any refusal to analyse and debate the reality of the social structure of socialist society.

My second point is to argue that Marxists, and especially Communists, must come to grips with the analysis of socialist societies. There is a developing literature which has not attracted as much attention as it deserves⁴. The price of failure to come to grips with this problem is already high. It underlines and provides justification for the reserve of millions against the sincere protestation by Communists that to overcome the clear class inequalities of capitalism will not result in a more complex but nevertheless profound relation of domination and subordination. If the writings of Gouldner and Parkin serve no other purpose they provide us with an urgent reminder of this pressing and unfulfilled task.

Alan Hunt

¹ISA = ideological state apparatuses, CMP = capitalist mode of production

²Note Marx's contract between the 'best bees' and 'worst architects' in Capital I, Chapter VII insists on the purposive character of human production

³For a critique of 'reductionist' interpretations of Marxism see essays by Hall, Hirst and Hunt in Hunt, A. *Class and Class Structure*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1977

⁴Amongst recent works of importance are Bettleheim, C. *Class Struggles in the USSR*, Harvester Press, 1976-78; Bahro, R. *The Alternative in Eastern Europe* New Left Books, 1978; Rakowski, M. *Towards an Eastern European Marxism*, Alison and Busby, 1979