CHAPTER I

THEORETIC CONCERNS OF THE NEW MIDDLE CLASS
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The problematic of the new middle class, in the theory of class as such and as a concrete social formation in the class analyses of different societies in particular, has long remained one of the most contested issues in sociology. First surfaced in German social theory by the turn of this century, the problem resurfaced and was discussed in British sociology only after the Second World War. The theme has since then been continuously debated from various standpoints in mainstream sociology by neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian scholars, thus generating a large number of conflicting theories of the new middle class. However no theory to date, has earned general approval and the class nature of the new middle class remains yet to be established. Considerable theoretical effort, spread over quite a long span of time, has been earnestly exercised; but this intractable issue is yet defying resolution and still is enigmatic to the social theorists and political activists alike.

PRELUSIVE THEORIZATION

The initial theoretical interest in this class had stemmed from an unprecedented growth of white collar

1 Abercrombie, Nicholas and Urry John, Capital, Labour and the Middle Classes. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983, see, especially Part-I.
employment in Weimar Germany. There was an extended debate on the social and political significance of this class, since this emerging uneasy-stratum could not be easily described as characteristic of either 'Capital' or 'Labour'. This earlier German debate was deeply influenced by the fast and abruptly developing capitalism; predominance of Marxist traditions in social thought and prevalence of a strong labour movement.

**Socialist Project and the New Middle Class**

From the very outset, the emergence and growth of this class was seen incompatible with Marx's vision of increasingly polarized class structure, hence detrimental to the socialist project. Kautsky working then with the Marxist traditions noted that like proletarians, salaried employees were divorced from the means of production and their bourgeois appearances also were superfluous, pretentious and transitory in character. They were nothing but a "third category of proletarians..... the educated proletarians".  

However, Bernstein in his 'revisionist thesis' and 'theory of gradualism' argued that social structure under capitalism was actually becoming more and more 'graduated'

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and 'differentiated'. Refuting the orthodox Marxist claims of polarization he pointed out, "that middle classes change their character but they do not disappear from the social scale."\(^4\)

At the beginning of revisionist controversy Kautsky was tardy in joining the issue with Bernstein, nevertheless later on, he made some interesting observations on the new middle class and enlisted its positive and negative features:\(^5\)

- proximity to bourgeoisie;
- dislike and contempt for proletariat;
- ambiguity of social position;
- disregard for private property in the means of production (unlike old-petty-bourgeoisie);
- privilege of education and superior intellectual-culture.

He compared this class with other classes and cautioned not to include it either among the 'propertied' or the 'proletariat' but insisted that from the very birth its growth was "accompanied by the process of proletarianization".\(^6\)

Further for Kautsky this class was submissive, cowardly and byzantine; few in number having no unified class interests

\(^4\) ibid., p.xiii.


\(^6\) ibid., p.21.
or proper form of social organization and the one that detested class struggle. 7 Detested this class certainly Kautsky's proletarian form of class struggle of insurrection, rebellion and revolution; but Kautsky was belied as within a few decades this class grew enormously, created a social space for itself through gradual, latent and passive class struggles - not only under capitalism but also in a diverse range of other societies all over the world.

Again Bernstein drew the political conclusion that, "the formation of political and social organs of the democracy, is the indispensable preliminary condition to the realization of socialism". 8 Implicit in the argument was the envisaged future growth of institutions and organizations those were to become the prerogative of the new middle class - accentuating its class interests at radical variance to that of 'Labour'. However his preoccupation with socialism did not permit him to abandon the 'proletarianization thesis' as he held that "the majority of them (salaried employees)* identify themselves more and more with the working class and should be added to it - along with their dependents." 9

7 ibid., p.22.
* Bracketed mine.
On this reckoning both Kautsky and Bernstein were constrained to perceive correctly as this class had to make no truck with 'Labour', rather mystify and distort the socialist initiative and outgrow the very scope and logic of proletarian socialism. Somehow under their socialist pretentions both were - consciously or unconsciously - wishing well for the future of the new middle-class. The structuration of the processes of its class formation and class struggles, in fact, had to take place beyond the domain of 'Labour' and 'Capital'.

Perception of Right Wing Theorists

In opposition to socialists the other extreme position was that of the right wing theorists belonging to 'Die-Tat' circle. They identified new middle class as a 'third-force' that through mediation between 'Capital' and 'Labour' would act as a stabilizing factor. DHV - the strongest organization

10 For the views of right wing theorists Oswald Spengler, Ernst Niekish and others see, Labovics, H., Social Conservatism and the Middle Classes in Germany, Princeton: 1969, chap.6; and Walter Struve, Elites Against Democracy, Princeton: 1973, chap.2.

11 The Deutschnationaler Handlungsgehilfen Verband (D.H.V.), was founded in 1893 in Germany and its political orientation was anti-semitic, anti-parliamentary, anti-liberal and anti-Marxist; see, Spier Hans, Social Order and the Risks of War, London: MIT Press, 1969, pp.79-80.
of salaried employees - considered that since salaried employee performed 'delegated authority' in the direction of the enterprise; his profession conferred upon him responsibility, greater independence and chances of advancement - thus making a fundamental difference in his position and that of the manual worker. While rejecting the 'new-proletariat' position DHV saw in the new middle class a 'nationalist-middle class' that would help in maintaining status-quo within the social system.

In political struggles the organization always took a strong anti-labour stance and vehemently kept distance from manual workers. But the assumed subservience of new middle class to capital by its theorists prevented them to adopt a distinct independent ideological course of action. This also blocked the path to a correct theoretical understanding of the new middle class and of its nascent contradictions with capital. Thus during the fierce struggles of 'Labour' from below DHV was pushed more and more to cling to fascism unleashed by capitalism and ultimately, "DHV went into 'Nazi German Labour Front' as the principal organization in the 'salaried employee' column'."¹²

¹² ibid., p.79.

Debate within German Academic Social Theory

Within German academic social theory notable
contributions were those of Emil Lederer and Jacob Marschak.* Lederer in the beginning upheld 'revisionist thesis' and noted differentiation among the salaried employees, however, encountered difficulties in formulating a precise definition of the new middle class. For him the unity of the 'middle-position' of this class was not derivative of the technical functions rather a 'negative-characteristic' of the analogous social positions of its members vis-a-vis other classes; ... "their social valuation is chiefly decided by their relationship to the important classes, the employer and labourers." He envisioned an independent path of development for the new middle class because of the growing consciousness of its special interests.

Later on Lederer alongwith Marschak reiterated heterogeneity within, and a common social position of the new middle class. No doubt its dependency on employment drew it ever closer to labour's social programmes (trade-unionism), but new middle class rejected socialist ideology, abhored labour's radicalism and on the whole its politics remained

* Some of the works on the theme 'white-collar worker in Germany' including those of Emil Lederer and Jacob Marschak were translated in 1937, under a W.P.A. Project jointly sponsored by New York State Department of Social Welfare and the Department of Sociology at the Columbia University.


14 ibid., p.8.
of 'unmistakable middle-class character'. Theoretically they conceived the following alternate courses of political action for the new middle class:

1) to offer a counterweight to the increasing numerical strength of the laboring class;

2) to adopt a policy aimed against the excessive concentration of business;

3) to strengthen the position of the wage-earner in the struggle between capital and labour.15

They argued that drastic changes in the objective conditions resulting from First World War effected significant reorientation in the new middle class; thus clearing the way for the materialization of the above-mentioned third possibility. That new middle class had struggled before war to achieve economic security, independence from other classes and showed a tendency to become a 'stratum sui-generis'. However due to post-war collapse of economy, dependency on employment and subordination to capital had become an ever stark fact - thus reducing the salaried employee to a mere wage-earner and making the alliance of new middle class with 'Labour' a practical reality.

"...'middle-class' character of the salaried employee had to capitulate before the growing notion of mere wage-earner.

15 Emil Lederer and Jacob Marschak, 'Der Neue Mittelstand', in Grundiss der Sozialökonomik, 1x Abteilung 1 Teil, Tübingen, 1926; trans. as The New Middle Class, W.P.A. project no. 165-97-6999-6027, New York: 1937, pp.16-17.
Proletarianization of the 'middle-class' strata, which went on at an unprecedented pace...proved stronger than any class tradition.¹⁶

In this way, upholding the 'proletarianization thesis', they endorsed the theoretical position of the socialists.

That was an era of enormous political turmoil spewing sweeping changes in Germany. The new middle class being in the thick of yet crystallizing capitalist mode of production* was caught in a newly developing socio-political context which qualified it for a new social phenomenon. Being a new social formation, in the above sense, it was at a complete loss to comprehend new forms of emerging social relationships and its nascent contradictions with capital and labour. Having yet 'no ideology of its own' new middle class was laying arrogate claims to all sorts of sundry ideologies. Lederer and Marschak's analysis, more or less, remained organically linked to the direct reflections of changing political stances of the new-middle class.

Each time their theoretical position shifted corresponding to the fluctuations in this class' political activity.

¹⁶ ibid., p.25.

* It should not be misconstrued that new middle class was an especial 'new' product of the capitalist mode of production, no doubt its growth in some sense was enhanced by the capitalist mode of production.
Somehow this incapacitated them from applying their valuable insights to their own analysis - thus drawing at times contradictory conclusions. No wonder then, that with the end to tumultuous era Lederer rejected 'socialist thesis' and once again validated his original position. In retrospect, he argued, that 'new middle classes' were supposed to develop into a proletariat, according to orthodox socialist theory; while conservatives expected them to become a stabilizing factor; the 'new middle classes', in fact, formed a new layer of society, the size as well as the character of which was a new phenomenon.

A more balanced contribution to this debate was that of Hans Speier. Speier considered new middle class a key to the understanding of the entire social structure and of its future configuration - a new social type whose social and economic interests were different from those of entrepreneurs and manual workers. Its growth was caused by: scientific management-planning, administration and control in production;

17 When National Socialists led by Hitler seized power in 1933, Lederer fled from Germany to U.S.A. In retrospection, he reconsidered and endorsed his earlier theoretical position; see, Emil Lederer, State of the Masses, New York: 1940.


19 ibid., pp.71-72.
increased organization of distribution; reduction of earlier 'independents' to salaried status; and the reintegration of liberal society (a growth of self-governing bodies, associations and organizations). Its social valuation was derived from: the share in authority within production; as co-bearers of applied science and representatives of culture; share in official authority (enhanced further due to their tilt towards nationalistic sentiment). However, he noted, that because of the growing tendency to recruit salaried workers of proletarian origins, a process of proletarianization was at work. In addition the social level of the salaried employees further lowered with the increasing size of the group.

No doubt the special position of salaried employees was a subject of controversy and their very growth had disturbed the sociological basis of political theories, observed Speier, but they received scant attention in the field of political theory. In the past various classes had struggled and sought legitimation of their interests through specific ideologies: rising bourgeoisie rationalized liberalism; threatened nobility transformed tradition into conservatism; bureaucracy was provided noble justification in the Hegel's philosophy of State, "but the salaried employees when they became a mass

20 ibid., pp. 84-85.
stratum, found no ideology* of their own.*21 And he did not fully subscribe to the view that fascism was the rationalization of their social interests.

From the very beginning this German debate** was linked to and remained throughout located within the capitalist mode of production. Furthermore it was heavily influenced by the political upheavals in Germany, and much of it was addressed either in defence of or as a challenge22 to orthodox Marxism. Socialists considered it merely a new proletariat while the conservatives expected new middle class to become an effective harmonizing buffer between the working class and the bourgeoisie. No doubt the debate generated valuable insights into the nature and social character of the salaried employees but on the whole it failed to produce a consistent and coherent theory of the new middle class which could explain the basis of its existence and its class contradictions with 'Capital' and 'Labour'.

21 ibid., p.80.


* The development of the ideology of the white collar worker is, to be sure, dependent in the individual countries not only on the stage of economic development but also on the conditions of organization and social legislation. See ., footnote no.15, p.462, in, Speier, H., op.cit.,1969.

** This historically important German debate which had started by the beginning of this century, came to an abrupt end when National Socialists led by Hitler seized power in 1933.
RESURGENCE OF THEORETICAL INTEREST IN THE NEW MIDDLE CLASS

The problematic of the new middle class emerged in mainstream sociology only after the Second World War. Initial impetus came from the discussion of the embourgeoisement of the working class in Britain, and the 'new working class' in France; and from the works of radical social theorists like C. Wright Mills in America. In the embourgeoisment thesis it was argued that economic differences between the 'middle class' and the 'working class' were converging; and the working class values, social and cultural traits began to resemble those of the 'middle class'. In France Mallet and Touraine observed that the emerging scientific and technical intelligentsia within production was nothing but a 'new working class'. They wanted to cast it in the role of the traditional proletariat and expected it to become the central deriving force in the struggles against capitalism. Mills in America noted an enormous growth of white-collar — a


disparate group, ranging from clerical workers, engineers to managers, connected to each other only by a common desire not to fall into the proletariat. In his 'anecdotal' and 'speculative' analysis this 'born decomposed' class having no political unity was more of an 'occupational salad'.

It was generally felt, that development of capitalism produced consequential changes in class structure. The old 'master-man' relations were being replaced by the depersonalized and anonymous character of the wage-worker. The fast expansion of the salaried strata effected significant transformations in the composition of the 'middle-class'. Even on a general scrutiny the earlier sympathetic claims\(^26\) of 'exclusive middle class culture' were burst asunder.

The initial interest soon resulted in a massive academic excitement. A large number of studies poured out in the footsteps of Weber. Since as a critique of Marx's theory of class, Weber\(^27\) had sought to delink the concept of class from the context of production relations and had situated it within the relations of distribution (market, life style and attendant status), and authority (power). Thus in all such


\(^27\) Weber, Max, *Economy and Society* (3 vols), New York: Bedminster Press, 1968, see chap. on 'Class, Status Groups and Politics'.
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studies 28 class situation was equated with market situation; status and class became almost synonymous terms; e.g. for Warner 29 class system was equivalent to status system — a function of subjective evaluations and not of objective criteria. Since 'status' and 'power' are not dichotomous, social stratification amounts to gradational array of continuous strata, bulging in the middle to generate the 'middle class'.

Thus the supremacy of market relations over and above the production relations led to the import of distinctions such as 'status communities' and 'occupational groupings' within the new middle class. Overconcern with empirical descriptions of socio-economic nature, devoid of any historical understanding obscured the analysis of this class to the extent that whole issue bogged down to heterogeneity* — amounting almost to the perdiction of the concept of class. The role of the new middle class is seen not unimportant, rather it is central in these neo-Weberian studies, however, it is not regarded as a problematic.


* 'The middle class has never comprised a coherent unity even in the classic bourgeois age...it is even more of a heterogeneous grouping today', King, R. and Raynor, J., The Middle Class, London: Longman, 1981, p.242.
For a long time the problem of the new middle class was given no currency in Marxism except that it was a 'new working class'. But very soon it was realized that this 'new proletariat' stubbornly resisted to play the revolutionary role that was originally assigned to the traditional proletariat; hence it was recognized not as a force to reckon with that could deepen a socio-political crisis* within capitalism. Meanwhile the studies of Nicos Poulantzas30 acknowledged the 'distinct social characteristics of 'new petty bourgeoisie' as the carrier of ideological and political roles within the reproduction system. Both factors instilled considerable Marxist interest in this area of class structure; and under the aegis of neo-Marxism new-middle class was identified as a distinct social formation containing features of 'wage-work positions' as well as the elements of 'capital valorization' and 'supervision tasks'.

Despite this belated recognition of its social distinctiveness, orthodox Marxists still insist upon, that under the impact of monopolistic and global character of 'capital' and given the collective nature of labour, this social formation


will degenerate and wither away, and in future will polarize in between labour and capital. Marxist theory of class is still confronted with serious difficulties to build an adequate analysis of the new middle class.

Neo-Weberian and neo-Marxist studies* of the new middle class have produced a variety of theories, viz., 'Proletarianization thesis', 'Embourgeoisement thesis', 'service class', 'contradictory class locations', 'Fragmentary class', 'Structurally ambiguous class positions', 'Professional-Managerial-class, 'middle mass or classlessness' or even is sometimes referred to as 'non-class' or 'social-non-entity'. A continuous debate is going on and there is an unceasing theoretical controversy about the nature and class character of the new middle class. The issue has become of daunting complexity and is obfuscated to such an extent that "theoretical waters were bound to become muddy". 31

To a greater extent it has become conventional to classify the theories of new middle class in terms of the distinctions between Weberian and Marxist approaches. However recent literature suggests that while considering the 'middle-classes' in particular, such an alleged distinction between

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31 Abercrombie, Nicholas and Urry, John, op.cit., 1983, p.91.

* The synthesis of both the Marxist and Weberian approaches was sought, first by David Lockwood in a study of white-collar workers. See Lockwood, David, The Black-Coated Worker, London: Unwin University Books, 1969.
these forms of analyses collapses.

"In working towards an account of the positions of the middle classes.... a separation of Marxist and Weberian theory is not now theoretically profitable and that an adequate theory may well seem eclectic, incorporating and rejecting elements of both approaches."

Hence, for the purpose of this analysis, the conventional distinction between Marxist and Weberian approaches will not be adhered to, while discussing the salient issues concerning the new middle class.

**BOUNDARY PROBLEM: EMBOURGEOISMENT AND PROLETARIANIZATION**

An issue of central significance and the one that dominates all the theories of the new middle class is that of the 'Boundary Problem' - i.e. the demarcation of the new middle class on the one hand with working class and on the other with the bourgeoisie. Almost all theories have been concerned to mark out a 'middle-place' for the 'white-collar' positions within the social structure; and it simultaneously involved the drawing of boundary lines of the bourgeoisie and working class, - thus much depended on the definitions of class used and criteria employed. Generally the criteria used are mental/manual labour; productive/unproductive labour; property

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32 ibid., p.102.
relations and authority relations (significance of ownership and domination); functions of labour and functions of capital; significance of educational credentials and qualifications in white-collar occupations; white-collar employment (as positions of control over labour power) as carrier of ideological, political and cultural roles; and 'social closure', etc.

The solutions to the 'Boundary Problem' differ in many respects; while for some sociologists the problem at all is of no significance. The view is that criteria so applied lack sociological meaning, therefore, to demarcate unambiguous class boundaries linkages with the mode of production must be established. The 'Boundary Problem' takes an acute shape where the working class and white-collar positions start overlapping - because of the embourgeoisement of the working class and the proletarianization of the routine white-collar workers.

THE AFFLUENT WORKER AND THE EMBOURGEOISEMENT-THESIS

In 1950s and 60s the gap of income differentials between manual and white-collar work had narrowed down and there was a marked improvement in the living standards of the Western working class. It was claimed that the traditional class divisions had become redundant due to increased material affluence. There occurred a substantial increase in the
working-class earnings nearing to those of the salaried employees reinforced by the improvements in their work conditions, housing, health and education. In 'Embourgeoisement thesis' it was held that due to rise in the living standards, working class was adopting middle class culture and lifestyle. The thesis further asserted that differentiation in skills and specialization in occupations had resulted in a gradational status system catering to group interests; reinforced by greater social mobility and by the dissolution of the class structure. The very notion of traditional working class had evaporated; which in turn led to a swelling 'middle class'.

On the whole the view prevailed that social stratification was becoming less extreme and rigid, more fine in its gradations and the affluent sections of the working class were becoming part of the 'middle class'. Goldthorpe and Lockwood, who were otherwise critical of this thesis noted:

"....further economic progress has resulted in a new factor into the discussion (stratification) - that of working class 'affluence' ...the working class or at least a far more prosperous section of it, is losing its identity as a social stratum and is becoming more merged into the 'middle class'."  


* Bracketed mine.
Goldthorpe and Lockwood in the 'Affluent-Worker Studies' were extremely critical of the embourgeoisement thesis. While admitting the substantial economic progress made by the working class, they argued that it was overrated since other aspects such as job security, promotion avenues and fringe-benefits etc. were not given due consideration. Even the higher earnings of skilled workers were more due to overtime and shift work. Beyond this economic aspect, on the relational and normative levels, neither the middle-class people recognized manual workers as equals in formal and informal relationships nor the manual workers had acquired new sets of behaviour resembling those of the 'middle class'. The conclusion was that Affluent Worker just displayed privatised life-style but was never absorbed into the 'middle class' environs.

This study which was the watershed in the discussion of Affluent Worker, not only problematized the assumption of embourgeoisement but also brought in a new concept of the manual worker (as the traditional solidary worker having group commitment was replaced by a new instrumentally oriented worker). Variants of 'embourgeoisement thesis' are still in vogue. It has argued that access to educational opportunities, increased social mobility (both among the manual and non-manual workers) has given rise to new life-style of 'middle-

classness' the central ethos of which is collective striving for materialistic gains.

**PROLETARIANIZATION AND DESKILLED WHITE-COLLAR WORKER**

The most prominent issue concerning the new middle class is that of proletarianization. The opinions regarding the degree and meaning of proletarianization of 'middle-class' occupations vary considerably in different theories. While some theories stress simultaneously fragmentation and proletarianization of the new middle class, the others want to seek sociological significance of its coherence and reject proletarianization. The impetus came from sociology of work and studies of qualifications - i.e. white-collar workers in offices and services are subjected to a process of proletarianization because of decreasing occupational skills and qualifications.

Lewis Corey noted that salaried employees as a whole were becoming propertyless and being subjected to a process of decreasing social esteem. The earlier social position of the salaried employee, i.e. "measurably a professional and undeniably a member of the 'middle class'"^36 had been sinking.

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Due to increasing dependence on employment under large economic organizations, they like manual workers were facing a crisis of employment and were engaged in a similar struggle for survival. Moreover, because of mechanization of office the differences in the nature of duties between such workers and manual workers were completely wiped out; hence they were simply becoming proletarians.

"The mechanization of clerical labour becomes constantly greater; a typical large office is now nothing but a white-collar factory". 37

Corey located the salaried employees in the overall context of the changes in the structure of Western capitalism and the consequent transformations in the market situation, however, he did ignore vital changes in the labour process for such white-collar workers.

The analysis of clerical labour by Klingender revealed that in the earlier stage there was a feudal-relationship between small number of clerks and their employer in the office. "The clerk was more a family servant than a wage labourer." 38 These patriarchal relations between master and men were replaced by a special capitalistic character of

37 ibid.
clerical labour - performing no more specific economic function; and "the first cracks were appearing in the alliance that cemented the clerks to the ruling class." 39

The gap between wages of clerical and skilled manual workers had narrowed down. Significant trend was that of rationalization and mechanization of office work; the former created the 'monster-office', resulting in the specialization of clerical functions; the latter did produce 'technical proletarianization' of clerical labour as it, "vitally transforms the work of clerks and finally destroys the craft basis of their trade." 40

That white-collar work has been affected in this way has found much credence in sociological literature. 41 The general argument is that automation of office work produces conditions similar to that of manual work. Machines like duplicators, photocopiers, dictating and addressing equipments have made significant impact in large offices, particularly replacing traditional skills.


40 ibid., p.61.

"...modern office is no longer a small and friendly place.... large-scale methanization.... has increased its resemblance to the shop floor."\textsuperscript{42}

Consequences of further automation and rationalization in large bureaucratised organizations are: the enhanced repetition of work, reduction in the sphere of decision and responsibility, increase in the higher managerial control and elimination of skill leading to alienation and minute division of labour - resulting in the successive proletarianization of white-collar workers.

The above proletarianization stances have not paid sufficient attention to the details of the labour process of white-collar work. Rationalization and mechanization are not the only tendencies in the existing clerical labour process. Mere mechanization is not a sufficient condition as machines are efficient only to the extent that they are incorporated into a reorganized labour process.\textsuperscript{43} Resistance to new technologies both from management and workers have been well documented.\textsuperscript{44} Since 'profit' is the central assumption underpinning the concepts of rationalization and mechanization (resulting in centralization); it brings in the interplay of market-situation in the labour process. Even on this score,

\textsuperscript{42} Mumford, E. and Banks, O., \textit{op.cit.}, 1967, p.22.


considerable literature - though in a more general vein, suggests to the contrary:

"...market forces alone do not produce the conditions necessary for socially acceptable deployment of new technologies." 45 Lastly whether rationalization and automation have acted as a historical trend responsible for increasing tendencies such as alienation, routinization and repetition in office work is far from clear. The evidence of this is inconclusive. 46 Hence the need for a historical perspective.

Mills argued that old entrepreneurial 'middle class' has been replaced by propertyless and alienated white-collar workers, working in large bureaucratized organizations. And the factors responsible for the immense growth of white-collar are: expansion of large scale enterprises, greater scope of government activities and technological changes. Further, transformations in property ownership and changes in occupational structure has produced heterogeneity and fragmentation of the 'white-collar' making it an 'occupational salad', hence creating theoretical difficulties of its definition, determination and location within the class structure.


*Form notes: in investigating trends in office work scholars may confront a historical myth. Most male workers in nineteenth century offices spent most of...*
"When we consider the vague boundary lines of the white-collar world, we easily understand why such an 'occupational salad' invites so many conflicting theories..."  

White-collar workers, for Mills, are diversified in social form, contradictory in material interest and incapable of combining into a cohesive class with a definite political ideology. However, he insisted that in terms of propertylessness, income and skill-levels (mechanization and deskilling); the objective structural position of 'white-collar' is becoming close to that of the working class - hence placing central emphasis on proletarianization.

"Objectively.... the structural position of the white-collar mass is becoming more and more similar to that of the wage workers. All the factors....which have enabled white-collar workers to set themselves apart from wage-workers are subject to definite decline. Increased rationalization is lowering the skill levels and making their work more and more factory like."  

Mills has been criticised for not showing how old and new middle class are continuous over time historically and in what sense new middle class is a class. The work was more of a radical outburst against

46 (contd.)
their lives copying records and adding figures.
Operating a typewriter is not more routine than copying things by hand. ibid., p.150.


48 ibid., p.297.
Marxist economic determinism, however it did introduce indeterminacy of other type, leaving the theoretical issues concerning the new middle class unresolved.

**MONOPOLY CAPITALISM AND PROLETARIANIZATION THESIS**

The strongest insistence on proletarianization thesis comes from Braverman. For Braverman the very notion of new middle class is obnoxious. According to him, the development of technology and the ever more complete realization of Taylorism in monopoly capitalism results in the proletarianization of white-collar workers, hence the homogenization of labour power and the polarization of class structure. In the overall context of fragmentation, deskilling and degradation of work under monopoly capitalism, he furnished a detailed analysis of the changes in the labour process of 'middle class' occupations. Capitalist's heightened derive for accumulation has resulted in the creation of 'detail-worker' in industry on the one hand, while on the other his desire for the reduction in the cost of management has effected far reaching consequences for the white-collar work.

The separation of 'conception' from 'execution'; the growing rationalization of labour process alongwith

increasing mechanization of office has created a new division of labour and the formation of elaborate hierarchies in large monopolistic corporations. This has culminated in the concentration of conceptual element (information and decision making capacity) in an ever smaller group, leaving the rest of clerical labour to execute progressively deskilled, fragmented and externally controlled manual tasks. Most white-collar workers are overeducated for their jobs; and profession is simply an euphemism for job simplification. The white-, and blue-collar distinctions are meaningless because most manual, office and sales jobs are simple, menial and trivial. Office as a whole is no more a centre for mental labour as large sections of clerical labour are unambiguously proletarianized - this being also true of service occupations.

"The problem of the so-called employee or white-collar worker which so bothered early generations of Marxists, and which was hailed by anti-Marxists as a proof of the falsity of the "proletarianization" thesis, has thus been unambiguously clarified by the polarization of

50 Cf. e.g. Crompton, R. and Jones, G., White-collar Proletariat: Deskilling and Gender in Clerical Work, London: 1984. In this study of office deskillling, they found 'no clear break between routine clerical work and administrative, professional and managerial work' and questioned whether skill was the basis for class distinctions in bureaucratic structures. p.224.
office employment and the growth at one pole of an immense mass of wage workers*. The apparent trend to a large non-proletarian "middle class" has resolved itself into the creation of a large proletariat in a new form.51

Ever since this forceful defence of 'proletarianization' by Braverman, there has been an ongoing debate on the causes of the changes in work and work organization and their consequences for the class structure. Littler52 has argued that such a deterministic link between the logics of the capital and changes in work processes is non-existent. The reality of capitalism is much more complex. There is always an area of motivation, consciousness and resistance between the buying and using of labour power hence the scope for different supervisory strategies. This is an area of continuous fluctuation between conflict and consensus. While introducing supervision systems the capital has to take into account the level of workers consciousness and resistance. Braverman's accumulation can not follow a given path in a simple linear progression. The nature of the working class and changes in it are of prime importance since the existing class structure is the precondition for dequalification,  

51 ibid., p.353.


* Emphasis original.
reduction in the price of labour power and labour market segmentation. 53

Braverman has not stated what constitutes the 'proletarian interest'; but he has simply assumed that there exists an unambiguous 'proletarian class interest' that will be unproblematically adopted by the newly proletarianized 'middle class'. This is a mute exaggeration. Ignored by him also are class practices which lie outside the sphere of management - thus he overlooked to relate the changes in the labour process of white-collar worker to state and wider political struggles in society.

Central to Braverman's critics is, that it includes an idealized picture of precapitalist relations of production; and when dealing with dequalification and loss of autonomy, he uses all the time an idealized artisan as a referent. 54 In the 'romanticism' of early 'artisan-ideal' he has considered deskilling as a simple replacement of craft thus overlooking socio-historical practices integral to such a process of deskilling. Whether deskilling had ever been a historical tendency, remained unsubstantiated.

53 ibid., pp.18-19.

CARCHEDI'S VERSION OF PROLETARIANIZATION

Carchedi’s class analysis is limited to the economic identification of social classes under capitalism. Capitalism prior to its maturation, according to Carchedi, goes through various stages of development. As the capitalist mode of production sets in, labour process at the outset is simple, and the tasks of capital are carried out under the direct supervision of the entrepreneur or his immediate agent. Next occurs real subsumption of labour to capital: labour process becomes complex; production being function of collective-worker acquires social character, and many non-manual places within production get covered by productive labour category.

Under monopoly stage, real ownership sets apart from legal ownership. Within the collective-worker organization hitherto operating through 'co-ordination' and 'co-operation', hierarchical bureaucratic structures emerge performing the 'control' and 'surveillance functions' of global capital. This last stage has significant consequences for the new middle class. The new middle class, in Carchedi's view does not own the means of production but participates in the tasks of global capital and collective workers.

For Carchedi proletarianization is the devaluation of 'middle class' labour power through the loss of functions


56 ibid., pp.188-193.
of global capital in work process. The gradual deterioration of the white-collar-position happens also through successive stages. In the beginning, a few entrepreneurs and correspondingly a few white-collar workers; the relation between white-collar worker and the entrepreneur being direct and personal devoid of any mediations; close proximity and participation in the tasks of capital formation confers upon white-collar worker privileges and ensures higher wages than workers; this privileged position within capitalist production requires special education, and given the elite nature of education at this stage, white-collar worker belongs to either bourgeoisie or petty-bourgeoisie.

With the rise of monopoly capital, the functions of capital acquire global character and up comes the complex bureaucratic and hierarchical organization. The white-collar worker severes his personal link with and distances himself away from the entrepreneur. The increased complexity and minute technical division of labour within the production process reinforced by hierarchical structures of 'control' and 'surveillance' lead to an enormous growth of the new middle class. Proletarianization is still far from complete because certain privileges viz., 'healthy work-environment', relative degree of 'autonomy' and 'freedom' at office, 'broader-culture', 'higher salary' and a 'career-possibility'
etc. are yet intact.  

During the final stage, the work-operations become atomized, specialized and repetitive; and knowledge and educational credentials lose significance. The growth of the new middle class is enhanced not only in absolute but also in relative terms as compared with total industrial population; and to make the things worst there appears at the lower levels female white-collar workers. Now functions of global capital disappear; technical dequalification reduces value of labour-power near to the average; wages of white-collar workers fall below that of skilled workers; autonomy at work diminishes; alienation heightens and ultimately condition of the new middle-class severely deteriorates. The process of proletarianization is complete as the differences between worker and white-collar worker become totally redundant.

The analysis essentially is reductionistic and economic deterministic, and new middle class "is merely a creature of Garchedi's dubious logic of abstraction". The political and ideological implications of such an analysis in a concrete society are far from clear.

57 ibid., pp.189-90.
58 ibid., p.191.
Manifestations at the level of social formation are missing. The overarching role assigned to capital reduced class struggle and the social context of class formation to nothingness.

The formation of the proletariat is also a continuous process, and takes place within the context of 'middle-class' struggles, which in turn affects such a process of proletarianization. Even the range of the functions of global capital is complex and the translation of distinction between real and legal ownership in society is cumbersome. Further as the new middle-class supposedly performs both the functions of global capital (control and surveillance) and collective worker (unity and coordination), it is not easily distinguishable which work-tasks are composed of which functions.

ARBITRARY SOLUTIONS: SOME DISPARATE APPROACHES

A variety of solutions based on arbitrary assumptions, essentially different in nature and having no basis for their comparison; have been proposed by a number of scholars to the problem of the new middle class while determining its class character and demarcating its boundaries within the class structure.

Property and Class Structure: A Squeezed New Middle Class

For Westergaard and Resler, propertied/non-propertied

dichotomy is the fundamental determinant of class. They are critical of manual/non-manual distinction since essentially different types of people are generally covered by the non-manual category. Similarly they abhor the term 'middle class' because heterogeneity within it is relegated to the background. In this analysis the 'propertied' plus a small group of top directors, managers, established professionals and senior executives in industry and government constitute a tiny privileged elite - a ruling interest because it wields political power. The rest is the mass of people which is purely dependent upon the sale of their labour power.

However in between this elite and mass they identified a small 'intermediate-group' reluctantly referred to as 'middle class'. Constituted by middle management positions, lower professionals such as teachers, social workers and nurses and skilled technical personnel, this 'intermediate-group' has certain special advantages in terms of security, opportunity, better work-conditions, higher incomes and fringe-benefits etc. as compared with routine white-collar-, and manual workers. Despite the fact that this small group enjoys a privileged social position, authors insisted that it is mainly dependent on the sale of labour power; and is marginal, heterogeneous, fragmented and sometimes even experiences insecurity. Thus within this propertied/non-propertied cleavage 'middle-class' is squeezed and reduced to insignificance.
This so claimed Marxist analysis (property being its starting-point) of class structure under capitalism, however while identifying top executives and 'intermediate-groupings', much relied on criteria such as income-differentials, occupational and job advantages etc. falling clearly under the purview of Weberian market relations.

Authority and Class Conflict: A Splitted New Middle Class

The original meaning ascribed to property by Marx has lost significance because of the separation of ownership and control, in Dahrendorf's view, 'class' must be seen independent of property and economic conditions. In his 'conflict theory' perspective authority is the central structural determinant of class formation and class conflict. Thus 'with' or 'without' authority is a form of dichotomous property, eventually generating polarization of class structure leaving no space in the middle. "...in a situation of conflict ...this kind of intermediate position just does not exist, or at least, exists as a negative position of non-participation." Hence new middle class must be seen as belonging partly to the bourgeoisie and partly to the proletariat.

62 ibid., p.253.
The theoretical controversy whether new middle class was an extension of the old ruling class or that of the proletariat was resolved by Dahrendorf rather arbitrarily: "...significant line can be drawn between salaried employees that are part of a bureaucratic hierarchy and salaried employees in positions that are not...ruling class theory applies without exception to the social position of bureaucrats and the working class theory equally generally to the social position of white-collar workers."63 Thus otherwise 'decomposed' and heterogeneous new middle class was split by him into white-collar workers and bureaucrats. The white-collar workers formed in no way part of the power structure and in terms of the 'exclusion from authority' their position is the precise equivalent of that of the worker. In bureaucratic hierarchies no doubt top executives are far removed from lower clerks, but Dahrendorf insisted that it does make sense to lump them together since in terms of the exercise of authority it is of prime importance that top and bottom are rungs on the same ladder.

Ignored by Dahrendorf are 'forms of conflict'* within bureaucracy and the differentiation inside such hierarchies

63 ibid., p.55.

* A consistent analysis of the nature of 'class conflict' is still missing in Marxism; see, Meiksins, Peter, 'Beyond the Boundary Question', New Left Review, No.157, May/June 1986, pp.101-20.
due to the differential distribution of authority. The existence of authority structures is limited to the narrow domain of associations, however their expression and relation to broader processes of class formation in society is not clear. The emerging service-sector catering within production and lying beyond the authority structure remains uncovered by his conflict-theory.

A Synthetic Approach

That 'class' must explain particular and concrete events, David Lockwood\(^{64}\) studied the relationship of clerks to trade unionism through the synthesis of Marxist and Weberian frameworks, i.e. class position is constituted by 'market-situation', 'work-situation' and 'status-situation'. The gap between clerks and manual workers, in terms of market-situation has narrowed down, however, in terms of work-situation status differences do persist: "...as the term 'class-situation' is understood to cover not only market-situation but also work-situation, it is clear that clerk and manual worker do not, in most cases, share the same class situation at all."\(^{65}\)

Thus clerks and manual workers both being propertyless, does not mean that they belong to the same class.

\(^{64}\) Lockwood, David, op.cit., 1969.

\(^{65}\) ibid., p.280.
The apathetic or hostile attitude of clerks to trade-unionism is not due to false consciousness but is reflective of the very real differences between the class position of clerical and manual workers. The explanation of militancy at times, of white-collar trade-unions is to be found in differences of work-situations of various clerical occupations. Despite all that, clerks for Lockwood do not form part of the middle class.

As in most of the Weberian analyses the existence of market-structure is generally presumed; so does Lockwood take the structure of work-place relationships for granted. Moreover slight differences in market, work and status situations tend to generate differential social structure, which simply cannot be analysed in terms of social classes.

**Mediate and Proximate Structuration of the New Middle Class**

Giddens 66 conceived a unitary 'middle class' because for him there exist fundamental differences between manual and white-collar workers. The structuration of classes takes place on three-tier market capacity: "ownership of property in the means of production; possession of educational and technical qualifications; and possession of manual labour

power."  

To effect theoretical transition so that these market capacities may acquire 'structured forms' in the shape of discrete classes with definite boundaries, Giddens made use of 'mediate' and 'proximate' structurations. Hence, "a three-fold class structure is generic to capitalist society."

While Giddens concern is the 'exploration of the class structure' as a whole, we will limit to his analysis of the new middle class.

Educational and technical qualifications are the source of 'market-capacity' of white-collar occupations. Giddens broadened Weber's concept of 'market-situation' by arguing that marketable skills are another type of 'property' through which accrue 'economic benefits' in society. This generates fundamental economic differences between white-collar and manual workers.

67 ibid., p.107.


* 'mediating' structurations pertain to distribution of 'mobility chances' in a society; and 'proximate' structurations to, the division of labour within the enterprise; authority relations within the enterprise; and the influence of 'distributive groupings' created by neighbourhood segregation.

** Modifications and reinterpretations of Weber are many, the latest in the series, see Barbalet, J.M., 'Limitations of Class Theory and the Disappearance of Status: The Problem of the New Middle Class', Sociology, Vol.20, No.4, pp.557-75. Status groups and the differences between them arise through class relations.
The 'mediate structuration' which pertains to mobility, and mobility according to Giddens of being short-range, generates a buffer-zone between the white-collar workers and workers; hence insulates new middle class from the working class. Next due to proximate structuration: foreman being the only link, office and shop-floor remain exclusive entities; white-collar worker being part of the hierarchy delegates authority while manual worker has antagonistic relationship with management; and neighbourhood segregation further strengthens the class differences between white-collar and manual workers. The 'structured form' of the new middle class is now complete with distinct class boundaries. For Giddens, middle class is broader, significant and the process of proletarianization is absent— even 'automation' and 'mechanization' of office, in his opinion, has nothing to contribute towards such a process.

Criticisms of Giddens are: the distribution of educational and technical qualifications among the middle class is not uniform. Higher education and special technical qualifications are sometimes superfluous for certain occupations and many times there is no harmonic relationship between such credentials and white-collar jobs. \(^\text{69}\) Lastly it is not clear

why the capitalist mode of production must generate only a threefold class structure. The problem with many such analyses like that of Dahrendorf, Lockwood and Giddens; is to search solutions through definitions by moulding the concept of class to suit certain particular preconceived purposes.

Exclusion/Usurpation Dichotomy and the New Middle Class

Parkin in the beginning held that "the backbone of the class structure, and indeed of the entire reward system, is the occupational order." The occupational categories do not display distinct demarcations or sharp discontinuities which can be easily interpreted in terms of social class. Contrarily the reward system is manifest in the form of a 'graduated continuum' resulting in a gradational social structure. Like a good many earlier analyses he injected within the 'reward hierarchy' a principal line of cleavage in terms of manual and non-manual occupations while determining the exclusive class position of white-collar workers. Later on, however, Parkin introduced in his analysis the exclusion/usurpation dichotomy through the Weberian concept of 'social closure', i.e. "the process by which social


collectivities seek to maximise rewards by restricting access to resources and opportunities to a limited circle of eligibles. 72

Different criteria for 'exclusion' are employed by various groups subject to their location within the distributional system. Property is just one form of 'exclusionary power', similar 'exclusion' can also be effected by other factors such as educational credentials etc. Parkin further modified the concept: while recognizing the 'exclusionary power' of certain groups, equal weightage must be given to the strategies of the 'excluded groups'. Thus besides the power of 'exclusion' there exists always a threat of 'usurpation' from below. Structuration of classes is independent of the mode of production and must be seen 'in relation to their prevalent modes of closure, exclusion and usurpation'. 73

Dominant or exploiting class is constituted by the 'exclusionary powers' of control over 'productive capital' and legal monopoly of professional services; creating reciprocally an excluded class of social inferiors. In this two class polarization Parkin tried to split the middle class: one section having 'exclusionary power' of credentials belongs to the dominant class and the other section 'without' such

72 ibid., 1979, p.44.
73 ibid., p.46.
powers forms the white-collar proletariat. He further suggested that some groups may simultaneously adopt both the strategies of 'exclusion' and 'usurpation'. The white-collar proletariat is one of such groups, associated with apparent anomalies of class because it resorts at the same time to the practices of exclusion and solidarism (usurpation). To the extent such a group belongs to dominant or subordinate class is further subject to which strategy is primary.

Parkin's analysis is one more example of searching solutions through arbitrary assumptions and definitions, because which strategy is 'primary' can only be an apriori decision. Objective allocation of such groups to specific classes can never be ensured. Methods and effects of Parkins' analysis are not much different from those of Marxists advocating polarization. In sum the analysis is prone to most of the criticisms levelled against all other dichotomous theories.

**Structurally Ambiguous Class Positions**

Crompton and Gubbay\(^ {74}\) argued that analyses of class need not remain limited to Weberian market relations of distribution. A true analysis of class must lay bare the

concealed forces of production, underlying and governing the patterns of distribution since, "Marx's analysis focuses upon relations of production, rather than relations of exchange."\textsuperscript{75} Besides everything else capitalist mode of production generates certain structurally ambiguous class positions which contain elements of both the global capital and collective worker; (control and coordination). "....'new middle class' or structurally ambiguous class situations - draw their ambiguous class character directly from the structure of capitalist relations of production."\textsuperscript{76}

However, despite the fact that new middle class positions contain elements of both the global capital and collective worker, such heterogeneous complex of structurally ambiguous class situations lacks a firmly defined base in the Marxist sense, hence by all means does not constitute a class. "...We see no analytical difficulties in locating such structurally ambiguous elements within the class structure.... Yet at the same time....they do not constitute a social class in themselves."\textsuperscript{77} Even if non-Marxist strategies of class analysis are employed it is difficult to fit this heterogeneous grouping into a single class, since the range of market and

\textsuperscript{75} ibid., p.14.
\textsuperscript{75} ibid., p.203.
\textsuperscript{76} ibid., p.203.
status differentials will be so wide so as to preclude firm identification on the basis of interests.

Interestingly, like Carchedi, this analysis too considered new middle class positions as constituted by the elements of both the global capital and collective worker. However, unlike Carchedi who insisted on proletarianization of the new middle class, Crompton and Gubbay stressed the opposite conclusion: new middle class positions may potentially associate with either of the functions but net effect of structural impact has historically tended to orient them towards global capital rather than collective-worker. Besides that impending polarization is central to both the analyses.

**Fragmentary New Middle Class**

Roberts et al. 78 proposed that more emphasis must be given to the subjective perceptions in the theory of class, and a combination of both the subjective and objective factors can provide a better sociological understanding of class. Objective factors are hierarchies of inequalities in the form of wealth, income etc., the structures of which can be determined independent of subjective assessments. And subjective factors pertain to individual's perceptions of their class position. Thus, aggregates of individuals

located at particular points in such systems of inequalities are called strata. Classes are defined as collectivities with which individuals identify themselves.\(^{79}\) Significant are also the cleavages such as middle class/working class and manual/white-collar in terms of stratum (objective) and class (subjective).

Objectively and subjectively 'middle class' for them is fragmentary - constituted by a number of components having disparities and discontinuities within them: an awareness of belonging to the 'middle mass' occurs amongst individuals comfortably positioned around the centre of the non-manual hierarchy; perception of compressed middle class is characteristic of those following more traditional types of white-collar careers, whose positions are now increasingly insecure; and proletarian consciousness arises mainly at the base of white-collar ladder, whose status is roughly on a par with those of the manual workers.\(^{80}\) Thus new middle class is fragmented into a number of distinguishable strata, each with its own class perception and the lowest part of which is becoming progressively proletarianized.

The proposed distinction of stratum (objective determination of inequalities) and class (product of subjective perceptions) has not been properly adhered to

\(^{79}\) ibid., p.18.

\(^{80}\) ibid., p.142.
throughout this analysis. To the extent fragmentation is the outcome of individual's perceptions or in part is contributed by the objective location of occupations is an insoluble problem of separation. Hierarchies created on the basis of wealth and income differentials tend to generate a gradational social structure in the middle; - what type of cleavages are responsible for so many components and how to draw meaningful boundaries around various fragments within the new middle class, remains unclear.