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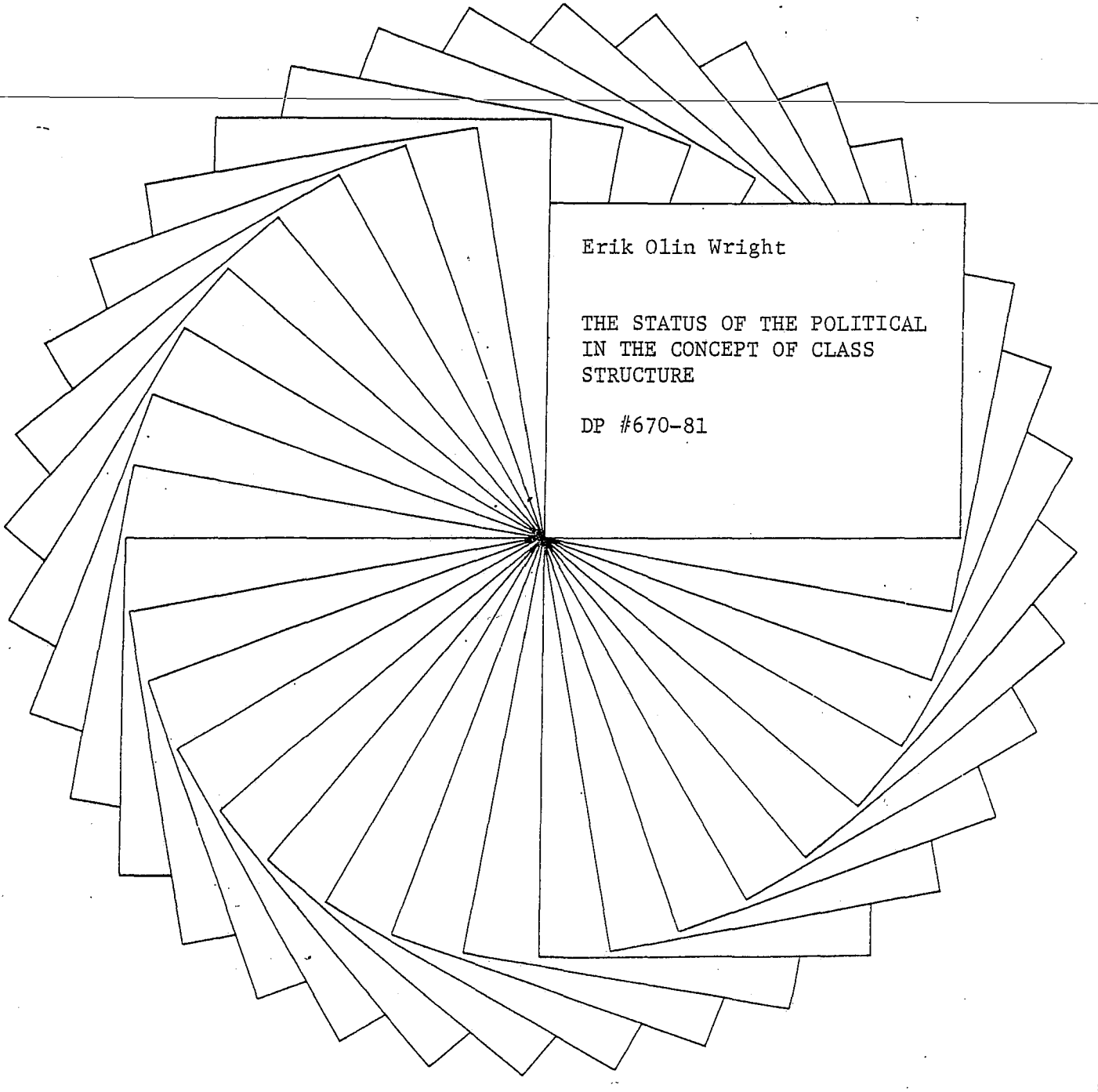

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THE STATUS OF THE POLITICAL IN THE CONCEPT OF CLASS STRUCTURE

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ABSTRACT

Over the past fifteen years Marxist theoreticians have devoted considerable attention to reconceptualizing the place of "class" in the overall Marxist theory of society and social change. In this paper the author situates class structure within a broader context of class analysis. He defines the concept of "the political," both as it bears on the problem of the political aspect of practices and of social relations. He then turns to John Roemer's analysis of exploitation and class. The paper ends with a brief discussion of some of the implications of viewing class as an intrinsically political concept.

The Status of the Political in the Concept of Class Structure

As part of the general rethinking of basic categories within Marxist theory over the past fifteen years, considerable attention has been devoted to the concept of class. This has involved both a reconceptualization of the place of the category "class" in the overall Marxist theory of society and social change and a variety of transformations of the concept itself.[1]

Many of these attempts at reconceptualization have revolved around the problem of the relationship between the political and the economic in class relations. Traditionally, Marxists have regarded the concept of class structure as purely an economic category, defined by property relations or production relations understood in strictly economic terms. Capitalists appropriated surplus value because of their location within economic relations; workers produced surplus value because they did not own their own means of production and had to sell their labor power to capitalists. In this notion of a "class-in-itself," politics entered the analysis explicitly in only two ways: first, the state was seen as essential to reproduce this structure of economic class relations and for setting its legal presuppositions (guaranteeing contracts, enforcing property rights, etc.); and second, politics was seen as central to the process by which classes became organized in the class struggle. Indeed, the transition from the status of a "class-in-itself" to a "class-for-itself" was traditionally viewed as largely a process of the movement from the purely economic existence of classes to their political existence.

More recent Marxist analyses have often stressed the importance of political relations in the very definition of class relations. Not only does the state establish the legal preconditions of property relations, but in a deep sense those relations themselves have a political dimension. That dimension is expressed in different ways by different theorists--as power relations, relations of domination/subordination, relations of control, etc.--but in all cases some notion of class relations as necessarily embodying a political aspect is asserted. Even at the most abstract level, it is argued, a purely economic understanding of class relations is unsatisfactory.

John Roemer challenges this recent trend in class analysis in his paper, "New Directions in the Marxian Theory of Class and Exploitation."* His central argument is that at the most abstract level, classes can be defined strictly in terms of economically defined ownership relations. Political factors enter into the story only at "lower" levels of abstraction, particularly in specifying the necessary institutional conditions for maintaining the basic property relations which define classes. In this paper I will critically examine Roemer's arguments in support of this thesis. I will try to show that while Roemer is correct in arguing that the concept of exploitation can be adequately specified in purely economic terms, the concept of class cannot. Class is an intrinsically political concept and,

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*Forthcoming in Politics & Society, 1982. A slightly different earlier version is available as Working Paper Series, No. 161, Department of Economics, University of California, Davis, November 1980. This essay summarizes the central issues in Roemer's forthcoming book, A General Theory of Exploitation and Class (Harvard University Press, 1982).

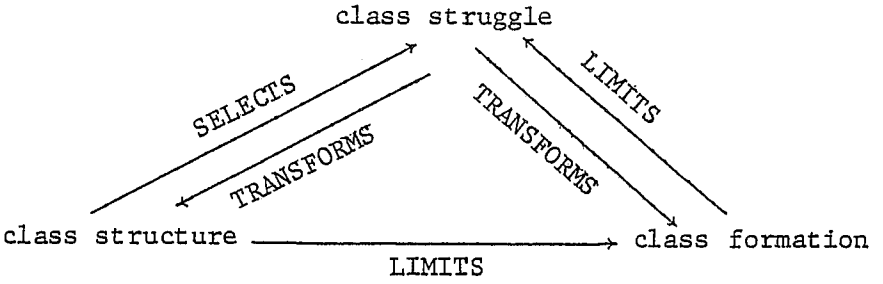
I will argue, for it to serve its explanatory purposes it must have its political dimensions systematically represented within the concept itself.

The paper is organized as follows. First, I briefly situate the theoretical object of this discussion, class structure, within a broader context of class analysis. This is important to avoid unnecessary confusion over the limits of the discussion. Second, I define the concept of "the political," both as it bears on the problem of the political aspect of practices and of social relations. Once these preliminary conceptual clarifications are done, we will turn to Roemer's analysis of exploitation and class. The paper ends with a brief discussion of some of the implications of viewing class as an intrinsically political concept.[2]

CLASS STRUCTURE AS AN ELEMENT IN CLASS ANALYSIS

It is useful in discussing the concept of class to distinguish three separate elements in a class analysis: class structure, class formation, and class struggle. While each of these presupposes the other two and is definable only in terms of its connection with the other elements, nevertheless it is important to make the distinctions. Class struggle is defined as the practices of individuals and collectivities in pursuit of class interests; class formation is defined as the social relations within classes which determine the capacities of classes to pursue their interests; and class structure is defined as the social relations between classes which determine or shape the basic interests over which classes-in-formation struggle. These three elements, then,

are related in the following manner:[3]



The essential argument of this model of determination is that the underlying structure of class relations imposes limits on the possible forms of collective class organization which in turn impose limits on the possible forms of class struggle, while within these limits class struggle has transformative effects on both class structure and class formation. These transformative effects imply that the limits on class struggle (and on class formation) are not permanently fixed, but change in response to the struggles themselves. It is in this sense that the model can be seen as "dialectical": struggles transform the conditions of their own determination.

This model is, of course, purely formal in character. There is no specific content given to any of the terms and no concrete propositions about the nature of the limits and transformations involved. As such it is largely pre-theoretical: the model provides a framework to specify a theory of class, but does not itself constitute such a theory.

One of the critical steps in developing the theory is to elaborate the logic of each of the elements in the model. In this paper I will focus on the concept "class structure," particularly on the question of the role of political relations within the concept. I will not, except

in passing, discuss the role of the political in the concepts of class formation and class struggle. This is not to suggest that explicating the concept of class structure is somehow the key to the entire analysis, but simply that it is a necessary starting point.

The Concept of "Political"

In order to define the concept of the political, it is first necessary to define the concept of social practice. Following Althusser, "practice" can be defined as human activity that transforms some raw material, using specific means of production, into some product.[4] Practices are thus human activities viewed in a specific way, namely in terms of their transformative effects in the world. Different kinds of practices--or different dimensions of practice--are distinguished by the nature of the transformation process involved (i.e., the nature of the raw material; means of production, transformative activity, and product). In these terms, economic, political, and ideological practices can be defined in the following way:

Economic practices: Activities which produce and transform use-values;

Political practices: Activities which produce and transform social relations;

Ideological practices: Activities which produce and transform the subjective experience of those relations.

Concrete, observed activities of people typically involve aspects of each of these types of practice. When workers work on an assembly line they are simultaneously transforming nature into useful products (economic aspect), producing and reproducing a particular structure of social relations (the political aspect) and particular forms of subjectivity (the ideological aspect).

Corresponding to this distinction among practices or aspects of practice, there is a distinction among social relations (or aspects of those relations). These can be defined as follows:

> Economic aspect of social relations: Those features of social relations which shape or limit the activities of transforming nature;
>
> Political aspect of social relations: Those features of social relations which shape or limit the activities of transforming social relations;
>
> Ideological aspect of relations: Those features of relations which shape or limit the activities of transforming subjectivity.

Using the example of the factory, we might say that the technical division of labor is primarily an economic aspect of social relations in that it systematically shapes the activities of transformation of nature; the authority structure is centrally a political aspect of those relations in that it systematically limits the capacities of workers to transform the relations within which they work; and the job structure (seniority, competition in internal labor markets, etc.) is centrally an ideological aspect of the relations in that it systematically shapes the subjectivity of workers on the job.[5]

When we speak of "political practices" or "political relations" the terms should be understood as a shorthand for practices or social relations within which the political aspect is the most important. This may be quite difficult to determine empirically in specific cases, as in the debate over whether educational institutions should be viewed as primarily ideological (i.e., producing forms of subjectivity) or primarily economic (producing skilled labor power). The important point in the

present context is acknowledging this complexity of practices and relations and setting the agenda for investigating relationships of the various aspects under discussion.

The specific focus of this paper is the political dimension of the concept of class structure (i.e., the structure of class relations). As already stated, the political aspect of any relation consists of those features of the relation which shape the practices of transforming social relations. In these terms, the relations of domination/subordination constitute a quintessentially political aspect of social relations. To say that A dominates B is to say that A not only tells B what to do or in other ways directs B's activities, but also that A has the capacity to constrain B's attempts at transforming the relationship between A and B. To be a subordinate is not simply to be in a position in which one is given orders, but to be unable to transform the relationship of command-obedience. This is what distinguishes following instructions or suggestions in a reciprocal relationship and following orders in a hierarchical relation. They may be behaviorally equivalent in a given instance, but they are structurally quite distinct.

The question at hand, then, is whether this particular political aspect of social relations--domination/subordination--is an essential element in defining class relations. I will argue in the next section that John Roemer is quite correct that such relations of domination are not central to the definition of exploitation as such, but that they are necessary for the specification of class relations.

ROEMER'S TREATMENT OF DOMINATION IN THE CONCEPTS OF CLASS AND EXPLOITATION

In his discussions of class and exploitation, Roemer adopts two rather different stances towards the problem of domination. In the first part of his analysis he argues that both class and exploitation can be specified strictly in terms of the distribution of property rights, without any reference to domination relations. At the end of the paper, when he introduces a game-theoretic way of analyzing exploitation, he argues that there is an implied relation of domination in the concept of exploitation and thus in class as well. What I will argue is that Roemer is correct in the first formulation regarding the concept of exploitation, and in the second regarding the concept of class: class requires domination relations, exploitation does not.

Let us first examine the strategy Roemer employs to investigate exploitation and class as direct consequences of the distribution of property rights. His strategy is to examine several different economies which differ only in terms of the kinds of markets which are allowed in them and in the character of the distribution of productive assets. In the course of these investigations he proves two propositions, both of which may at first glance seem quite surprising. First, he shows that exploitation can occur in situations in which all producers own their own means of production, and thus there is no domination whatsoever within the actual process of production; and second, he shows that there is complete symmetry in the structure of exploitation in a system in which capital hires wage laborers and in a system in which workers rent capital. Let us look at each of these in turn.

Roemer demonstrates that exploitation can exist in an economy in which every producer owns his or her own means of production and in which there is consequently no market in either labor power or means of production; the only things that are traded are final products of various sorts, but different producers own different amounts of productive assets. The result is that some producers have to work more hours than other producers to produce the exchange-equivalent of their own subsistence. What Roemer shows in this simple economy is that the result of trade among producers is not only that some producers work less than others for the same subsistence, but that the producers who work less are able to do so because the less-endowed producers have to work more. That is, an actual transfer of labor occurs from the asset-poor to the asset-rich. (The critical proof is that if the asset-poor person simply stopped producing--died--the asset-rich producer would be worse off than before and have to work longer hours.) Since in this economy the exploiter clearly does not in any way directly dominate the exploited--they both own their own means of production and use them as they please--this example shows that exploitation does not presuppose immediate domination relations. Of course, a repressive apparatus may be needed to guarantee the property rights themselves--to protect the asset-rich from theft of assets by the asset-poor--but no domination directly between the rich and poor is implied.

The second analysis is more complex. It revolves around a comparison of the class structures on what Roemer calls a "labor market island" and a "credit market island." The argument is basically as follows. On both

islands some people own no means of production and other people own varying amounts of means of production. The distribution of these assets are identical on the two islands. And on both islands people have the same motivations: they all are labor-time minimizers for a common level of subsistence. The two islands differ in only one respect: on the labor market island people are allowed to sell their labor power, whereas on the credit market island people are not allowed to sell labor power but are allowed to borrow, at some interest rate, the means of production. Roemer then demonstrates two things: first, that on each island there is a strict correspondence between class location (ownership of differing amounts of means of production, including no means of production) and exploitation status (having one's surplus labor appropriated by someone else or appropriating someone else's surplus labor). This is his important "Class Exploitation Correspondence Principle." Second, he demonstrates that the two class structures are completely isomorphic: that every individual on one island would be in exactly the same class on the other island.

It is because of this strict functional equivalence of the labor market island and the credit market island that Roemer concludes that domination plays no essential role in the most abstract definition of classes. Roemer writes:

> These results force some reevaluation, I think, of the classical belief that the labor process is at the center of the Marxian analysis of exploitation and class. I have demonstrated that the entire constellation of Marxian "welfare" concepts can be generated with no institution for the exchange of labor. Furthermore, this has been done at the level of abstraction at which Marxian value theory is customarily performed. This casts serious doubt on the project

> of elevating the labor process to central stage in the Marxian theory of exploitation . . . .
>
> . . . Exploitation can be mediated entirely through the exchange of produced commodities, and classes can exist with respect to a credit market instead of a labor market--at least at this classical level of abstraction.
>
> This is not to say coercion is not necessary to produce Marxian exploitation and class: rather, that is suffices for the coercion to be at the point of maintaining property relations and not at the locus of extracting surplus labor directly from the worker.[6]

Political relations are important for instituionally reproducing class and exploitation, but they are not constitutive elements in the very definitions of these concepts.

This is not, however, the only assessment of domination made in Roemer's analysis. Towards the end of the paper, when a game-theoretic approach to comparing different systems of exploitation is introduced, domination reenters the analysis as a central feature. The objective of this part of the paper is to provide a general strategy for assessing claims about different groups of agents being exploited or not exploited in different ways. The device is to treat the production system as a kind of game and to ask if a coalition of players would be better off if they withdrew from the game under certain specified procedures. Different types of exploitation are then defined by the withdrawal rules which would make certain kinds of agents better off. In this way "feudal exploitation" is defined as the situation in which agents would be better off if they withdrew from the game with only their personal assets (i.e., if they were freed from relations of personal bondage), whereas capitalist exploitation is defined as the situation in which agents would be better

off if they left the game with their per capita share of total social assets (not just personal assets).

Roemer's game is an extremely clever and insightful device, but it immediately runs into certain problems unless some additional specifications are added. For example, under the rules laid out so far, the handicapped could be said to exploit the healthy feudalistically, since the healthy would be better off if they withdrew with their personal assets from the game in which the handicapped are aided. Even more damaging, perhaps, if two islands, one rich and one poor, are arbitrarily grouped together even though they have no relations with each other, the poor island would be considered "exploited" capitalistically by the richer one (i.e., it would be better off if it withdrew from the game with its per capita share of the combined assets of the two islands).

It is to avoid these and related problems that Roemer added a number of further specifications of the game-theoretic approach in footnote 3 to the paper. There he states:

> A coalition S is viewed as exploited . . . with respect to a particular conception of the alternative (embodied in the characteristic function of a game, v) if: (i) S does better under alternative v than it is currently doing at the given allocation; (ii) S's complement S' does worse under the alternative v; (iii) S' is in a relation of dominance to S.[7]

This final criterion implies that a relationship of domination in some sense or other is required for the definition of exploitation and class. The handicapped do not dominate the healthy--indeed, if anything, the relations of domination are in the opposite direction--and thus even if they receive benefits from the assets of the healthy, they cannot be considered exploiters. Similarly, the poor island is not exploited by

the rich one, since even though it would benefit from getting its per capita share of the two islands' combined assets, there is no social relationship between the people of the two islands.[8]

Why is it that in the discussion of the game-theoretic strategy of analyzing class and exploitation Roemer was compelled to introduce relations of domination into the basic definition of class, whereas in his earlier discussion he was not? The answer, I think, lies in the fact that the initial discussion was confined to the problem of exploitation and class within commodity-producing economic systems, whereas the game-theory discussion was designed to explicate the problem across fundamentally different economic systems, including non-commodity-producing economies. Since feudalism, for example, revolves around relations of bondage, and this is at the heart of the definition of feudal class relations, it is impossible to generate a purely economic definition of feudal classes. So-called "extra-economic coercion" must be considered part of the definition of class relations in feudalism, not simply an institutional boundary-setting political process. Within commodity-producing societies, however, it appears that political relations are essentially separated from economic relations and it becomes possible to talk about classes and property rights as if they did not imply domination.

This view of the relationship between class and exploitation in commodity-producing systems is, I believe, incorrect. Let us return to Roemer's discussion of simple commodity production and the two market "islands." In each of these analyses Roemer convincingly shows that exploitation can be specified strictly in terms of property rights and

their distributions. Domination enters the story of exploitation only externally, in the enforcement of the property rights themselves.

But what about class relations? Here we notice that there is a critical difference between the analysis of simple commodity production and the two islands. In the simple commodity-producing case there are, in Roemer's view, no classes properly speaking, since all actors have the same relationship to the means of production, whereas in the two islands we do have classes: a class of owners and a class of nonowners. But why, one might ask, does owning matter to such an extent as to warrant the designation "class?" In the simple commodity-producing society depicted by Roemer there are people who may live a life of relative leisure because of the heavy toil of others. With relatively little modification of the conditions of his story we could also have people with very different levels of final consumption--rich and poor standards of living (rather than just high and low levels of toil). Why is not the distinction "rich" and "poor" itself a class distinction?

The reason, I would argue, is that the rich do not dominate the poor in the simple commodity-producing society. There is no social relationship which necessarily directly binds them to each other in a relation of domination/subordination. In both the credit market island and the labor market island, on the other hand, the owners and nonowners are bound together through direct relations of domination/subordination. There is thus a crucial difference between having few assets, but still enough to produce one's own means of subsistence, and having no assets, and thus having to either sell one's labor power or rent the assets of

others. In the former case, rich asset-owners do not directly tell the poor asset-owners what to do--they do not directly dominate them; in the latter case, a new kind of social relation is generated between the asset-owner and nonowner. Owners dominate nonowners.

This difference between the two situations implies that the general term "property rights" has a different social content in the two cases. In the simple commodity-producing economy, property rights only specify a set of effective powers over things--productive assets. While of course such effective powers imply that one has the right to exclude other people from using those assets (or prevent them from taking them), the right itself implies no ongoing relationship between people in which effective powers over people are exercised. In the credit and labor market economies, on the other hand, property rights imply both a set of effective powers over things and effective powers directly over people. The owner of assets not only has the right to use those assets but the right to control in specific ways the behavior of people without assets who desire to gain access to the assets in question. The labor contract and the credit contract both imply a relation of domination, an agreement on the part of the assetless to follow certain orders from the asset-owners.

I would argue that it is precisely because property rights in the labor and credit market islands entail such relations of domination/subordination that one is justified in saying that the exploitation relations in this case constitute a class relation and not simply a basis of inequality.[9] Exploitation without domination, or domination without exploitation, does not constitute class relations. Domination

by itself may be a form of oppression, but not class oppression. This is the case, for example, of prison guards dominating prisoners. Similarly, exploitation without domination is not a form of class relations. Children certainly appropriate the surplus labor of their parents, but do not (at least in the normal sense of the term) dominate them and thus cannot be considered a "ruling class" within a family.[10]

Roemer is thus correct that the recent focus on the labor process within Marxist analyses is not essential to specify the minimum conditions for capitalist exploitation to occur. But he is not correct in dismissing analyses of the labor process from the abstract understanding of class relations in capitalism. At a very minimum, the capitalist labor process must be understood as a structure of relations within which capitalists have the capacity to dominate workers, to effectively tell them what to do. To be sure, it is the real ownership of the means of production which constitutes such capacities, but it is essential to recognize such ownership rights as implying domination over the activity of workers if ownership is to constitute the basis for a class relation. And this is precisely what the analyses of the labor process are concerned with: the forms of domination which govern laboring activity within production.[11]

IMPLICATIONS FOR CLASS ANALYSIS

The argument that the political is intrinsic to the concept of class at even the highest level of abstraction has a number of important implications for class analysis. I will discuss several of these: (1)

implications for the labor theory of value; (2) implications for the defense of the Marxist concept of class against its various bourgeois rivals; (3) implications for the more concrete elaboration of the concept of class in capitalist societies; (4) implications for the problem of classes in socialism; and (5) implications for the general Marxist analysis of modes of production.

1. The Labor Theory of Value

Roemer argues that the essential justification of choosing labor power as the numeraire commodity for defining value and exploitation is that it is uniformly distributed throughout the population. This property is essential for a "proper" theory of exploitation--that is, a theory which classifies the poor as exploited and the rich as exploiters. Only labor power, Roemer argues, has this property since "no produced commodity is uniformly distributed since proletarians are dispossessed of all productive assets."[12] Furthermore, since the purpose of the theory is precisely to explain class struggle between capitalists and workers, and since the use of labor power as the numeraire commodity for value and exploitation generates a theory of exploitation which corresponds to the polarization between capitalists and workers, this choice of numeraire is dictated by the explanatory objectives of the theory.

Once we add domination relations directly into our conception of class, a different kind of argument can be built for the use of labor power as the numeraire commodity, or equivalently, for the choice of labor time as the metric for exploitation. Labor time, as opposed to

any other metric for the surplus product, is simultaneously a measure of appropriation relations and domination relations. It is a measure of how much product is appropriated and how much human time is dominated through that appropriation. As appropriators, exploiting classes appropriate surplus products in one way or another, and if the appropriation-relation was the totality of class relations, any metric of the surplus product would be a satisfactory way of representing the quantitative aspect of class relations. But, as I have argued, the concept of class is intrinsically a political concept as well. The ideal metric of exploitation, therefore, should capture both aspects of class relations. Labor time accomplishes precisely this, for it identifies how much laboring activity is dominated in production.[13]

This justification for the choice of labor time as the metric of exploitation depends upon the argument that domination relations are as central an aspect of class relations as are appropriation relations. While I have shown that domination relations are implied in Roemer's analysis even though he explicitly relegates them to secondary importance, I have not yet provided a general argument in support for the importance of domination in a class analysis. To do that it will be useful to turn to a comparison of Marxist and non-Marxist concepts of class.

2. Marxist vs. Non-Marxist Concepts of Class

Non-Marxist concepts of class take typically one of two forms: either they are structured around categories of distribution without

reference to domination, or they are structured around categories of domination without reference to distribution. In the first of these tendencies, class is defined either directly in terms of distributional outcomes--typically income--or in terms of the proximate determinants of those outcomes--typically occupation or "market capacity" (the Weberian approach). In either case, relations of domination are either entirely absent from the discussion or of strictly incidental importance. The second tendency, most explicitly found in the work of Ralph Dahrendorf, defines classes solely in terms of power or authority relations. There are "command classes" and "obey classes" in every institutional sphere of the society, with no special status being given to economic institutions.

The Marxist account of class in a sense subsumes both of these images of class relations through the concept of exploitation. Class relations are precisely the unity of appropriation relations (the Marxist way of theorizing categories of distribution) and domination. The justification for this way of conceptualizing class relations rests on two arguments:

1. Within production relations, domination without appropriation and appropriation without domination are unreproducible structures of social relations.[14]

2. The coincidence of domination and appropriation within production relations provides the basis for understanding collective actors in the epochal processes of social conflict and social change.[15]

The first of these can be termed the "conditions of existence" argument, the second, the "historical materialism" argument. Let us briefly examine each in turn.

The first thesis states that if it should happen through some historical process that a noncorrespondence should occur between the relations of domination and appropriation within the social relations of production, the situation would be highly unstable and tend towards a restoration of correspondence. Imagine, for example, that as the result of a series of labor reforms, workers organized in militant trade unions won the capacity to collectively organize the process of work, including the ability to allocate labor and means of production to different purposes, but that the rights to the products produced with these means of production, and thus the appropriation of the surplus product, remained in private hands. Capitalists could not tell workers what to do or fire them, but because they owned the means of production and appropriated the surplus product they could effectively veto any investment decision made by workers (i.e., they could decide to consume their surplus rather than let it be used productively). This would be a situation in which appropriation brought with it no immediate power of domination, and domination was unaccompanied by appropriation. In such a situation it seems likely that <u>either</u> workers would attempt to extend their powers to include actual appropriation <u>or</u> that the capacity to block investments would become an effective new means of domination by the appropriators, thus undermining or limiting the apparent domination of production by workers.

In these outcomes it is predicted that a radical noncorrespondence between appropriation and domination within the relations of production cannot endure for long periods of time. There are two basic reasons for

this. First, the appropriation of surplus products requires power. Direct producers typically do not like to toil for the benefit of exploiting classes, and unless there are coercive mechanisms at the disposal of the exploiting class to force them to do so, the level of exploitation is likely to decline. Just as feudal lords needed coercive capacity to force peasant serfs to work the demesne lands, so capitalist owners need coercive capacity to force workers to perform labor within the labor process of the capitalist factory.

Second, unless relations of domination enable people in positions of domination to command resources, that domination quickly reaches severe limits. Domination without resources inevitably becomes more symbolic than real. In the end, the capacity to command the use of the social surplus provides the material basis for the exercise of effective domination within the relations of production.

A concept of class that unites the relations of domination and appropriation, therefore, is structured around the necessary conditions of existence of both domination and appropriation. But Marxist theory makes claims that go far beyond this kind of functional or reproductive argument. Historical materialism in its various incarnations is an attempt to understand the conditions and dynamics of epochal social change and social conflict, not simply the conditions for the reproduction of stable structures of social relations. The concept of class defined as the unity of domination and appropriation is meant also to provide a way of understanding these problems.

It is far beyond the possibilities of this paper to provide a defense of historical materialism (or more accurately, of a modified version of historical materialism), but I will offer a few comments on the suitability of the concept of class being discussed here for the theoretical ambitions of historical materialism.[16] Social change is, to a large extent, a process by which the basic patterns of the social use and allocation of time and resources change. Since the most important resources in most societies are produced rather than freely given by nature, and since the core organizing principle of the use of time in most societies (perhaps all) is structured by the use of laboring time, the heart of social change necessarily revolves around the transformations of the social use and allocation of productive time and resources. This has two important implications for the present discussion. First, since class struggles are struggles directly structured by the social relations within which laboring time and resources are allocated and used, such struggles are always implicated in epochal social change. This does not imply that such change is reducible to class struggles; other kinds of conflict involving other sorts of actors and determinations may be of great importance in specific historical circumstances. But class struggle alone, of all forms of conflict, is likely to play an important role in all process of epochal social change since class relations are so directly determined by the structural conditions for such change.

Second, any social movement, whatever its social base and logic of development, which pursues projects of fundamental social change ultimately

faces the problem of reorganizing the system by which time and resources are controlled. If the system of class relations is left intact, then there are clear limits to the range of possible social changes which can be pursued. If those limits are to be surpassed, then the social movement must become a movement for the transformation of class relations. Ethnic, religious, nationalist, and other nonclass movements are thus forced to engage in class-like struggles, struggles which produce systematic effects on the transformation of basic class relations.

To summarize: Non-Marxist accounts of class stress either distribution (appropriation) or domination, but not the relational unity of these two within a concept of class exploitation. The Marxist attempt to combine these two elements within a single concept produces a much more powerful theoretical tool, both in terms of the structural analysis of the conditions of existence of classes (the relational requirements of their reproduction) and in terms of the dynamic analysis of the conditions for epochal social transformation. For both of these purposes it is essential that classes be understood as having a political dimension even at the highest level of abstraction in the analysis of class structures.

3. Implications for the Concrete Investigation of Class Structures

Abstract concepts are to be evaluated not only in terms of their logical presuppositions and coherence, but in terms of their usefulness for more concrete investigations. One of the advantages of a concept of class that is defined explicitly in terms of the unity of exploitation

and domination relations is that it provides a systematic strategy for examining capitalist class relations at more concrete levels.

In particular, such a concept provides a way of understanding the class character of managerial positions within capitalist production. Managers can generally be understood as locations within the social relations of production which (a) dominate the working class, (b) are dominated by the bourgeoisie, and (c) are exploited by capital, but (d) to a lesser extent than are workers. Whereas the capitalist class and the working class are perfectly polarized on both the domination and exploitation dimensions, managers occupy what I have termed elsewhere a "contradictory location within class relations."[17] They are in a sense simultaneously in the capitalist class and the working class, occupying class locations which have some of the relational characteristics of each class. If capitalist class relations are defined exclusively in terms of exploitation relations, then in general most managers would fall firmly into the working class (except for those few top managers who are probably not at all exploited). The explicit specification of class in terms of both exploitation and domination thus provides a direct strategy for more concrete analyses of class.

4. The Analysis of Socialist Exploitation and Class

One of the most promising lines of investigation opened up in Roemer's work is the strategy for analyzing exploitation in socialist societies. Roemer suggests that socialist exploitation should be understood in terms of inequalities generated by the distribution of "inalienable assets,"

i.e., skills. The exploiters in socialism are those who possess skills; the exploited are the unskilled. In terms of Roemer's formal criteria for exploitation, this seems a reasonable way of characterizing the distributional outcomes of skill inequalities in socialist societies.

The question, however, is whether or not this kind of exploitation can be considered a class relationship. I would argue that if in addition to benefiting from an exploitive redistribution, the skilled also dominate the unskilled, then this relationship would constitute a class relation. But, unlike the case of owners of alienable assets, the sheer possession of skills does not logically entail a relation of domination of the skilled over the unskilled. It is entirely possible, for example, to imagine a situation in which production was controlled by democratic bodies of all workers which decide on production priorities and procedures and which give orders to both skilled and unskilled workers, and yet the skilled still received an exploitive redistribution of income. This would be the case, for example, if the only way of inducing people to acquire skills is through heavy incentives which effectively redistribute income from the unskilled to the skilled. But this would not imply that within the actual organization of ongoing production it was skilled workers who dominate unskilled workers. In such a situation, the skilled could reasonably be regarded as a privileged stratum of workers, but not as a different class.

The two kinds of "socialist" societies we have described are likely to have very different forms of social conflict, even though they may

share a similar pattern of distribution. In the society in which the skilled actually dominate the unskilled as well as exploit them, it would be expected that social conflicts would be likely to crystallize around the unskilled-skilled cleavage. In a society in which, on the other hand, the skilled do not dominate the unskilled, even though they receive exploitive redistributive benefits, then conflicts would be less likely to take on a class-like character. Conflicts might center on cultural transformations aimed at changing the motivational underpinnings of the incentive structures, but there would be no necessary tendency for cleavages to correspond to the skilled-unskilled lines of demarcation. If we fail to distinguish these two societies by failing to incorporate the notion of domination into the specification of class relations, however, then in both cases skilled and unskilled would have to be regarded as antagonistic classes.[18]

5. Modes of Production

I argued earlier that including the political in the structural definition of class facilitated a class analysis of social conflicts implicated in epochal social change. In this final section I will examine the implications of this definition of classes for the theoretical specification of the "epochs" themselves, that is, of "modes of production."

In distinguishing capitalism and feudalism as modes of production, Marxists have usually stressed that in feudalism exploitation required "extra-economic" coercion whereas in capitalism exploitation was purely

"economic." This formulation was typically accompanied by the claim that in feudalism politics and economics (or the state and production) were institutionally fused in the social organization of the feudal manor, whereas in capitalism the political and the economic are institutionally separated.

The argument of this paper challenges this traditional view of modes of production. Classes in both capitalism and feudalism imply domination, and not simply system-preserving coercion, but domination directly within the social organization of production itself. The issue is where the coercion is located, how it is organized, and how it is articulated to other aspects of the system of production (technical, ideological, etc.). Instead of seeing the contrast between capitalism and feudalism as economic exploitation vs. extra-economic coercion, the contrast should be formulated as follows: class exploitation based on noncoercion outside the labor process + coercion inside the labor process vs. coercion outside the labor process + self-determination inside. That is, the issue is precisely how the political dimension of the production relations is linked to the economic dimension of those same relations.[19]

This way of understanding production suggests the following simple typology of modes of production:[20]

Mode of Production	Political Dimension Outside of the Labor Process	Political Dimension Inside of the Labor Process
Slavery	Domination	Domination
Feudalism	Domination	Self-determination
Capitalism	Self-determination	Domination
Communism	Self-determination	Self-determination

This way of conceptualizing modes of production has important implications for class analysis. I will briefly discuss three: the problem of class formation, the analysis of politics in general, and the transition between modes of production, particularly from capitalism to socialism/communism.

First, class formation. Traditionally, Marxists have understood the process of class formation as a transition from a "class-in-itself," understood as an economic category, to a "class-for-itself," understood as a political category. The analysis presented here suggests that classes can never be seen as purely economic categories, even in their most disorganized and atomized states. They are always intrinsically political. This suggests that instead of seeing class formation as a one-dimensional process of political formation, what is needed is a typology of class formations. Classes can be formed around the political dimensions of production relations, around the political dimensions of the state, or around both. Without attempting to defend the argument, this could suggest the following simple typology of formations of the working class:

Political Formation of Working Class	Formation Centered on Production Politics	Formation Centered on State Politics
Syndicalist	Yes	No
Reformist social democratic	No	Yes
Revolutionary	Yes	No

Second, politics. Politics cannot be analyzed simply as state-centered political processes and practices, as politics oriented towards and structured by the state apparatuses. Instead, a central object of political analysis must be the specific articulation of what Michael

Burawoy has called "Global Politics" and "Production Politics," politics organized around the state and politics organized within the process of production.[21] For example, Burawoy analyzes the relationship between these two sites of politics in the transition from the colonial to the independent state in Zambia, paying particular attention to the politics of production in the mining sector.[22] The mode of production in mining, Burawoy argues, can best be characterized as a specific "colonial mode of production," a variant of capitalism which depended upon particularly coercive forms of labor control and certain specific forms of extra-economic coercion outside of the labor process. The whole social organization of the mines was built around this particular form of production during the colonial period. Burawoy then observes what happens when there is a drastic change in the form of the state, and an accompanying change in the character of global politics, while the structure of the production system in the mines remains relatively unchanged. From a situation of a correspondence between global politics and production politics, Zambia entered a situation in which these two forms of politics contradicted each other.

Finally, transitions between modes of production. The classic Leninist position on the transition between capitalism and socialism was that the proletariat had to smash the capitalist state apparatus and construct a new kind of state--a distinctively proletarian form of the state--which would enable the working class to be stabilized as a ruling class. The expropriation of the means of production from the capitalist class plus the restructuring of the state were sufficient to ensure the

consolidation of socialism and accordingly the transition to communism. As became clear in Lenin's praise of Taylorism (scientific management), one-man-management, and so on, no fundamental restructuring of production politics was deemed necessary.

The argument of this paper suggests that the transition from capitalism to socialism requires a change in the politics of production as well as in global politics. If workers are dominated within production relations, it is hard to see how they could become a dominant class in any meaningful sense of the word, even if private ownership of the means of production is abolished. Under such conditions it would be expected that a new class system would emerge in which public appropriation of the surplus product was combined with new forms of domination of direct producers. It is only when the political dimension of production relations and thus of class relations is recognized that such a new class system can be adequately theorized. If forms of appropriation of surplus labor are the only criterion for class, and if modes of production are understood in purely economic terms, then the public appropriation of the surplus product becomes ipso facto socialist production.

CONCLUSION

John Roemer's work is one of the few genuinely novel contributions to the Marxist theory of exploitation and class to be produced in recent years. It opens up possibilities not only for deepening our understanding of the logic of exploitation within a Marxist perspective, but of facilitating critical theoretical and empirical assessments of competing substantive

claims about exploitation within different theoretical traditions. What is less satisfactory in his analysis is the extension of his reconceptualization or exploitation to the problem of class. The uniqueness of the Marxian concept of class lies in the specific way in which it links together economic and political relations within a single category. Classes cannot be viewed as determined solely either by relations of exploitation or relations of domination, but by the intersection of the two. If the domination dimension is ignored or marginalized, as it is in some of Roemer's analysis, the concept of class loses much of its power as an explanatory concept of social conflict and historical transformation.

NOTES

[1]For an overview of alternative perspectives on class within current Marxist debates, see Erik Olin Wright, "Varieties of Marxist Conceptions of Class Structure," Politics & Society, 9:3, 1981.

[2]This paper will not address Roemer's innovative strategy for defining exploitation using game-theoretic models, nor his development and defense of the Class Exploitation Correspondence Principle. I consider both of these to be extremely important contributions to the Marxist theory of exploitation and class. My critique is limited to the way Roemer deals with politics in his analysis. His claims about domination could be modified without any fundamental change in his general argument.

[3]This is, of course, a radically incomplete picture. The state, ideology, nonclass relations and interests, and many other factors have been left out. It is not meant to be a model of the complete determination of aspects of class, but simply an explication of the interrelationships among the constituent elements in the concept of class. For a discussion of the precise meaning of the terms "limits," "selection," and "transformation" in this diagram and for further elaboration on the constitutent elements in the concept of class, see Erik Olin Wright, Class, Crisis and the State (London: New Left Books, 1978).

[4]See Louis Althusser, "On the Materialist Dialectic," in Althusser, For Marx (New York: Vintage, 1970), pp. 166ff.

[5]It would be incorrect, however, to say that such labels exhaust the character of any of these concrete aspects of the social relations within the factory. The technical division of labor also influences capacities to transform social relations; authority relations also shape subjectivity, and so on.

[6]Pp. 21-22 of manuscript of the Politics & Society article.

[7]P. 55 of manuscript.

[8]I would want to add a fourth criterion to Roemer's three: it is not just that the two groups exist in relations of domination/subordination, but that this relationship must in some sense causally explain the inequalities between the two groups. Prison guards, for example, dominate prisoners, and the prisoners would be better off materially (and in other respects) if they withdrew from the prison with their per capita share of the combined assets of guards and prisoners (or indeed with just their personal assets), but they are not necessarily exploited by the guards, since the income of the guards is not gained by virtue of their domination of prisoners (i.e., they do not appropriate any surplus labor from prisoners). Roemer's second criterion--that S' be worse off--touches on this issue, but it is possible to be worse off in a withdrawal rule which has redistributive consequences even if one's position in the initial game does not explain the initial inequalities. (The situation in the prison example would be quite different, of course, if the guards obtained services from prisoners. Then part of the inequality between guards and prisoners would be causally explained by the appropriative relationship between the two.)

[9]G.A. Cohen makes a similar point in his discussion of classes and subordination. He argues that distributions of ownership rights specify class relations only when combined with relations of subordination/domination. See G.A. Cohen, Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defense (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 69-70.

[10]But note: where fathers both exploit and dominate their children, as is true in some societies, then the father-child relation could be considered a form of class relation.

[11]In an earlier version of this paper I attempted to justify the concern with domination on the grounds that workers, being labor-time minimizers (one of the assumptions in Roemer's models), would try to work as little as possible once employed by owners. Domination was thus needed to get them actually to perform labor, or in traditional Marxist terms, to transform labor power into labor. Roemer and others pointed out in discussions of that initial analysis that this was quite parallel to the problem of capitalists' "cheating" each other in their exchanges, i.e., violating the terms of the exchange contract. The problem of cheating, resistance, etc. can thus be considered a problem at a "lower level of abstraction" than the specification of the formal exchange relation itself. And thus, just as Marx ignored the problem of cheating among capitalists and the need for institutional safeguards against such cheating (although much contract law is concerned with this) in his abstract analysis of the capitalist mode of production, so, it was argued, we can ignore the problem of cheating by workers (i.e., failing to perform the amount of labor

specified in the contract). The problem of domination, however, is not simply one of responding to resistance on the part of workers; it is also a question of exercising effective powers over workers' activities in order to get them to do what the capitalist wants them to do. While this is directly entailed by capitalist property rights, it is a mistake to talk as if it is the property rights as such and not the domination relations implied by them which are constitutive of class relations. Property rights which do not entail relations of domination do not define class relations. This is precisely the case in the simple commodity-producing economy.

[12]P. 33 of manuscript.

[13]Labor time is, of course, only a measure of the quantitative dimension of domination relations, not of its qualitative characteristics. The argument here is not that labor time by itself provides an adequate way of analyzing domination, but rather that it is the one metric of value which expresses both the magnitude of the product and the magnitude of domination. Any basic good can accomplish the first of these objectives, but only labor time can accomplish both.

[14]The contention here is not that there need be a perfect coincidence in every social position between these two aspects of production relations, but simply that a complete noncorrespondence could not be stable. It is entirely possible in capitalist production for certain positions--middle and lower management for example--to be in a domination relation to workers without being in an appropriation relation. This kind of noncoincidence is the heart of the concept of "contradictory locations within class

relations," a concept developed to decode the class logic of "middle strata." (See Wright, Class, Crisis and the State, Chap. 2). What I am excluding as a possible structure of production relations is one in which power is completely divorced from appropriation.

[15]"Epochal social change" refers to fundamental, qualitative transformations of a society's social structure. In the Marxist tradition this revolves around the transformation from one mode of production to another.

[16]For my views on classical historical materialism and its weaknesses, see Andrew Levine and Erik Olin Wright, "Rationality and Class Struggle," New Left Review, no. 123, 1980.

[17]See Wright, Class, Crisis and the State, Chap. 2.

[18]The question of the conditions under which socialist "exploitation" becomes crystallized as a new form of class structure bears directly on what Roemer terms "status exploitation." Although not analyzed extensively in the paper under discussion here, Roemer's status exploitation refers to situations in which a person receives exploitive net redistributions not by virtue of ownership of private property or skills, but by virtue of incumbency in some office, typically of a bureaucratic character. Now, I would argue that when it happens that socialist exploitation as defined by Roemer in fact becomes a form of class relations--that is, when it coincides with relations of domination--it will also tend to generate what Roemer calls status exploitation. After all, if people with skills also control bureaucratic centers of domination (so that they dominate

unskilled workers as well as receive exploitative transfers from them), why should they stop at the skill-based form of exploitation rather than use their bureaucratic positions to extract additional surplus? What this may imply is that "socialist exploitation" in and of itself is not likely to become the central principle of exploitation in any form of class structure. Status exploitation--or perhaps more appropriately in this context, "bureaucratic exploitation"--on the other hand is intrinsically linked to a relation of domination and thus can be considered a basic principle of class relations. These intuitions correspond to the traditional Marxist notion that socialism is not a new mode of production but rather a transition from one form of class society (capitalism) to a classless one (Communism). The concept of bureaucratic or status exploitation, on the other hand, suggests the existence of a form of post-capitalist class relations, a new mode of production altogether. For a further elaboration of these issues, see Erik Olin Wright, "Capitalism's futures: A preliminary reconceptualization of post-capitalist modes of production," Institute for Research on Poverty Discussion Paper, forthcoming 1981.

[19]Ellen Meiksins Wood, in an important recent article, "The Separation of the Economic and Political in Capitalism" (New Left Review, no. 127, May-June 1981, pp. 66-95), makes a similar argument. She characterizes capitalism as a social system in which politics are privatized (i.e., removed from the "public sphere") through the organization of the "politics of production" within the private factory. In feudalism there was a coincidence of the political dimension of production and the political

dimension of the state--both were united in the feudal lord, and thus the politics of production had a "public" character. In capitalism it is not that the political and the economic are institutionally separated, but rather that the political dimension of production is institutionally separated from the public sphere. For related arguments on the concept of politics of production, see Michael Burawoy, "The Politics of Production and the Production of Politics," Political Power and Social Theory, Vol. I, edited by Maurice Zeitlin (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1979).

[20]This typology is obviously only a first approximation. To be able effectively to deal with such modes of production as the "Asiatic Mode of Production" or (if it is a legitimate concept) "State Bureaucratic Mode of Production," various kinds of distinctions within the category "coercion outside of the labor process" would have to be made. I will not explore these issues here.

[21]See especially, Michael Burawoy, "Terrains of Contest," Socialist Review, no. 58, 1981.

[22]See Michael Burawoy, "The Hidden Abode of Underdevelopment," Politics & Society, 11:1, 1981.