

# NOTES AND COMMENTARY: SYMPOSIUM ON CLASS

by Stanley Aronowitz, Russell Jacoby,  
Paul Piccone and Trent Schroyer

*During the weekend of November 7-9, 1975, the undergraduate student body of Brown University sponsored a conference of the Caucus for a New Political Science on the topic "Socialist Perspectives on Social Change in the United States." This conference was conceived as an effort to renew the organizational life and critical spirit of the Caucus for a New Political Science by reintroducing a theoretical orientation which had been lost sight of in recent years. The success of the conference will be fully appreciated by the impact that its theoretical accomplishments, however modest, will have on future Caucus objectives and the socio-political tendencies it represents. Although the title of the conference may appear very specific, the participants and panel members represented widely ranging political perspectives. As anticipated, those who hold similar political views most frequently disagree on substantive and methodological matters. Yet, the result was a forum where division was ultimately subordinated to common purposes and where, at the very least, new and important perspectives were developed, even if they were not uniformly traditional socialist perspectives.*

*A complete listing of all panels and symposium members may be found in the Fall 1975 issue of Political Science, the official bulletin of the American Political Science Association. Publication of additional proceedings from the conference is scheduled for the near future.*

*The panel on "Socialist Perspectives on the American Working Class and on the Concept of Class in Marxist Theory," whose full transcript follows, provoked considerable controversy among conference members and others. Panelists included Stanley Aronowitz, Paul Piccone, Trent Schroyer, Russell Jacoby, and Marvin Surkin (moderator).*

*Morton Schoolman*

SURKIN: The title of this panel is "The Concept of Class in Marxist Theory." The first part will deal with the concept of class in Marxist theory in light of critical theory, and the second part will be open to questions and general discussion. Our first speaker will be Paul Piccone, who will talk on "The Status of 'Class' in Marxist Theory."

PICCONE: Since most of the members of this panel agree on the general problem of class in Marxist theory, I will merely outline a concise set of nine theses:

1) In uncritically presupposing a necessary connection between social being and social consciousness, the traditional Marxist notion of class can be historically located as part of the social reality that was qualitatively altered with the displacement of entrepreneurial by monopoly capitalism. The relationship to the means of production as the determining aspect of social being automatically translating itself into social consciousness is theoretically viable *only* up to the age of Fascism, Stalinism, and the New Deal.

2) In the administered society resulting from these developments, the politicization of the division of labor to prevent the translation of social being into social

consciousness produces (a) the systematic dequalification of the work force and a fragmentation of productive functions; (b) the integration of earlier forms of internal opposition as regulatory mechanisms to displace rapidly disappearing market competition; and (c) the colonialization of consciousness through massive State intervention in everyday life and the explosion of the culture industry.

3) When social consciousness fades as a dependent variable, social being itself can no longer be grounded in its alleged *economic* essence. Thus, culture and politics become two dimensions where social contradictions are managed, generating new political, ideological and economic crises.

4) The obsolescence of the traditional Marxist concept of class does not mean the *elimination* of contradictions—only their relocation. Formally integrated within the system, opposition takes on a character dictated by capitalist cultural hegemony, thus ceasing to express negativity which, socially checkmated, resurfaces within the psychological sphere as neurosis kept in a state of perpetual convalescence by that consumerism on which the system thrives.

5) When social existence is structured by a well-managed consumerism, the tendency is toward universalized *passivity*, i.e., the elimination of even that modicum of subjectivity needed by the system to produce and reproduce itself.

6) Thus, unlike earlier phases of entrepreneurial capitalism when the logic of the system necessitated the obliteration of *all otherness* and *particularity*, with monopoly capitalism the survival of the system hinges precisely on the retention of a minimum of otherness and particularity to provide the system with that negativity without which it cannot regulate itself and further develop.

7) This implies the extension of the historical obsolescence of traditional Marxism to critical theory's own account of the objectification of identity theory. If domination does not necessarily disappear with a mere altering of property relations or with the formal elimination of economic exploitation, any theory of emancipation that remains based on the logic of property relations is also tendentially irrelevant. Thus, Adorno's critique of identity theory no longer adequately captures contemporary social reality.

8) Furthermore, in the stage of monopoly capitalism, the uncritical transposition of the need to salvage otherness during the last phase of entrepreneurial capitalism when it was being systematically annihilated, precipitates orthodox critical theory from the status of a challenge to that of an unwitting support of the system. Thus, whereas orthodox Marxism can be seen as the consciousness of entrepreneurial capitalism, orthodox critical theory turns out to be the consciousness of the *transition* period to monopoly capitalism. Both reverse their role with the passing of their historical moment from one of *opposition* to one of covert *support*.

9) In this context, any traditional account of class can only provide abstract and politically useless classification. The task of radical theory today is to thematize the link between a managed social being and a consequently manipulated social consciousness in order to re-think the mediations necessary for the millenarian shift from social *unconsciousness* to self-consciousness. In conclusion, not only is orthodox Marxism bankrupt but so is orthodox critical theory. It is time for radical theory to go beyond traditional critical theory.

SURKIN: Thank you, Paul. Our next speaker is Russell Jacoby, who will talk on "History and Class *Unconsciousness*."

JACOBY: Those of you who know Lukács' book *History and Class Consciousness* will

note that the title of my remarks is "History and Class *Unconsciousness*"—an obvious play on the original. The basic thrust of Lukács' book is to show how the bourgeoisie is incapable of class consciousness, and how only the proletariat can gain it. This shows up in a number of questions, such as that of surplus value, crises and the general situation of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in the commodity structure, which dictate that only the proletariat can pierce the mystifications within which the bourgeois class is imprisoned. Now, over fifty years after Lukács, I think we have to reverse directions and reverse the concepts. Which is to say, the question is not the class consciousness of the proletariat, but its class *unconsciousness*. I'll preface that with two observations. One is that if there has been any class consciousness (and I am speaking of the West and the industrialized countries), it has been more proper to the ruling classes than to the proletariat. And the second one, which I will only mention, is that there has been, in fact, little class consciousness in the working class or the proletariat. This means that Lukács' formulations have to be both in emphasis and in concepts reoriented toward the reverse question.

To say that there has been little class consciousness in the industrialized countries in the proletariat does not in any way denigrate the struggles throughout the history of labor. The question is an emphatic notion of class consciousness; i.e., the concept which Lukács developed comprehending the totality of society. In this sense, I think it is fair to say that there is little emphatic class consciousness, but there have been a lot of partial struggles. If anything, American labor history has probably been the bloodiest of any industrialized country. And yet, the end result has not been a socialist presence or a proletarian class consciousness. There has been a lot of liberal and bourgeois social theory dealing with class and class consciousness which would show this; that in fact, even if the workers are willing to be radical within the factory, this doesn't carry over into daily life where they turn out to be good democrats or good laborites or whatever. And in that sense there is no relationship. If I may refer to the book by the moderator, which deals with Detroit and the workers, we get a picture of an industrial proletariat as a shrinking part of the working masses and probably not representative of the entire working class.

The problem, then, is one which Sombart broached in 1906 in a small book entitled *Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?* Sombart divides the factors into economic and political. Politically, he looked at various things—the city machine, two-party politics, a certain kind of love for the Constitution and American government, the frontier, the possibility of social mobility, and so on. Then he looked at the economic questions and showed that the American working class was better paid than its European counterpart. Thus, he concluded that there was no socialism in the United States even though America was the classic capitalist country, even though, unlike many other European countries, it had no feudal remnants, no pre-capitalist class and so on, and in that sense should show the most socialist consciousness. The conclusion, therefore, that the United States would develop a socialist class conscious proletariat is, in fact, provisional. Look at least at some of the writings of Marx on the question of class and class consciousness. Obviously, I can't do that here, but I just want to mention one or two things. I think there is no Althusserian break in Marx's writings. However, one can see that after 1850 there is a shift in his writings from the concern with consciousness and subjectivity to a concern with political economy. Korsch called the first phase Marx's subjective and the second one the objective phase. The question here is not a conceptual reorientation but a shift in emphasis. Why is there this shift? Because, in fact, the proletariat did fail in 1848 and it did look like a new proletariat

upsurge was premised on a new crisis in the economy. Hence, the last issue of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* stated: "In view of the general prosperity which now prevails there can be no question of any real revolution, but new revolution will be made possible only as a result of a new crisis. That is just as certain as the coming crisis itself." Marx's subsequent writings are premised on the notion of an imminent economic crisis and therefore on a class conscious proletariat. This is tacit in Marx. And after a hundred years the question is why does this class consciousness fail to emerge. The question for critical theorists is whether this tacit premise that class consciousness will surface if there is a crisis is satisfactory.

Now there is a simple solution which has begun to emerge with Marxist working class elements, which is that Marx neglected the subjective factor. In that sense it was necessary to look at subjectivity, consciousness, and so on, to supplement Marx's system. There is one problem with this. If one tries to explain the absence of class consciousness by the absence of an active proletariat over a long period of time, it becomes a circular argument. One is looking for materialist reasons for the failure of class consciousness. Which is simply to say that there is an absence of class consciousness because it hasn't been attended to by Marxists, or in fact it has been neglected by social democrats. This is inadequate for a materialist analysis. As a growing phenomenon, the absence as well as the presence of class consciousness has to be explained relatively with some sort of materialist factors. In this sense what is necessary is a theory of unconsciousness and an objective theory of class unconsciousness. It is a theory which attempts to look at the social economic situation of the proletariat and determines what, in fact, in terms of classic Marxist theory, went wrong. Now I would be kidding you if I said that this is an entirely novel approach. In different terms, it became very popular at the turn of the century, when it became necessary for Marxists to analyze the problem of reformism and revisionism within the social democratic movement. That is, as an objective phenomenon, why did the proletariat by the turn of the century fail and become at least to a large degree an aspect of the establishment? There are various theories which attempt to explain this: some with which we are very familiar—the theory of the labor aristocracy. There is the theory that the proletariat was betrayed by the leadership (this becomes the Luxemburg theory). There is the theory associated with Michels which deals with how the party or working class organizations are necessarily conservative and, in this sense, they deflect the revolutionary impulse of the proletariat. And finally, there is the so-called orthodox and left-communist position, which is that reformers within the proletariat were the result of temporary prosperity and until this temporary prosperity ended there was nothing for anyone to do.

Now, all these theories of reformism were in fact attempts to understand class unconsciousness—that is, how did class unconsciousness surface in the proletariat as an enduring and real phenomenon. And when we look at these sorts of questions—leadership, organization, or the economy—all of them were in some sense decisively flawed, because they remain locked within a political economy parameter; they forgot to look at decisive mediation elements which were neither completely subjective nor objective. Just to mention some of these things—questions of culture industry, work organization, character structure—all the things which stand between economics and political economy and which become decisive mediating elements. For example, Harry Braverman's book deals with work organization and how capitalist ideology is in fact concretized in work place activities. Here, he begins to look for reasons for a failure in class unconsciousness not simply in the workers' aristocracy, not

simply in terms of the failure of Marxists to attend to subjectivity in class consciousness but in terms of objective mediating elements. Character structure, work organization or culture provide at least a promising beginning for an understanding of class unconsciousness and not of class consciousness. I will leave that as a list, all of which can be developed in discussion.

SURKIN: Thank you, Russell. Next Stanley Aronowitz will speak.

ARONOWITZ: In the spirit of Paul's and Russell's remarks, I'm going to try and make mine as brief. I think that both of them have set a very provocative framework for the discussion. I want to first indicate some other problems and then try in some way to comment on the problems that they raised. It is a truism of Marxian theory, as Russell's article in *Telos* 23 shows, that without a crisis theory Marxism does not have a revolutionary trajectory. It becomes an ethical ideal; it becomes a way of looking at the world which is not rooted in the foundations of capitalist development—in the accumulation process, to be more specific. I would offer the analogy that without a theory of class the problem of history becomes extraordinarily difficult to resolve. Even though every point that is made about the obsolescence of traditional Marxism and perhaps even the obsolescence of the critical theory variant is true, or at least can be defended, we are still left with the problem of what is an adequate alternative and how do we conceive of history and social change—indeed the category of social time itself—without a class analysis, without a theory of class and without class as the substance of the otherness of which Piccone speaks. The difficulty in conceiving of a society without classes is that ultimately it leads to a rather common sociological position that was widespread in the 1940s and 1950s in the aftermath of World War II and the apparent unconsciousness of the American working class. That theory is fundamentally conservative: it was imported from Europe, where it was developed after the rise of Fascism and the theory of mass society. Without trying to be too provocative in reverse, it really sounds as though Piccone is reviving the theory of mass society, in which what we have is the atomization and fragmentation of the underclasses of society. The organizing principle becomes the class actions of the monopoly capitalists. Now, that may indeed be empirically certain, or it may correspond to certain historical developments, but, on the other hand, where does it leave us? And one can talk about a shift of the location of the crisis from, say, the economic crisis, the breakdown theory, to, say, the ecological crisis or to the cultural contradictions and the contradictions in politics, and I don't necessarily disagree with that. But the question of the motive force has to at least be addressed in a much more sophisticated way than is indicated by the Piccone theses. The motive force cannot be the whole people because what that literally does is eliminate the possibility of organized action. The problem with class, then, I would argue along with Lukács, is a problem that precedes any empirical description. And if the charge be made that it becomes a logical principle, then I would plead guilty. It is the logical principle from the perspective of revolutionary socialism. Certainly not from the perspective of the description of the history of the last hundred years—that is indisputable. But unless one can define the objective possibilities for the revival of class consciousness, then I think we must begin to revise or jettison the notion of revolutionary socialism. Now, I personally am not willing to do that. Therefore, seeking a theory of class continues to be a project which cannot be easily overcome.

Let me make a couple of comments, then, on what some of the problems are. It

seems to me that one of the most revealing comments that Marx himself made about the problem of class is not contained in any of his theoretical writings but is contained in his historical writings, particularly *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, written in 1852. There Marx says that the existence of social classes presupposes culture, community, and communication—in other words, a commonality is required for a class. (He was talking specifically about the impossibility for peasants to constitute a class which could make history, and one of the things he argues is not the dialectic of labor, but the dialectic of culture—the cultural separation of that class from all others.) The difficulty in positing the existence of the American working class is, in part, as Russell has pointed out, not so much the product of the culture industry, but the problem of the formation of the class itself in the industrialization period. That is the period prior to the formation of monopoly capital, or at least concurrent with it. And it would appear that the American working class never had an autonomous culture because it never had a common cultural tradition—a cultural tradition rooted not just in the experience of industrialization (because in my opinion the experience of industrialization does not create culture, it breaks it up), but the pre-industrial experience. The pre-industrial experience would be the experience of the peasant societies from which most of the American working class came. They were not only separated by language and by country, but in each of those peasant experiences there was a profoundly different kind of feudal economy and a profoundly different kind of feudal society. The moment when the American working class is formed is at the same time that we get the development of monopoly capitalism.

So far as the American working class is concerned, then, what Piccone says is probably historically the case, which is that it never even had the entrepreneurial period of gestation in a common culture. And that may account for the peculiarity, the particularity of our own experience—or at least a part of it, because we do share with Europe and all other industrializing countries, the kind of fragmentation and disruption of skills described by Braverman, Margolin, Kathy Stow, and many others. But that is not what is unique to the American experience. It could even be the case that the formation of character structure in the development of American workers is concomitant with certain features of its social existence and its cultural heterogeneity. Which is to say that there aren't even in this country experiences where, within the socialization of the production process, immense numbers of people are brought into the cities and into large industrial units,—even here there aren't conditions for the self-reflection upon the cooperative work process because of the minute cutting of ethnicity and race. Now, one of the interesting things about the development of ethnicity and race is that, in terms of the development of the American working class as cultural phenomena, ethnicity and race are even more important than work organization. They produce heterogeneous cultural developments yielding a split which is never healed, because by the time capitalism has, to a certain extent, an integrated character where it is able to mobilize these differences within the working class, the split has grown too large.

There is one thing of which I would be very critical in Jacoby's analysis which seems to me to be throwing one point out much too quickly. What Marxism lacks and what makes it really obsolete, it seems to me, in the twentieth century, is a theory of bureaucracy. Now there are attempts in Europe to do that but we have very few people in the United States who are really working on a theory of bureaucracy. It is undoubtedly the case, at least in the history of the American working class movement, in the organization of American workers into unions, and even their socialist organizations, that the development of bureaucracy corresponds in a sense to the

development of the authoritarian family. There is no doubt that the structure of that bureaucracy has a certain important parallel to patriarchal relations that exist in the authoritarian family. It is a direct carryover. And the throwing up of leadership, as Freud analyzed in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, that is successfully able to oppress a working class, is to a certain extent connected in the American labor movement with that family development. It is, therefore, of supreme importance that we not only ask the question how is it possible that the American working class hasn't developed socialist consciousness, but that we begin to identify those kinds of cultural contradictions of which Piccone would like to talk, which, in fact, are the specificity of development of the working class.

And now I return to my first comment. I believe two things will emerge in the coming period. The first one is that we are in for a fairly substantial crisis in the material foundations, the economic foundations, of society. It is not a classic crisis of overproduction; that is *not* the kind of crisis I'm talking about. I would suggest that the crisis is one in which the necessity for the reaccumulation of capital in the most productive sectors of society, from the viewpoint of the problem of the rate of profit, has also necessitated severe cutting of those industries, those forms of employment which have been responsible for the social legitimation system at least until 1933. We are witnessing not the disappearance but the disintegration of those fundamental structures of social integration, to be found, I believe, in the enlarged state sector, the arms industry, and certain other things. What is absolutely taking place is that capitalism is in the process of world reorganization. This does not suggest that there is any automatic relationship—and I agree here with Piccone—between social being and social consciousness. The mediations of which Jacoby speaks, that is, how the problem of the creation of a concrete universal out of the working class, the creation of a social force capable of totalizing its own experience and proposing to reorganize society—are not resolved by recounting the character of the economic crisis, a crisis which concerns the contradictions of disaccumulation and accumulation. But, on the other hand, I would reiterate that it is certain that this crisis, notwithstanding the efforts of the organized left, is bound to lead towards a more reactionary direction and postpone the possibility of working class consciousness under present circumstances, because there is no concerted, intellectual effort to comprehend the significance of the mediations. On the contrary, there is a deep anti-cultural, anti-psychological, old-time religion return among the Marxists, revealing that the problem of character structure has reared its ugly head in precisely that moment where the problem is in the sphere of culture and politics. People wish to make the jump toward that economic crisis which I believe only provides the objective possibilities, in the most abstract sense, for socialist revolution or socialist development. They wish to make the jump between that and automatism, that is, an automatic reaction under the leadership of a very well-informed, organizationally profound vanguard. Well that, of course, as everybody should know by now, is sheer and utter horseshit—

SURKIN: We will now hear from Trent Schroyer.

SCHROYER: This is a very strange panel. It is a group of people who certainly don't take the traditional perspective on the notion of class. Yet, in a way, I hear everyone trying to create a new theory that will do the job of the old theory. And what is the task of the old theory? Orthodox theory created an ethos in which there was a messianic hope whereby, somehow, salvation was going to be achieved. And the problem which I

think we should talk about, is where does this messianic sphere or dimension come into the Marxist tradition? What kind of theory would we need to get out of this kind of eschatology and into another relationship to the problems of class domination? That's what I understand we are talking about. This panel is really talking about the crisis of theory and critical theory as an attempt to restore some of the intentions of a different kind of scientific ideal which really never got a chance because it already, as bourgeois society was forming, suggested that what was necessary was to overcome this type of social form.

Now, as I listen to these people speak, I find that we really don't agree: we are all trying to reformulate what it would mean to create a theory that would do a different kind of thing than bourgeois theory, positivist theory. That is, it would put us in a different relation to our world. It would restore us all to a position of high culture in the sense that the world would be totally meaningful and our action in it would have some kind of relationship to our intentions and we would not be constrained by class contexts on all sides.

The problem now is how did we start with a Marxist theory that got us into this eschatology which we constantly have to fight? One of the ways we can think about this is that liberal capitalism was a very unique figuration in history. There emerged a self-regulating market system which justified itself in terms of the direct relationship between wage labor and capital. Ideologically, the laborers can get their just deserts in the marketplace. It is this unique configuration of components in society which led us to believe that critique really relates to some kind of action in a direct way; because what that really means is that the economy and culture really are understood in terms of the same principle: the principle of exchange. The state really understood its role as a night watchman on the marketplace, while justifying the cultural notion of possessive individualism. Orthodox Marxism upheld that a contradiction in the economy leads directly to a contradiction in the culture which would, in turn, lead directly into a revolutionary situation. That was a very fleeting moment in the development of capitalism. After it passed, the traditional form of the Marxist theory of crisis could really no longer be directly applied; that is, critique did not directly relate to action. As the state intervened in the accumulation process to make it possible for accumulation to continue—for example, the progressive era in the United States—there is a sense in which the economy is no longer totally constituted by exchange and the political ideology is no longer based upon the regulatory ideal of the exchange, but developed new kinds of managerial strategies. Insofar, then, as state intervention really changes the dynamic of capitalist development, this relationship between totalized critique and action was also altered. Nonetheless, organizations that were trying to transform the class experience in capitalist society continue to believe that it did. Thus, the messianic expectations that some kind of organization would be capable of breaking through the constraints.

Our problem today is that we live in a society in which there is very deep state penetration in both capital accumulation and in the social-cultural world. How can we form a theory that will have the same possibility of restoring to us a world that is meaningful and that suggests to us subjective possibilities for action? Is it going to come to us in a traditional theory of class? Obviously not. We've been listening to attempts to describe what kind of theory could possibly do that. In my opinion, the most ambitious attempt to restore a form of crisis theory has been Habermas'. He attempts to show that there is a new contradiction in late capitalism—i.e., the legitimation crisis—which is really sharpened by two dynamics. On the one hand, there is



the dynamic of capital accumulation which requires state intervention; and, on the other, the dynamic that is created by rationalizing institutions in which people no longer want to participate—that is, what Daniel Bell calls the disjunction of social structure and culture or what Habermas calls the motivation crisis. But these contradictions reflexively intensify the political incapacity to both stabilize the society and justify this control as “democratic.” So there is a new crisis in the making—a legitimation crisis.

Well, if that kind of theorizing will do it, fine. Whatever the form of crisis theory that we get, I doubt very much if it will be a material theory of class unconsciousness, because the whole problem is to understand how our subjectivity is *formed* in a material context but not *determined* by that context. There is a sense, then, in which the relationship of the theory to the context in which we’re theorizing has to discover the openings for action in a manageable way. So, I think what we’re trying to talk about is: can we again achieve a totalization that is capable of this kind of relationship to a context where there are so many constraints—class constraint being a major one—upon consciousness?

**QUESTION:** Can the working class in the West still be considered an agent of social change? Or, more precisely an agent of revolutionary social change?

**PICCONI:** Unlike Aronowitz and Schroyer, who think that there is something fundamentally wrong with Marx’s original categories, I take Marx’s account to be roughly adequate for the 19th century. Because of historical developments, however, those categories have since become obsolete—and one of them is “class.” The reason why I don’t talk about class is because the way it is articulated in the 19th century in Marx is in direct relation to the means of production. But after World War I, capitalism successfully meets the challenge of proletarian revolution by first of all smashing workers’ organizations, and secondly, by rearranging the production process such that consciousness is no longer objectively attainable at the workplace, and thirdly, by massively intervening in the economy and carrying out a cultural offensive through the new modes of communication. It is no longer possible for the working class to obtain revolutionary consciousness through the relationship to the means of production. Consequently, the notion of class which hinges on the possibility of the attainment of this objective consciousness, no longer makes any sense for radical theory precisely because the capitalist class was further able to integrate the opposition provided at the workplace, as a regulatory mechanism to substitute for the rapidly disappearing market which in liberal capitalism carried out that function. By the time we get to the New Deal, Fascism, and Stalinism, we find a situation in which *organized* labor is part of the system and its struggles to regulate prices and wages. Critical theory, in fact, came about then as an attempt to update the kind of critical analysis provided by Marxism. Thus, by the time we get to the 1970s, any discussion of class in traditional terms is pure idealism: that category is no longer theoretically relevant. Traditional Marxism or radical theory must stop attempting to come up with a class analysis that can identify the revolutionary agent. That is a kind of revolutionary nostalgia for the good old days of the picket lines of the 1930s, and I don’t think it’s theoretically very useful. We have to develop a theory which does not rely on a mythical working class, which, because of its direct contact with machinery and oppression, is better able to see the light. That simply is not the case. Today, we confront a situation of bourgeois hegemony in which our very ways of thinking are already instrumentalized to the logic

of capitalism. Earlier overt repressive mechanisms have been internalized in our very character structure such that the way we express ourselves, the way we relate, automatically reproduces these mechanisms. In the present context, there are two crucial things that need to be done: a) to investigate genuine emancipatory possibilities; and b) to figure out how to translate these possibilities into concrete political projects. Given the totalized nature of bourgeois hegemony, today no one group has privileged access to revolutionary theory and practice because of *objective social being*. What makes us revolutionary is not the fact that we may carry a pipe-wrench in our side, but the will to bring about a qualitatively better world without oppression and suffering.

QUESTION: What specifically in Marx's notion of class is being rejected, and why?

JACOBY: There is no theory of class consciousness in Marx. This leaves us two alternatives. One is that because there is no class consciousness, this says nothing about the existence of classes which could persist with or without class consciousness. But if there is no class consciousness for a long period of time, something *is* wrong with your concept of class. But this is an orthodox concept of class with various positions to it. One could say, for example, that everyone who receives wages at the end of the week is in the working class. Thus, we have the French Communist Party that says 99% of the country is working class. Insofar as that concept of class doesn't account for the problems of class consciousness, it is inadequate. To be sure, I don't have an adequate concept of class to offer in place of it, but I am just suggesting certain kinds of problems which indicate that the orthodox concept of class doesn't explain certain problems which have emerged over the last hundred years. In this sense, the concept has to be reformulated and the ways of saving it, by saying, well, everyone is in the working class except the ruling class, which is 1%, don't actually do the trick.

And in some ways, a concept of class which begins to incorporate the mediations, which begins to include the *objective* elements of how class unconsciousness and class consciousness are formed, is unnecessary. Without that, we couldn't say, "Well, look, this society is without class consciousness, but our theory says that here is the sector of society which, if it should become class conscious, can stop the entire society." Therefore, one discovers that the electrical workers in upstate New York can, in fact, if they become class conscious, bring the entire economy to a halt. This way of locating the revolutionary agent is a phony way of approaching the problem.

SCHROYER: I think that there is a real difference between what Paul is saying and what I'm trying to say. I don't think we can have critical theory or a Marxist crisis theory without the notion of class for a very simple reason: capital, the new social form that came into history when all factors of production were delivered by markets and were commodified. They come together and are mobilized by this new social form in which production is no longer organized for human use, but is constrained by this very capital form. The material production process is distorted into a stimulated exchange value production process. It is in the sense that capital still exists as a moving force in the international capitalist system that we still have the need for the category of class. On the other hand, there is a section in *Capital* I, called "The Fetishism of Commodities," which is an understanding of what happens to human sensibility and perception under the conditions of the lifeworld that is constituted by the capital form. That is, if you will, a class constraint on human sensibility and perception until the human reality cannot be really perceived by human sensibility, but must be perceived via this detour through the heaven of exchange value and its logics. In that

sense, class remains a notion that helps us understand the distortion of consciousness in a human totality.

Thus, although the historical configuration of constitutive forces creating social change has undergone fundamental changes, in ways that force us to make a broader totalization, nonetheless, we need to still look for the constraints upon those constitutive mechanisms in human society—namely, production, on the one hand and, on the other, the possibility of understanding the world in which subjects are formed. The analysis of this must use the notion of class, even though we may need a more totalizing theory to recognize the constraints that are now placed on these human potentials, so class is relevant.

I have a sense that what Paul is getting into—as he commented to me during the break—is that the real, valid element in the Marxist tradition is seen as its eschatological moment. And I think that this is our difference. I understand the notion of critique to be this documentation, the mapping of the constraints—basically, class constraints—on consciousness (although other types of constraints exist, such as hierarchy, and so forth). You cannot understand critique to be the development of a theory of the active agent in history: that is a kind of elitist Marxism which I think is exactly the element that Lenin developed and that is really more of a problem than a help. Ultimately, it is the *form* of theory that we are talking about. An eschatological Marxism has lost the intention of critique and simply selects the *telos* of revolution. The problem is, if we discipline ourselves to that kind of goal in history, we lost exactly the world in which we might find some other orientation. It is this kind of eschatology which is the deepest problem of Marxism.

JOEL WHITEBOOK (from the audience): Russell rightly pointed out that most of neo-Marxism has been trying to explain why class consciousness hasn't emerged. I'd like to ask: is it ever correct to believe that it would? And whether the search for the missing class consciousness hasn't been informed by a deeper assumption that the working class is the agent of social change? I would suggest that this is the question we should address. It is the political question which the New Left never came to grips with and, as a result, ended up on the rocks. Now, I'd like to make a few comments on that question before turning it over to the panel.

It's really in the first Hegel critique that Marx supposedly deduces the proletariat as the agent of social change. I think you can see the problem emerging here already. There are two criteria here which he says a radical class has to have: first, it has to be strategically located in society so that it can overthrow that society, so that it can effect a transformation in society. That's what I'll call the "strategical" criterion. Second, its particular position, its particular logic, must lead to what we have come to call class consciousness, and which I will call some sort of enlightened critical consciousness. And I think it's very important—I think Russell pointed this out when he was discussing Lukács in his article in *Telos* [10]—that we have an emphatic notion of class consciousness. It can't be conceived of in terms of narrow economic interests. We have to have a notion of class consciousness which is commensurable with full emancipation.

Now, I would argue that Marx, throughout his career—although he kept trying—was never able to show how it was possible for the proletariat to develop that emancipatory class consciousness in the emphatic sense. But the proletariat was *clung* to as the agent of social change—and it made a lot more sense in his effort to do that—because of its strategic importance. And in a way, most people still cling to it for this reason. Stanley's comment is a case in point: he says that he cannot conceive of any

other way for a socialist revolution to take place. So with that as a given, then you have to reason backward and find out how class consciousness can emerge. My point—and maybe I will disagree with Stanley here—is that the concept of socialist revolution needs to be rethought, so as not to be shackled with that notion of the working class as the agent of social change. I would contend that most—not most, *every*—argument I've seen which has tried to demonstrate that the proletariat will develop class consciousness in the emphatic sense is contrived and the motivations for this contrivance are this strategic importance.

ARONOWITZ: It is incorrect, obviously, to expect the working class to achieve class consciousness. But that's not the problem I was addressing. There are two ways of understanding the history of capitalism. One way is by ascribing to the banality of the working class leadership the failure of class consciousness. The other way, which is inescapable, is to take a careful look at the concrete history of the working class to discover what was at stake under capitalism. There is a possible argument implied in Volume I, the section on Machinery and Modern Industry, that the notion of class never corresponded to the empirical existence of the working class anyway, and that really the category of fragmentation and the category concomitant to that of hierarchy were far more significant in the actual existence of those who work for wages. Therefore, the first step might be to discover whether, in any sense of the word, the concept of class has ever been more than an *a priori* inference from the lordship-bondage section of Hegel's *Phenomenology*.

In my opinion, that's exactly the case. I think you will find that in the empirical existence of the working class, the structural forms of capitalism have always been more based on the category of fragmentation, secondary to the category of authority, hierarchy, than they have been on any category essentially of class which would allow the working class to develop an existence for itself. The second problem inherent in the first one is that Marxism does not just assume the existence of the working class, but also assumes the class *unconsciousness*—the point Russell was making—of the ruling class—which, as Lukács argued, could never achieve a sufficient amount of consciousness to be able to mobilize its resources to prevent the emergence of class consciousness even though that class consciousness is independent in Lukács of any empirical existence.

So here is the other problem. If it is true that hierarchy and domination—that is, authority—is central, and not the relationship to the mode of production, this would indicate, then, that various sectors of workers would have different fates, different life chances, different social trajectories. What follows from that, it seems to me, is that we have to begin to reappraise the way in which capitalism itself developed structure. I am not arguing for the working class, that's not the issue. I am arguing for a theory of class, because in the first place, I ask the question how is history possible without classes and in the second place, how is a revolution possible without a social agent. I agree with Russell that the 99% argument made by the French Communists is really nonsense. But I don't believe that even Gramsci or Korsch advanced the notion of "will" without simultaneously the notion of class and the *generic* notion of party—not party in a Leninist sense, but as political organization. You cannot abstract the notion of organic intellectuals because the organic intellectual in Gramsci depends on a relationship with *someone*. You cannot abstract the notion of historical specificity without a notion of how structure of space and time penetrate each other. Class is the spatial category from which time becomes possible. That's the difficulty. I admit my confusion—I understand that the empirical existence of the class has nothing to do

with its possibility for consciousness. But at the same time I don't know how one can construct either a model of a revolutionary future or a model of a political present without understanding or having some theory of class.

**QUESTION FROM AUDIENCE:** First of all, Marx—at least implicitly—and Lenin very explicitly, never expected class consciousness to arise right out of the working class or their struggles. Lenin makes it very clear that there is no automatic relation between crisis and revolution. It should be obvious to anyone familiar with what's going on outside these four walls that we are now in an economic crisis and the American working class has not been waiting for this crisis: in fact, the opposite is the case; workers are only afraid of losing their jobs, and so forth. An economic crisis, then, does not automatically bring about a rise in consciousness. So why do the workers not have class consciousness? Well, I don't think you have to look for some sort of fundamental change in capitalism to find the answer. The answer lies in several factors. One is the question of who leads the working class? Since the period of World War II, the working class in many places was smashed or disarmed (Stalin, Europe). The leadership of unions which then took over simply consolidated the bureaucratic aspects (the Meanys, Woodcocks, and so on) out of which there was the consistent elimination of radicals and a concern only for filling capitalism's needs. Therefore, the question of what class consciousness is: it isn't simply a tacit acknowledgement of the need for socialism, but is an active opposition to every manifestation of capitalism.

The task of a revolutionary party, then, is to go into the unions, takeover their leadership, and oppose the traditional American party system, oppose all racial and sexual discrimination, and be absolutely for the expropriation of private property. That's what we need! [Moaning and groaning from panel and audience.]

**PICCONI:** That's the question that we needed: there were getting to be too many differences among us, and we could use something to unify us again! [General laughter.]

**SURKIN:** Well, I'd like to ask something...

**UNDERGRADUATES IN AUDIENCE:** No, go back to the question. Why don't you answer him? Respond!

**PICCONI:** Response coming up! How can anybody in 1975 push the views of that incredible piece of shit, *What Is to Be Done?* [Applause from audience.] That in order to make a revolution people need some kind of Leninist saviour to tell them what the story is is one of the most outrageous insults that human beings can be subjected to. As early as 1905, Lenin himself realized this and eventually, in *State and Revolution*, went completely beyond what American Trotskyists and Leninists recycle in 1970. And not only Lenin, but most other mass movements on the left immediately after World War I rejected this as well. Only some kind of petty-bourgeois student picks it up, who wants to take the good class consciousness to the working class and say to them, "Look, you poor bastard, listen to me: I have the blueprint for revolution here and you're going to be saved." Not surprisingly, they don't listen...

**ARONOWITZ:** There's one thing that's really relevant here. The invocation of a 1902 document, *What Is to Be Done?* and the program of that document, and Lenin's position that the working class by its own efforts could only achieve trade-union

consciousness, that socialism comes to the working class, as it were, from the outside, is a testament to the difficulty that this panel has been trying to deal with. We, who really in some sense believe in socialism from below, and you, who believe in socialism from above, have a substantial difference. If the working class *by its own efforts* cannot achieve revolutionary consciousness, and is able not only to struggle against every manifestation of its exploitation and oppression, but also to be able to conceive of a qualitative alternative in which it manages its own society—not the society of a state, not the society of a party, but the society of the people who are actually producing and controlling their own institutions—then we don't want your socialism. [Applause.] Your socialism would exchange one set of masters for another, and that has been the experience. If you want to explain the history of the Soviet Union by the perfidy of a couple of party leaders, you must take a look at the history of the Trotskyists during the period from 1917 to 1925. *They were above all* the most ruthless suppressors of the working class movement. [Applause.] The question is serious, because the question implies that what we're trying to grapple with is power. But we're concerned with how to conceive of class consciousness, and whether the theory of class itself is viable, given its difficulty in light of the last 55 to 75 years of our own experience. That's the difficulty, and you did not address it.

MURRAY BOOKCHIN (from the audience): I feel very congenial to certain aspects of Paul's theory. There was a period when the working class seemed to all appearances, and quite legitimately, challenging. It was the one class that was above all denied any possible relief, so to speak, by the bourgeois institutions. The peasants got the land at the end of the French revolution, the proletariat got the factory and with that the 18-hour day, child labor, and everything like that. It was very important that there was this ethnic differentiation—which I'll enlarge, Stanley, to mean not only people of different foreign backgrounds and different colors and so on, but people of different classes, transitional classes, like peasants who came into the towns and played the most revolutionary role through the 19th century. I would add here for everybody's consideration that when you talk about great revolutions, you're talking in most cases of French Revolutions, be they '93 or '71 in Paris; and you're talking there of craftsmen which Marx described as the "old shit" in contrast to the heavy industrialized proletariat of Germany which practically goose-stepped into fascism—very tragically. Similarly Spain (Barcelona); similarly Russia, with a *peasant* working class, and even Trotsky complains about its backwardness. You have now reached a point of such generalization in capitalist crises—ecological crises, economic crises, urban crises, psychological crises, political crises, etc., which entrench delegitimation of virtually all institutions. Is it not conceivable that one can now finally raise "as the agent of social change" that so-called utopian agent that has existed for almost 200 years as a myth almost, but which seems to now have become a reality? And that is literally called *le peuple*, "the people." You have argued, Stanley, that there is no way of organizing this. It has been more organized in terms of rebellion than the working class is in terms of many an institution that it has created in the factory. So much of what you call social struggle today is taking place not only among peasants abroad, discontended middle classes everywhere, but also among workers who are functioning outside the factory. This does not deny the existence of classes: it insists upon their transcendence. That doesn't mean there isn't a ruling class. It means that there is a population already—the oppressed. This was the imagery of the great French Revolution which was, as we know, distorted. This was the imagery of the American Revolution, also distorted. This was also the imagery of the populist movement. Is it

conceivable now that you have the urban masses, the oppressed, who cut across class lines, who are trying to find their own social forms outside the traditional industrial proletariat—important as that struggle is? But now the workers are becoming part of the people instead of the people dissolving into the workers, which was the traditional Marxian conception and which the French Communist Party rationalizes as 99%. I pose this as an issue. In other words I'm suggesting that the transcendence of the claim that 'the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle.' Marx made an amazing statement—all of economic history can be summed up in the contradiction between town and country. What are you going to do with that?

PICCONE: I would like to move that question into a polemic with Schroyer. I propose a concept of Marxism which has been pushed in Europe, by Bloch and others, but which is not that popular in the U.S. Marxism is not the theory of capitalist formation, it isn't something which developed in 1848 with the birth of the *Communist Manifesto*. Marxism is the last step in the secularization of the Judaeo-Christian tradition and, more generally, an attempt to reconstitute the spirit of Western civilization. It embodies a kind of longing of all mankind. This is the eschatological element of Marxism that is fundamental; this is the legacy that I believe is still worth salvaging and which cannot be captured in any of the fossilized theories that have somehow come down to us. We need a theory which captures the eschatology, the emancipatory goal, without hypostatizing any historically-specific (and obsolescent) category of working class, or even class, which becomes an obstacle to the attainment of the theory's goal of emancipation.

BOOKCHIN: I am surprised by the way I could make the statement that I made and that it goes unchallenged. I expected that somebody would rise to the defense of *class*. Marx dissolved people into *class*; and not classes into people, as I've tried to do. That's a fundamental change. In other words, I'm going back to the democratic ideology again just as I'm going back to the commune. The silence leaves me appalled.

JACOBY: The problem is that there are more questions than answers. The task is to escape certain kinds of abstractions. On the one hand, we conclude that the orthodox concept of class is inadequate. On the other hand, the concept of people as it has been used endlessly in 'power to the people' is also a great abstraction in that it is unclear as to whether there is a homogenized concept of people, or still basic differences which will surface at one time or another? In fact, the non-existence of class consciousness doesn't in fact mean that we've surmounted classes. I don't understand what is to be gained by dissolving class into people, because I still see basic structural differences in society. And in that sense, the concept of people as an abstraction can be indiscriminately applied to all sorts of groups.

ARONOWITZ: Let me state my position with regard to Bookchin's formulation of the problem. This is a relatively basic kind of question that I have been working on for two years now: the notion of class ultimately ends up as a definition of the relationships that human beings enter into in the process of producing the means of subsistence and negotiating our mastery or domination of nature. The dialectic of labor, which is the mediation between human beings and nature, is the thing that does not just transform nature to meet human needs, but is for Marx the basis of human beings' self-formation. It is their way in which they define themselves in the world. If one wishes to significantly vitiate the centrality of labor, then the concept of the people may indeed have considerable weight. Habermas states that if it once were the case,

which anthropological evidence indicates it may not have been, it certainly is not now the case that self-formation takes place entirely through that twin negotiation. Habermas' argument for a theory of communicative competence has a certain weight because what it calls attention to is that which even Marx discusses as being the function of the imagination, the function of thinking in the process of self-formation. So, my problem is that in order to jettison the concept of class, I cannot, because I am an orthodox Marxist in the methodological sense. I cannot jettison the notion of class unless I've learned or can accept a new concept of the fundamental question of human nature. If I am able to do that satisfactorily (and I do *not* think that Habermas has done this), then it may be possible to redevelop a different concept of agency which does not necessarily imply exclusivity. It seems to me what is really involved, Murray—and I think you've done this to your satisfaction—is that we have a considerable amount of work to be done in the attempt to perfect a conjunction of the kinds of questions that Russell was dealing with—namely, the question of psychology and the formation of character structure which I think is implicit in the notion of communication—and the dialectic of labor, which is still a very significant aspect of human development, with the historical process itself (i.e., at this particular junction, maybe it's Piccone's monopoly capital 1920s paradigm—I don't mean this to be precise). We may then have at least the elements, the categories, for the reconstitution of a social theory of revolution. I think, however, that we still have not successfully, despite all our talk, disposed of the Marxian concept of class because we have not yet wrung all the juices from it. For those people who are listening here, I want to reiterate what Jacoby originally said. No one will deny the militancy or the significance of the industrial working class or even the concept of the workers themselves in the social struggle. The question is not whether the category is necessary, *but whether it is sufficient to explain the kind of social consciousness necessary for socialist revolution.*

**QUESTION:** I don't think that the fact that someone is in academia precludes them from talking to people from another class. What do you think is the role of the theoretician in working with the disadvantaged and the exploited?

**PICCONI:** What we have here is the classic problem of external mediation which, expressed in a different form, generates the Leninist theory of party with the intellectuals ultimately end up becoming the party elite. The problem here, obviously, is that external mediation leads us to treat others exclusively as objects. *If the subjects do not liberate themselves, then it is not going to happen*—how many times do the members of this panel have to reiterate this point? To the extent that intellectuals present themselves as intellectuals, as outsiders, who have "mind" and who can explicate political problems for the workers as "body," to that extent the problem remains framed in terms of bourgeois categories that in principle cannot overcome that kind of problematic. If consciousness is not spontaneously generated and spontaneously articulated, then socialism is aborted from the beginning. The idea that there are all these kinds of struggles going on in the prisons, in the factories, in the mining industry and the universities—we all know this! We don't live in some kind of fantasy world. Critical theorists don't climb up in the clouds and ignore all of the struggles all of the time. The point is, the logic of advanced capitalism is such that all these issues can receive vindication by the system only to the extent that they are inserted within the logic of capitalist domination—the only vindication that these demands can get are those consistent with the system's logic. I don't suggest that we ignore these demands, but that we begin to conceive of alternatives that are



*qualitatively* different, *not* consistent with the logic of instrumentalization, and then translate these into objective possibilities. Right now we don't have that; therefore, all that kind of work, whether we like it or not, feeds into the logic of bourgeois domination. What all these groups eventually attain, if their struggles succeed, is *de facto* corporate status within the U.S. corporate state, so that their demands will be legitimately put forth and more or less satisfied. Thus, all of these struggles can leave as their latent goal the redistribution of the rip-off. One of the classical idiotic and uncritical assumptions of traditional Marxists is that what makes these struggles ultimately revolutionary is that the system will not be able to meet their demands. This is idealistic moonshine not justifiable in terms either of present capitalist possibilities or the historical record.

What critical theory must develop is a perspective which can be translated into a struggle for a qualitatively different state of affairs. All that you are talking about ends up reproducing on a higher level bourgeois repressive relations and patterns of domination.

QUESTION: And all this effort in formulating a critical theory allows you so-called theoreticians to hold these kinds of seminars and to make a living while these groups of people continue to be exploited.

ARONOWITZ: Come off it. . . In the first place, there is a way in which intellectuals perform significant roles by helping to generate a political culture. One of the points that Paul makes in part in his *Theses* is the tendency of late capitalism toward the depoliticization of masses of people. One of the functions of people who teach in universities, colleges and high schools and various other places in which there is an opportunity to work with working class people or lower middle class people is that we represent the possibility for politicizing one's life. We take our risks in our schools, in our classrooms, we struggle in our sector. We get fired for our politics, we have a hard time getting other jobs. There are those of us who are exceptions in that respect, but these are very few. It seems to me that we have, therefore, two responsibilities. The first is to be the best damn teachers and the most elucidating kind of writers we can be and to begin in some way to establish organic connections with students—in whatever sphere. I know people who are teaching prisoners, who then begin to internalize the necessity for critical thinking and critical politics. The second thing we do—and I think it is undeniably the case—is not to become abstracted from those struggles that are taking place in the state sector—where, right now, some of the most critical issues face our society. I believe that we don't have to go to the farm workers' committees, or to support movements for prisoners, to justify the validity of the enterprise that we are involved in. I think that the implication that politics consists solely in this kind of breast-beating, guilt-producing support movement activity—which is very, very important at elite universities to maintain the liberal character of these institutions—is profoundly *anti-political*. It is a depoliticizing activity although it may indeed in individual cases raise some personal feeling of well-being.

SURKIN: What I understand from Piccone's comments—he might not have meant this, but this is what I take it in part to mean—why should intellectuals interpret somebody's process of organization or struggle, militancy? Why can't they do it themselves? In fact, they will at some point do it for themselves, if they're going to have some social, actual significance. This also refers to the situation that we have here. What I take from Piccone's comments, is that instead of expecting the people sitting

up here to have a ready-made or saleable analysis of class or class consciousness, what will happen when New York City defaults, and so on, we need to see that, in fact, we must share our experiences and grapple with problems which it seems to be very difficult for this panel of experts to deal with. And that is the fact that we don't have a theory of class which is viable, and there is no agreement upon any one theory of class, so how do we proceed to develop such a theory—if we decide we need it—and then, once we've developed it, how will we relate that to real social processes? And that seems to be historically, as well as right now, a very difficult task for intellectuals, academics, and students as well, to deal with. I hope that they'll see that there is no simple answer, but rather a sense of wanting to continue to discuss that kind of problematic.

**QUESTION:** This is going to sound dumb, but I came here to try to make sense out of some things. Now, I've reached a level of understanding adequate within the practical and academic world in which I live, but when you speak among yourselves—and you're a very dynamic group of people—I find you really scary, since I don't understand what you're talking about. We have no way of communicating with you from wherever it is in the rest of academia that we are. I feel a lot of energy up here, but I don't know what to do with it. Perhaps you could think of some way to help us get together on some level? Perhaps we could help you, or you could help us, then, come to some sort of an idea about what class is?

**SURKIN:** There is one problem here, and I think that Trent was very conscious of it when he said that this is a peculiar group, with a number of different languages being spoken here. Maybe Trent will try to respond.

**SCHROYER:** I hope I can, but I'm afraid I'm going to get even more abstract as I try to be more concrete. I feel just as detached from this discussion as you are for the following reason: I've been persuaded that Piccone is right. Not only has Marxism failed, but critical theory has failed, too. It no longer speaks a voice that can be understood. I understand the real problem to be a little different than some of the other speakers understand it. That is, I really experience this as an example of what Hegel calls the unhappy consciousness; the attempt to understand the human faculty of thinking in relation to action in the way that creates an idealization. Hegel used that, by the way, to explain the Judaeo-Christian tradition which always wanted to seek an elevation to God, but always discovered that the flesh was in the way and could only fall back into a melancholic situation.

What I think we've been experiencing here is a Marxian melancholia that understands thinking in a way that takes us into the dynamic of society to find the subject of change. Thus we find an ideal subject that's going to change the world and then we realize that there's really no way out from that into the world of action, because we really live in a plurality of people where that kind of transition isn't made very easily. That's why theory gets reduced to an instrument; that's why Leninism is possible. That's why, as I listen to this discussion, I really am listening to what I understand to be the demise of reason, even in the tradition which I think continues to try and discover what the notion of reason is—that is, how thinking relates to action in the world. For that reason, as far as I'm concerned, we're still seeking. I've been participating in discussions like this for 15 years and each time we seek the subject that's going to do it, that's going to transcend the domination. The problem is that the mode of thinking is itself alienated from the world and from the ideal of critique, and

will never really transform the relationship of thinking to action. For example, I find Murray Bookchin's mode of expression to be the practice of emancipation and to be exemplary of the key category of an anarchist tradition: spontaneity. It does not attempt to use theory as an instrument to change the world.

And this is really what I think the discussion is about—not the category of class, but the theory that can express the logic of the development of a world in order to understand that world, on the one hand, and transform our relationship to the world in terms of understanding it better, restoring its meaning, making it possible for us to act in the world, on the other. Of course, that's a very odd philosophical statement. I could go back and try to show that from the beginning of monotheism to the present kind of idealized Marxism there has been a loss of the context of life. Thus, what we really have here is the ongoing struggle that occurred in Rome, when the Judaeo-Christian tradition took over and another tradition, that of Greek thought, was lost.

**QUESTION:** I never had the problem about worrying about the abstraction or disconnectedness of the intellectual. Because as an intellectual, I've also been on picket lines with farmworkers for the boycott, I've been beaten up by the police, I've organized demonstrations, and I've done other things, with the clear understanding that when I was doing these things I was not engaged in intellectual activity, that was a separate thing, which was often in competition with some intellectual activity, but which also had very real payoffs for my writing. What I'm trying to get at is this: there's a very real critique about intellectuality that is being made here: it's a critique which we have made. That's why I like Aronowitz' statement very much. When we work as intellectuals, we have a commitment to one thing, and that is clarity and directness, a dropping away of intellectual affections and of academic crap, and a moving directly with strength and clarity. Not necessarily simplicity, but clarity. . .

**PICCONE:** I want to make a plea for obstruseness here. The problem with clarity is that it speaks the language of reification. What is clear to us is what somehow fits into the consumerist mentality. You want clear ideas, well-packaged, that can be absorbed, taken home to enjoy, as if they were buckets of Kentucky Fried Chicken or the "I Love Lucy" shows. The point is that this is the kind of critique that has been made against critical theory from the very beginning. They said, "Look, you're speaking a language nobody can understand," and critical theorists answered, "Precisely, because we don't want this language to become a part of that reification we are trying to break. Therefore, in order to understand us, you must make an effort, and in making the effort, you begin to overcome reification and alienation." As long as you insist on clarity, you remain in this passive state: you stagnate in the mundane, the commonplace—the kind of alienation that the theory is trying to overcome.

**ARONOWITZ:** I'd like to comment on this discussion, because I'm much more sympathetic to the point that Paul makes than I am to the point that Trent makes. Let me start by talking about how I teach. I teach by the religious method of the explication of text. At Staten Island Community College people sit down and read and interpret paragraphs. I want to tell you why I do that. What exists in our society is the incapacity of many people to sit with an idea. It's a very traditional method, no students drop out, they sit there and read and *learn* how to read by reading Marx and Freud and all the things that the people up here have read and take for granted. We talk about meaning, and get through sometimes only 4 pages every two weeks. I never lecture. The point is, that critical reason has been lost not because of some obscure

development but because of the very character of the capitalism in which we live. It doesn't exist for the bourgeoisie, for the workers and certainly not for the academics. We have a responsibility. The responsibility is not to persuade students to do anything else than engage in the same processes, the same kind of fucked-up development that we have had, primarily because it seems to me that what is being lost is first the capacity to go beyond the reified structures, the appearances, and secondly is the capacity for people collectively and individually to have an imagination that allows them to conceive of alternatives or even the possibility thereof. The question of form is not simply a question of tradition; the question of form of teaching and form of learning has in my judgment an awful lot to do about whether it is going to be possible to develop social, much less class, consciousness. And if we find ourselves in our social existence as intellectuals in the classroom as well as at the writing desk, we have a responsibility—a revolutionary responsibility—to conjure the capacity for complexity and intricacy. I think linear thinking is among the plagues of mass culture and we participate in mass culture to a large extent if, for the sake of clarity, we degenerate into dogma; if, for the sake of communication, we degenerate into forms of imagery, popcorn imagery (if I may use an image), and I think we have a serious question about whether intellectuals ought to be thinking considerably more about the problem of pedagogy, an old and despised word. But pedagogy is one of the ways in which we can begin to transform, at least the possibility of transforming, consciousness. I think this is a serious matter, a matter that some time we should be talking about.

**QUESTION:** I'd like to ask Russell or Stanley if they would care to comment on the resurgence of Stalinism in the politics of the New Left—how do we account for it?

**JACOBY:** It's a question which cannot be tackled in its entirety here, but I think there are specific variable components to it as well as world wide ones. Some of this has to do with what I call "social amnesia"—particularly within the American left, there is no memory of a left. And in that sense given the short failures of the New Left, there is a reaching back for old doctrines and dogmas which in nearly every other country still persist as some kind of viable tradition, but which in the U.S. are more or less extinct. But people reach back to them anyway. In that sense, it's a kind of social amnesia. To come back to some of these questions, I think it's also within the U.S. the case that there has never been a viable Marxist culture either in or outside of the universities. In that sense it's a reflection and a failure of the relationship between intellectuals and the larger movement which again in any other country there is some kind of relationship, however weak, between Marxist intellectuals and a wider movement. In this country, the Marxist intellectuals have been effectively eliminated before they've emerged. This takes its toll in the political movement which is essentially mindless and which says nothing about the history of the left, Stalin, Lenin, and, aside from reaching for some 'pop' texts, is a product of a certain kind of amnesia and repression. I would draw the conclusion that there is the failure of Marxist culture among intellectuals which is also an aspect of anti-intellectualism. There are aspects of Marxist culture which are difficult; and the command to be able to relate to the needs of the movement at every point is ultimately repressive. There are many aspects of Marx and critical theory which, if not yet related to the movement, *can* be—and that remains essentially an anti-intellectual movement. This, again, does not apply to every movement in the world. One of Lenin's pamphlets is a bundle of various kinds of philosophies related to the immediacy of the mass movement, and there is a certain kind of propaganda criterion which is perpetually raised, like "How can I hand this out

on the street corner?" Well, for theory, that is not the criterion. You can't hand it out on the street corner. You can't hand out *Capital*, Vol. I, II, or III, nor the *Theories of Surplus Value*. In fact, there is precious little you can hand out on the street corner. There is obviously the whole link of mediation between the more difficult theory and the more popular one. On that account, though, I would not say there is any value in being difficult and abstract in itself, nor is there any value in being simple and clear in itself. To say that at every moment we must be able to speak the language that can be understood is repressive; it means to speak the language of a commodity society.

QUESTION: I just think that you've essentially emasculated any theory of where change will come from. You're just sort of saying "Well, intellectuals are going to play some role in this." But why should I? There's no working class, apparently, or if there is it doesn't matter. . .

SURKIN: I don't think anybody said that there is no working class or if there is or isn't it doesn't matter!

PICCONE: I said the second!

SURKIN: Did you say that?!

PICCONE: Yes, indeed!

QUESTION: In terms of the changing imperatives of work, in terms of production, in terms of the service sector and the economy—I wonder if you see that as a significant development, even though some of it comes out of Daniel Bell's analysis of the development of industrial society.

PICCONE: Well, from the 1930s on, there has been a systematic attempt, associated with the internalization of opposition in the capitalist system, to phase out live labor in favor of dead labor, or, in different terms, to introduce capital-intensive technologies so that the corporatized working class could be paid a political wage for its successful integration. But organized labor only includes an increasingly diminishing number of people—which leaves out large numbers as unorganized, underpaid with respect to organized workers, and making very few demands, since they have no collective means of political expression (e.g., American Blacks who came North precisely during this process of capitalist transition, when organized labor was being integrated and *unorganized* labor marginalized into welfare rolls or prisons). The tertiary sector has taken up some of the slack created by the decimation of the former industrial proletariat into "organized" and Taylorized labor. The problem is that the growth in this sector feeds right into the logic of the system: as soon as these sectors begin to organize and flex their political muscle, after a few violent struggles, they will become corporatized and politically integrated like the former industrial proletariat. The way the system works is by somehow trying to meet whatever "legitimate" demands are made by these groups. This has been part of the logic of capitalist development from the 1930s on—the legacy of the New Deal and of the authoritarian, *de facto* Fascist state.

ARONOWITZ: I'd like to make an additional comment on that. I think that the

Reisman and Gardner thesis about the growing significance of the service sector, as Paul has indicated, was because the opposition had been internalized by the system and they had a shift from productive labor to unproductive labor. That took place really in the beginning of the 1920s but it galloped in the 1930s. If one wants to understand one of the most significant demands of the current crisis, especially the fiscal crisis of large cities and states, one way is to understand it in terms of a fairly decisive shift away from the service sector back to a re-industrialization. But the contradiction inside the re-industrialization is that they are beginning to eliminate living labor, because re-industrialization is by definition labor-saving. The technologies are becoming almost self-reproducing, as in continuous flow operations of the oil industry. The consequence of that is that there is a fairly substantial objective contradiction developing, because to a certain extent it becomes increasingly difficult under those circumstances first to finance the re-industrialization—that's a very substantial problem in this society at this point given the international obligations of the American ruling class. Secondly, one of the major ways in which the society has been able to legitimate itself is by delivering the goods at the same time as it has been displacing industrial workers. Somebody said before that 20% of the work force is industrial workers, 80% is not; those 80% in the private and public service sectors and various other places who really produce nothing in classical terms have been receiving income. Now, in the last 10 years the service sector has been organized, especially the state sector. Four and a half million workers out of the 14 million workers in the state sector are in unions. The unions are no goddam good, but one of the things they have done is demanded equity with the workers in the industrial sector, which is not what is meant to be. The history of capitalism is the disparity between the wages in the industrial sector and the wages in the service sector. When that equity becomes a reality—which it in fact has—then there is a limit to the self-expansion of capital and there develops an accumulation crisis. That's what is happening right now.

Now the problem that we have been addressing throughout this panel, is, given those developments, which I think most of us pretty much understand, do they have any consequence for the development of socialist consciousness? And the answer that we have been reluctantly forced to make is: not necessarily, and probably not! And that is the problem, because the base-superstructure (the social-being-social consciousness trajectory) which Schroyer says is in another way a relationship between analysis and action, seems to have been severed. Look, there is a very important point to be made as we go down the road: the actions of the industrial workers and the actions of the state workers and all the service workers in making trade union demands have a transformative impact upon the fate of capitalism. The structure of the system, in fact, changes as they take action. The logic of the system is to incorporate that action and to make it part of the system. But this process does not happen smoothly. That is the problem with Bell, Reisman and Gardner: they think that it happens without causing a ripple. On the contrary, it must happen with tremendous contradictions and tensions. That tension, unfortunately, does not seem, over the past forty years at least, to have manifested itself as a new leap in certain types of political demands. And that is the problem that we are trying to address: the gap between the objective contradictions—which historically and theoretically should provide objective possibilities for change—and the reality of the lack of development of the mass revolutionary movement.