
A Touch of Class

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In a recent talk before a group of attentive students at the Dalian Institute of Technology in China, an American professor of management summed up his remarks in this way: "We are all members of a universal management," he declared. "We all face the same allocation decisions. We all need to motivate workers. And we need to insure that our organizations contribute to the achievement of national and social goals."¹ For the reporter who took down this statement, the text and its context were sharply and gratifyingly incongruous. Here was a dedicated cadre of Chinese administrators, steeped in the proletarian homilies of Marx, Lenin, and Mao, avidly recording the gospel according to the Harvard Business School. This was indeed an image of ideological capitulation suitable for framing—a row of puzzled Chinese brows knitted over the intricacies of market pricing and case method. The reporter had managed to discover an experiment in Sino-American cooperation even more inspirational than the import figures on fast foods and soft drinks. What could be more welcome, after all, than the prospect of China feeling its way toward the water's edge of market production?

Yet there was more to the professor's message than the suggestion of a wild-cat capitalism surging up in the communes and factories of the People's Republic. Its deepest irony resided in its direct appeal to a managerial class defined by common tasks of administration, allocation, and mobilization. His remarks left little doubt that modern management had assumed the mantle of universality and internationalism first proffered to the industrial proletariat by Marx and Engels. If the fit seemed at first a bit awkward, the point was nevertheless clear. By reason of their relation to production, polity, and culture, managers had become a class: a class defined by the nature of its decisions in these three spheres and, no less importantly, by its very capacity for decisiveness. A cunning History, it appeared, had thrust the responsibilities of modernity upon those most competent to meet them—management.

We do not know for certain the responses of the Chinese technocrats to this line of thought, though the Dalian experiment itself suggests some sort of ac-

¹ Christopher S. Wren, "Chinese Study Capitalist Lessons," *New York Times*, June 27, 1982; "Chinese Get Latest Word on U.S. Management Skills," *New York Times*, August 17, 1982.

commodation. Nor, for that matter, do we always know our own responses to the managerial argument; not, in this case, because the argument is so new but because it is so old. The possibility of a managerial revolution has been raised, refuted, and revived so many times as to leave most of us bewildered by the statistics and sociological categories adduced on either side.

Not that it is exactly the same intelligentsia that is discovered every time. Over the past century, American observers have repeatedly retouched the portrait of this "New Class" by successively highlighting its technical (1910-1930), managerial (1930-1950), administrative (1950-1970), professional (1970-1980), and intellectual (1980-) features. Of course, these distinctions are not as sharp as the dates would indicate; theorists have rarely hesitated to mix and match characteristics in various ways, with the result that the New Class can appear at times to be the product of some bizarre sociological Identikit.

As one might expect, the results are not always flattering. Neoconservatives, for example, have appropriated and revised the theory of a managerial and technocratic revolution to explain the rise of a pampered and petulant "adversary culture" in the United States. In their view, a New (salaried) Class, coddled by a New (permissive) Childhood, has produced a New (anticapitalist) Politics, informed by a New (barbarian) Sensibility: all of which, they argue, makes itself most deeply felt in the media and educational sector, where the left-leaning intelligentsia are presumed to reign. The left, for its part, has used the notion of a college-educated, nonpropertied salariat to explain the *collapse* of the New Politics, linking the creature comforts and scheduled mobility of New Class life to the guilt-edged quality of its political consciousness and the innocuousness of its countercultural alternatives. Caught in the middle, the New Class can look forward to rebuffs regardless of whether it bites or licks the hand that feeds it.

This curious doublebind may have less to do with some imagined duplicity in the New Class than with a profound ambivalence among its chroniclers. For some time now, writers have used the idea of the New Class as a mirror in which to behold the reflection of their deepest misgivings and their highest ambitions as intellectuals. As a result, they have produced theories about the New Class that invariably display the protean character of the mixed emotions invested in them. The New Class is a class for all reasons. It is here to stay, in theory if not in fact, despite sporadic efforts by orthodox Marxists (and others) to purge the notion from the repertoire of modern social theory.

Yet the survival of this idea of a class "between labor and capital" owes a debt to both the long tradition of political skepticism and critique on the left and some more fashionable preoccupation with the self. Reflection can be rigorous as well as narcissistic. In either case, however, the history of the New Class (now called the professional-managerial class) becomes in important respects a history of ideas. To put it more precisely, the New Class may be the one social

stratum for whom the consciousness of class expresses itself—at least in part—as a history of ideas. To examine the way that the left has thought about the New Class is to chart the contradictory course and prospects of the class itself.

The spectre of a third class “between” or “above” labor and capital has haunted the two-class model of industrial capitalism since the moment of its birth in the *Communist Manifesto*. Marx himself was the first to remark on the separation of management from ownership as a tendency of advanced capitalism. At the same time he foresaw “the constant increase of the middle classes, those who stand between the workman on the one hand and the capitalist and landlord on the other.” Marx neither linked nor developed these observations, but, taken together, they foreshadow the contradictory career that the concept of a separate technical or service class has enjoyed in the years since Marx’s initial musings on the subject.

In speaking of a separation of managerial from proprietary functions within the capitalist firm, Marx had meant to dramatize the indispensable productive operations of the capitalist division of labor that would be carried over into socialism, and whose survival was already visible in hundreds of producers’ cooperatives in England and America. In speaking of the growth of so-called “middle strata,” however, Marx had meant to dramatize just the opposite: the simultaneous development of a *nonproductive* class that lived off the surplus-value produced by the proletariat. Merchants, servants, accountants, lawyers were “a burden weighing heavily on the working base and increas[ing] the social security and power of the upper ten thousand.”² These two views, formulated quite separately in Marx’s own mind, have been persistently conflated by twentieth-century theorists. The result is a double-edged vision of a new middle class, distinguished alternately by its proficiency and its parasitism.

The American figure who most clearly and consistently stressed the dimension of proficiency in the New Class was the maverick economist Thorstein Veblen. Veblen appropriated the productivist legacy of artisan republicanism and socialist aesthetics and reinvested them in his image of the modern technician. His distinction between workmanship and wastemanship—between valued productive skills on the one hand and predatory commercial wiles on the other—animated all of his early writings, but it was not until after World War I that Veblen made his most earnest case for the imminent victory of the technician over the profiteer. The exigencies of the war, he argued in *The Engineers and the Price System*, had quickened the infiltration of experts into America’s industrial

² Karl Marx, *Capital* (New York: International Publishers, 1967) 3:387. *Theories of Surplus Value* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968), Part II, p. 573. Marxists such as Karl Kautsky, Eduard Bernstein, Emil Lederer, and Jacob Marschak were the first to take up the white collar question, but their influence on American writers was minimal.

apparatus. This process would continue, he predicted, until the nation awoke to the presence of a new, technical General Staff. Veblen fastened upon the prewar and wartime preoccupation with efficiency and waste as signs of a growing class-consciousness among American engineers, and in those signs he dimly discerned the outlines of an embryonic "Soviet of Technicians."³

There was some substance to Veblen's hopes, though not much. Radical disciplines of Frederick Winslow Taylor, the pioneer of "scientific management," did ally with various Veblenites, and both parties in turn made overtures to the labor movement during the 1920s. But the notion of a technical soviet made little headway until 1932—at the bottom of the Depression—when Veblen's little polemic on the engineers suddenly became a bestseller. One economist, Howard Scott, went so far as to propose the replacement of the price system by a complicated arrangement of energy measurements and transfers administered by central planning boards. Scott's technocracy movement rode a brief but powerful swell of popularity during 1932, buoyed perhaps by the favorable response to Adolph A. Berle, Jr., and Gardner C. Means's *The Modern Corporation and Private Property*. In this work, which has seen more than twenty reprintings since its first publication, Berle and Means marshalled masses of statistics to show the gradual separation of ownership from actual control over the corporation's means of production. *The Wealth of Nations* had, by their lights, become a dead letter, since managers were now more interested in efficiency and order than in profit and risk; and it was the managers who would staff the "neutral technocracy" that Berle and Means envisioned as the solution to the contemporary crisis of capitalism.⁴

As events would show, the particular proposals put forward by the technocrats and their allies fared badly with the New Deal, but the managerial ethos that they confidently embodied seemed at least publicly redeemed by the prominence given within the Roosevelt administration to the influence of his Brains Trust. "In a broad sense," George Soule wrote in *The Coming American Revolution*, "the New Deal gives us a foretaste of the rise to power of a new class, and this foretaste does have a distinct revolutionary tinge, just because it indicates a shift in class power"—a shift to the intelligentsia, as he called them. "The forefront of the white-collar workers, the productive professions, are just beginning to assume some of the political prerogatives which their actual place in a highly organized industrial society warrants, and to which their superior competence in matters of social theory entitles them."⁵ The grand assurance with which Soule

³ Thorstein Veblen, *The Engineers and the Price System* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), pp. 66, 83-91, 128.

⁴ Adolph A. Berle, Jr., and Gardner C. Means, *The Modern Corporation and Private Property* (New York: Macmillan, 1932), pp. 356-357.

⁵ George Soule, *The Coming American Revolution* (New York: Macmillan, 1934), p. 207.

delivered his prophecy captured the general optimism that “technocratic progressives” held out for a third or middle way between the Red and Black Revolutions at work in Europe;⁶ it also expressed a specific intuition about the intelligentsia’s own decisive role as minutemen of the managerial revolution.

No one had actually used the words “managerial revolution,” however, until 1941, when a best-selling book by that title appeared under James Burnham’s name and left the phrase on everyone’s lips. Burnham published his tract as he embarked on an intellectual journey that would eventually take him (and not a few of his former comrades) from the *Partisan Review* to the *National Review*, and the work bore the imprint of his embittered apostasy. It dismissed capitalist and Marxist theory as metaphysic and then proceeded to collapse the ideological polarities between which managerial theorists had been at pains to locate *their* revolution. Stalinism, Nazism, and New Dealism were, for Burnham, alternative sides of a die that would yield the “managerial society” whichever way it was thrown. The political ascent of the managerial class was not the result of a conspiracy of intellectuals, as the anarchists from whom Burnham was accused of plagiarizing his ideas insisted; rather, it was the upshot of the long-term historical movements and struggles that produced all new modes of production.

The cost in human life imposed by such struggles, Burnham reminded his readers, had yet to be calculated for the United States, where the managerial revolution still lay in embryo. But he doubted whether the nation could avoid the “more strenuous features” of the Russian and German paths to managerialism.⁷ Burnham’s hesitation was out of keeping with an approach to history that otherwise radiated a broad, albeit bleak, confidence in “what was happening in the world.” But if Burnham offered American liberals the promise of a global managerial triumph, he did so only on principles that neither his Trotskyist nor his technocratic readers could bring themselves to accept. For them, Burnham’s “managerial revolution” was at best a Pyrrhic victory.

Cold War politics merely thickened the Orwellian atmosphere in which Burnham had saturated the notion of managerialism. No longer did Veblenites such as Stuart Chase ask why Russia had all the fun of remaking a world. Managerialism bureaucratized spelled totalitarianism. Technocrats were but commissars in lab coats. They were an elite battenning upon the populace through political prerogatives and the mystifications of expertise. Jacques Ellul and Milovan Djilas heralded the changes in this theme, but the message remained the same: pure technique, detached from any moral and popular context, threatened to enslave the humanity it had pledged to emancipate. Thriving, or so it seemed, on

6 The phrase “technocratic progressives” is taken from Robert B. Westbrook, “Tribune of the Technostructure: The Popular Economics of Stuart Chase,” *American Quarterly* 32 (Fall 1980): 388.

7 James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution* (New York: John Day, 1941), p. 272.

the meager rations of irony and despair, emigré critics such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer kept this indictment of instrumental rationality alive through the 1950s and 1960s, long enough for their disciples to see it revived by the antinuclear movement. According to one of the movement's more eloquent leaders, Edward Thompson, the only "ism" produced by an unrestrained technocracy is "exterminism." From his perspective, engineers threaten to extinguish a good deal more of capitalist society than its price system.

In the face of growing Cold War hostility toward social and economic engineering, postwar liberals resigned themselves, according to Robert Westbrook, to an indirect managerialism that operated through such oblique and compensatory methods as fiscal policy and personnel management. During the fifties and sixties the hard-boiled notion of "technocracy" gradually gave way to the softer-boiled notion of "technostructure." All those who brought "specialized knowledge, talent, or experience to group decisionmaking" were said to belong to the technostructure; they were, in John Kenneth Galbraith's words, "the brain" of the modern enterprise, restraining the vestigial profit-reflexes of the firm's more entrepreneurial executives.⁸

"Mixed economy" became the operative term for the liberal ideal of a capitalism thus domesticated from within. As such, the phrase matched the conceptual ambiguity of Galbraith's technostructure: a stratum so broad in its fancied dimensions as to encompass most white-collar occupations. The imprecision, one suspects, was strategic; it suggested nothing less than the retreat of the technical and managerial elites of Veblen and Burnham to the white-collar jungle of their birth, a terrain where they could mingle—guerrilla fashion—with the massed ranks of office workers. Driven underground, as it were, by the combined animosity of left and right, technocratic and managerial theorists found themselves joined to a separate tradition of thinking about a broader, new, middle class—a tradition from which they had formerly been anxious to distinguish themselves. Much of our current debate over the presence of a third class amounts to a quarrel over the fruits of this subterranean affair between the narrow and broad constructionist views of the managerial revolution.

For every writer who has attempted to distinguish an autonomous managerial or technocratic elite from the complex class and status formations of twentieth-century America, there has always been another who preferred to sink the managerial strata into the growing numbers of white-collar employees. Indeed, terms such as "white collar" and "employee"—with all their vagueness—

⁸ John Kenneth Galbraith, *The New Industrial State* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967), pp. 70-71. Galbraith was far more critical of the new class than others; see also David T. Bazelon, *Power in America: The Politics of the New Class* (New York: New American Library, 1967), pp. 307-332.

came into popular usage at precisely the point where Burnham had marked the beginning of the managerial ascent in America: the first World War. The feverish activities of the various wartime administrative agencies had made visible a broad stratum of so-called "brainworkers" whose occupations and self-consciousness appeared to place them between the conventional categories of capital and labor. But rather than see these office and service workers in Marxian terms as unwanted parasites—surplus labor living off the surplus product of the industrial worker—American observers chose to see them as the balance wheel of contemporary society and the microcosm of the future society. "Between the brute power of unskilled labor and the brute power of capital," the journalist John Corbin wrote in his *Return of the Middle Class*, "a buffer arises which is composed of the most manly and intelligent elements in both." A new middle class intervenes "between capitalist and laborer, sympathizing with both, knowing the needs of both as neither alone can do." These hybrid figures, according to the political scientist Arthur Holcombe, belonged to an "intermediate class of professional men and public employees, who are neither capitalist nor proletarians but rather the servants of all classes." Their "special interests," he concluded in *The New Party Politics*, came "nearer to coinciding with the general interest than those of any class."⁹

The stress on subjective capacities—on detachment and empathy in particular—was characteristic of the early writing on the New Class. Political scientists and polemicists alike tended to psychologize the white-collar sector by treating it as a state of mind to be reckoned with in any calculation of future political struggles. The urban, technical, managerial, professional, and clerical force was, by the 1930s, a sufficiently sanitized sociological category—cleansed by the quality of its production and consumption—to warrant the title of a "public." One could gain entry into it by works or by faith; one could even join, in Holcombe's phrase, by "due process of thought." Or as one radical editor put it in 1935, "the fact that there is such a wide currency to the idea of a 'public,' between and more important than 'capital' and 'labor,' is significant, for we are governed by ideas." "We are," he added in a Pirandelloesque flourish, "what we think we are."¹⁰ Classes, like dreams, were the fulfillment of a wish.

To read such pronouncements is to realize that the white-collar class was less of a presence than an absence in the minds of its heralds—an absence into which they (and their subjects) could project infinite possibilities. The boundaries of the New Class were sufficiently vague and subjective as to produce a kind

⁹ John Corbin, *The Return of the Middle Class* (New York: Scribner, 1922), pp. 233, 279–280; Arthur N. Holcombe, *The New Party Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1933), pp. 201, 117.

¹⁰ Alfred M. Bingham, *Insurgent America: Revolt of the Middle Classes* (New York and London: Harper, 1935), p. 47.

ning to move again." Two years later, a convention of the Students for a Democratic Society issued the Port Huron Statement, affirming the values of individualism, community, and participatory democracy, and designating the university as the appropriate "potential base and agency in a movement of social change."¹⁴

The New Left was born committed to a strategy of self-radicalization, a strategy supported by the shared perception of the failures of the Old Left and the embourgeoisement of the American working class. The capacity of the system to regenerate and reproduce itself suggested the presence of a new, one-dimensional social and cultural totality, one that called for new analytic approaches and new revolutionary vehicles. "Any new left in America," the Port Huron Statement read, "must be, in large measure, a left with real intellectual skills, committed to deliberativeness, honesty, reflection as working tools."¹⁵ The early movement drew sustenance from pacifist and populist traditions, but its sense of embattlement against decades of deception and hypocrisy at all points of the political spectrum lent strength to its conviction that in the radicalized university lay the path of reason, revelation, and revolution. Events, particularly the Vietnam War and the draft, appeared to bear this conviction out. The very marginality of intellectuals, it seemed, made for a critical angle of vision.

As the New Left gained in numbers and visibility during the late sixties, marginality began to lose some of its political cachet as an organizing idea. In its stead, SDS endorsed the idea that students formed part of a "new working class," a technical, professional, and clerical force operating "at the very hub of production."¹⁶ The "Port Authority Statement"—the document in which these arguments were first announced—drew heavily on contemporary European writers such as Pierre Belleville, Serge Mallet, and André Gorz. In doing so, it brought together two previously opposing lines of thought: the gradual proletarianization and degradation of white-collar work on the one hand and its growing indispensability and priority to advanced societies on the other. Knowledge had become the most important force of production in the modern world, and the knowledge-workers the most important potential agent of change, not because they were materially immiserated but because they experienced most acutely the contradiction between the ideal of professional/technical autonomy and the subaltern status of their actual work. Here, it appeared, was the elusive reconciliation of Marx, Veblen, Burnham et al., a rapprochement dramatically enacted in the French worker-student alliance of May 1968 and reenacted in the widespread entry of white radicals into American factories in the years following. For the New Left, the New Working Class theory promised a homecoming

14 C. Wright Mills, "The New Left" in *Power, Politics and People*, Irving Louis Horowitz, ed. (New York: Ballantine, 1963), p. 256; Port Huron Statement quoted in Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), pp. 52-53.

15 Sale, *SDS*, pp. 52-53.

16 *Ibid.*, pp. 337-340.

and a barnburning all at the same time.

Given such hopes, the fragmentation and collapse of the New Left in the mid-seventies produced their share of soul-searching post-mortems. Among the most interesting and provocative of these reappraisals was one written in 1977 by two veterans of the movement, Barbara and John Ehrenreich. It was entitled, quite simply, "The Professional-Managerial Class." Resisting the return to Leninist models of organization on the one hand and to the fetishism of marginality on the other, the Ehrenreichs credited the rise and fall of the New Left to the initiatives of a third class between labor and capital. The career of the New Left, they argued, was directly related to the anger and anxieties of a class alternately mobilized and immobilized by the contradictions of its position in the new division of labor—a position that required professional-managerial class (PMC) members to service, supervise, and manipulate a working class with whom they otherwise shared a common nonpropertied status. The Ehrenreichs defined the PMC "as consisting of salaried mental workers who do not own the means of production and whose major function in the social division of labor may be described broadly as the social reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist class relations."¹⁷ In their view, the PMC had a distinctive history (beginning around 1890), a distinctive organization (the professional association), a distinctive function (capitalist reproduction), and a distinctive culture (scientism, professionalism, consumerism), and conflicting interests—interests that could make the PMC the handmaiden or gadfly of monopoly capitalism. Only a clear understanding of these conflicting interests, they concluded, could sort out the cross-purposes that had both made and unmade the New Left, and that could contribute to its remaking.

The response to the Ehrenreichs was predictably mixed: a combination of immediate, almost visceral outrage and gradual, tacit acceptance. For some, the Ehrenreichs had discovered the sociological equivalent of phlogiston, an imaginary class set free by the combustion of other classes. For others, the Ehrenreichs had merely renamed an old problem. And for others, the article came as timely inspiration. In fact, Alvin Gouldner took the Ehrenreichs' thesis several steps further in his *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class*. There he treated the PMC (redivided between intellectuals and intelligentsia) as a "flawed universal class," quietly parlaying its technical and cultural capital into the power it would assume once its mandarin under the decaying bourgeois and bureaucratic classes had ended. Revolution would be unnecessary, Gouldner assured his readers. The New Class was in effect a new bourgeoisie; it could afford to wait.¹⁸

17 Barbara and John Ehrenreich, "The Professional-Managerial Class," reprinted in *Between Labor and Capital*, Pat Walker, ed. (Boston: South End Press, 1979), p. 12.

18 Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), pp. 7, 83–85.

Such futurology is by now all too familiar. What was most refreshing about the Ehrenreichs' article was its reluctance to adopt the prophetic mode, its insistence on self-scrutiny, and, correspondingly, its appreciation of class as an historical category. Though their range of historical examples was necessarily slim, the Ehrenreichs had clearly drawn their inspiration from the radicalization of professionals during the late 1960s and from the related investigations of American corporate liberalism first undertaken by the circle of radical historians associated with *Studies on the Left* (1959–1967). In the decade since the dissolution of that journal, those investigations have broadened and deepened, leaving us a rough, composite history of the making of a professional-managerial class in America. Whether we are speaking of middle-level management, engineering, advertising, public relations, journalism, law, social sciences, medicine, or the helping professions, the stories are all strikingly similar—indeed, almost formulaic: a narrative of academic entrepreneurship and institution building; a story of journals, associations, and foundations, of examinations and degrees; in short, a story of technical and cultural gatekeeping and awarding credentials. Even today, the American professors at the Dalian Institute look to the creation of alumni associations and “old-boy” networks to secure their managerial experiment in China.

This may not be the stuff out of which epic sagas are made, but it is nonetheless a cultural history. If anything, it is a conspicuously cultural history: a story of a class whose work and play are almost entirely taken up with the manipulation and improvisation of social and technical symbols; a “speech community” whose culture can be described, in Gouldner's words, as one of “critical and careful discourse.”¹⁹ The categories of analysis are visibly Weberian; they are even more noticeably anthropological in that they define the PMC by its capacity to produce and reproduce the web of meanings and institutions within which capitalist exploitation operates. The PMC oversees the cultural and social arrangements that permit such exploitation to continue behind the backs, as it were, of its principals. Its success in this venture may be felt within the theory of the class itself—a theory that is far more at ease with problems of authority, legitimacy, entitlements, and enfranchisement than with issues of economic coercion, industrial discipline, and surplus extraction. Indeed, the hyphenated formulation—“professional-managerial”—obscures the fact that it is the “professional” that invariably is emphasized in recent theoretical practice. The “managerial” side of the PMC refers less to some specific position in the social structure than to a generally manipulative orientation or attitude toward social relations inside and outside the workplace. The PMC excludes Burnham's managers and Veblen's technicians.

And here the legacy of the New Left on our understanding of the New Class is mostly felt. It was the student movement, after all, that sought to mobilize its

19 Ibid., pp. 28–44.

inherited ethos of professional autonomy against the technocratic and managerial leadership of the "multiversity." It was the New Left that was most concerned, obsessed even, with the cultural and technical languages within which the oppressive and emancipatory possibilities of modern societies were embedded. And it was the New Left that, above all, worked to create a "prefigurative politics," that is, a politics that would embody a microcosm of the society its revolution sought to bring into being. The same localist, culturalist, and democratic features that mark off the New from the Old Left distinguish as well between our new and old ideas of the "managerial revolution."

The gap between the vision and practice of the New Left was undoubtedly considerable, as is the gulf between the behavior of the New Class and its imagined destiny. The naiveté, shortsightedness, elitism, and hypocrisy of both the movement and the class have been anatomized often enough. The blind faith that PATCO workers placed in their indispensability is only a recent example of the isolation and miscalculations of the New Class when it is driven into struggle. It fails to recognize its allies (and its enemies) because it does not know itself. As long as its membership remains mobile and fragmented, its solidity, not to mention its solidarity, as a class will be open to question. For many, the New Class will continue to resemble the new Nixon: neither new nor trustworthy.

The New Class, then, is something less than the "flawed universal class" described by Alvin Gouldner, but it is also something more than the "contradictory class location" mapped out by Eric Olin Wright. If the class is not, as Gouldner suggested, the "best card that history has presently given us to play," it is still a card we are likely to find in any winning hand. Its ideological and institutional skills are too deeply imbricated in the structure of advanced societies, its ambitions and aspirations too widely diffused, for the class to remain entirely passive in the face of systemic crisis or blockage. Admittedly, there is much in the long tradition of theorizing about the New Class to support the view of it as an exercise in wishful thinking—a case of the imagination doing the work of the will. But the case is hardly so simple as that. The opposing formulations long present in (and between) the various theories of a New Class are not gratuitous confusions; they are evidence of what they purport to explain: the protracted, public rumination of a class becoming, in its peculiarly contradictory way, a class for itself.

At present, the right wing of the PMC is predominant, visible in the rampant careerism, consumerism, scientism, and narcissism of the upscale markets. But its left wing survives: in the persistent concern with consciousness and language in the women's movement, in the community activism and technical critiques of the antinuclear movements, in the recovery of older cultures of resistance by radical feminist, black, and labor historians, and in the commitment to deliberative, participatory politics of journals such as this one. Contemporary radicals seem bent on creating a left culture: a structure of left institutions, associations, publications, and memory that can serve as a foundation for

alternative and oppositional politics. In their own way, the managerial types at the Dalian Institute would understand: it is networking writ large, and red.

According to Christopher Lasch, American radicals first drew the connection between culture and politics at the turn of the century, that is, at the moment when intellectuals were themselves emerging as a distinctive "social type."²⁰ The New Radicalism, like the New Class, is thus nearly a century old, if not a century wise. Considering its relative inattention to issues of production, equity, and exploitation, cultural politics may seem a singularly inappropriate politics for a time marked by the blatant transfer of wealth between classes and the wholesale rearrangement of classes into a new mode of production. But such politics *are* relevant to the way in which such massive disruptions can take place without substantial challenge or coercion. In the new global division of labor of advanced capitalism, the reproductive tasks entrusted to the PMC are critical ones.

At the very least, the PMC has become the labor aristocracy of a work force whose production has lost most of the tangible, material properties that Marx once identified with the commodity. Like it or not, we have entered an economic situation where, for the first time, workers in the consumer, financial, and service industries outnumber those in the so-called "goods-producing sector." "Soon," says yet another professor of management, "there will only be work for those who have the skills of speaking, listening, observing and measuring, and the confidence to use their minds to analyze and solve problems."²¹ The handwriting is on the wall, we are being told, but it will take an advanced degree to read it.

Still, we need not embrace the notion of some third wave to appreciate the value (and limitations) of the notion of a third class. It is not science, to be sure, but it is not science fiction either. Neither the culturalist categories in which the New Class is understood nor the materialist categories in which older classes have been understood can be wished away. It may indeed be the case that the professional managerial class is nothing more than an unwanted and unwitting fiduciary for capital and labor, holding the assets of one and the skills of another in a not-so-blind trust. If so, the century-long train of thought in New Class theory may be nothing less than the PMC's slow and uneven ascent toward a recognition of these multiple, if borrowed, resources. Where this awareness may lead, no one can say. But the irony is there for any sharp-eyed reporter to conjure with: a class condemned merely to solve the world, gradually empowered to change it.

²⁰ Christopher Lasch, *The New Radicalism in America, 1889-1963* (New York: Vintage, 1965), pp. ix-xiii.

²¹ Damon Stetson, "Service Industries Gain in Job Totals," *New York Times*, July 6, 1982; James O'Toole, quoted in Fred Hechinger, "About Education," *New York Times*, August 10, 1982.

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