

Folks: this review is of a book on the behavior of the middle-class, with respect to class-struggle (in advanced capitalist societies), the thesis of which is as relevant today as when it was originally published. (There is one caveat, however, from the perspective of this country: one would also have to integrate into the discussion the matter of "race.")

Book Reviews

*Capitalism, Class Conflict, and the New Middle Class.* By Bob Carter. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985. Pp. 256. \$29.95.

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Nearly a century and a half have elapsed since Marx predicted the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism in industrially advanced Europe. Yet as we approach the 21st century, the vitality of capitalism in these societies is, if not on the wax at least far from being on the wane. One explanation that some have offered for this is that Marx's principal protagonist, the proletariat, in the face of large-scale economic changes (and concomitant social structural change) has over the years been steadily losing its numerical strength to a new group of workers, the white-collar employees. Although this new white-collar "proletariat" shares with its blue-collar counterpart the common status of nonownership of the means of production, it differs from it, in that it lacks a proletarian consciousness. Thus the growing numbers of white-collar workers are ideologically middle class in outlook and hence lack any affinity for socialist or socialist-oriented politics. (On the contrary, their affinity, some—such as John Goldthorpe—have argued, is more with fascism.)

Bob Carter, in *Capitalism, Class Conflict, and the New Middle Class* (published as part of the well-known International Library of Sociology series), indirectly seeks to examine this thesis by studying the political behavior (principally unionization activities) of a section of British white-collar workers, the managerial and supervisory workers. Carter's principal conclusion is that the political orientation of members of the new middle class (including their propensity for political action) is a function of "the structural position its members occupy between labor and capital and the balance of class forces both at the local and societal levels" (p. 203). Related to this conclusion are two major points. In general terms, the propensity of members of the new middle class toward radical or leftist politics is proportional either to the distance between the controlling (not necessarily ownership) authority within the production process and their own hierarchical location within that process or to the distance between the sectoral location of their jobs (in the sphere of circulation) and the production sector (the sector of Marx's "real labor processes"). Within these structural parameters, however, middle-class affinity with either radical or conservative politics is further determined by the relative degree of dominance displayed by the traditional class forces of labor and capital.

Carter argues convincingly that, while there is a general tendency for the middle class to seek accommodation with capital (rather than labor), it cannot be conflated with capital because it does not own the means of production. There is a residual tension between itself and capital; therefore, conservatism among the middle class is not definitional. At the same time, however, it cannot be conflated with the proletariat, simply because

it too is subject to the same forces of the capitalist production system. Such a conflation rests on the unwarranted assumption that the new middle class's actions are a "real labor process" (where new values are created through the embodiment of labor power) akin to that engaged in by proletarian labor. To the extent that the new middle class distances itself from the working class (as manifest, e.g., by its preference for wage differentials, hierarchical work organizations, etc.), for reasons of both economic self-interest (careers and promotions) and its technocratic-oriented character (preference for "scientific" orderliness and discipline), not all unionization activities by the new middle class can ipso facto be termed proletarianization. Among the ideological characteristics that distinguish the new middle class from the old (the small business people, etc.) is its view of the state. It regards the state as essentially neutral and, moreover, considers the state to possess a legitimate role of an arbitrator between social classes. Yet, at the same time, its technocratic character predisposes it toward support for a strong authoritarian state—especially in times of societal crisis.

Carter's book will be of interest to a diverse audience. He draws theoretical insights from the work of people such as Guglielmo Carchedi, Nicos Poulantzas, and Erik Olin Wright, and those familiar with their analyses will find Carter's book "must" reading. But so will those sympathetic to the work of orthodox Marxists such as Ralf Dahrendorf or to Weber and Weberians such as Frank Parkin, for Carter's conclusions challenge their theoretical contributions on the new middle class. His conclusions also pose a significant challenge to the work of people such as John Goldthorpe, Serge Mallet, Harry Braverman, and Rosemary Crompton. Those concerned with British party politics—especially with the emergence of the Social Democratic party—with the political behavior of white-collar workers in the United States, will find this book useful. The book is also relevant, especially at the level of theory, to study of the emerging middle classes of the Third World, particularly those of Asia and South America (cf. Dale L. Johnson, *Middle Classes in Dependent Societies* [Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1985]).

Two questions need to be addressed in concluding this review. First, is Carter's study simply one more effort to challenge Marx's contribution on classes? In my view it does not; as Carter himself points out, the conventional attribution to Marx of a dichotomous framework of class analysis is a misrepresentation of Marx's work stemming from the failure to contextualize the *Communist Manifesto*, coupled with the failure to comprehend the method of *Capital*. In fact, Carter's study reinforces Marx's basic principle of class analysis: that it must be rooted in the production process but must also recognize that subjective class positions may not always correspond to objective class positions.

Second, what of the future of capitalism among the advanced capitalist societies? Carter's study effectively demonstrates the futility of basing prognosis on the political behavior and orientation of the new middle class, given its essentially vacillatory nature.