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THE SOCIAL ANALYSIS OF CLASS STRUCTURE

EDITED BY FRANK PARKIN



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To
Peter Worsley

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Preface

With the exception of my contribution, all the papers brought together in this volume were originally presented at the British Sociological Association's Conference on Social Stratification, held at the University of Surrey in April 1973.

January 1974

Frank Parkin

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FRANK PARKIN

Strategies of Social Closure in Class Formation

Although social relations both within and between classes or strata could be said to form part of a unitary stratification scheme they are conventionally treated as entirely different phenomena. For the most part, inter-class relations are viewed as an expression of certain generic features of the social system, whether conceived of in terms of property rights, authority relations, or the division of labour. Typically, classes are represented as paired, logically exhaustive categories – propertied and propertyless, superordinate and subordinate, manual and non-manual – dichotomies that seek to reveal the fundamental line of cleavage or structural ‘fault’ in the stratification order.

Divisions within classes on the other hand are not normally construed in terms of similar systemic principles, and least of all are such divisions represented as an extension of the same principles that govern inter-class relations. The intra-class distinctions commonly employed appear to take shape under the imprint of purely national conditions and lack those universal properties that characterize the relationship between class and class. Thus, in the sociology of the working class the terminology of affluent and traditional, new and old, rough and respectable, secular and deferential, and so forth, set up distinctions that appear to derive more from the British version of modern capitalism than from its universal, systematic features.¹ This capitalism-in-one-country approach serves perhaps as a more acceptable framework for the analysis of internal class relations than of the relations between classes because of the striking contrast in what is taken to be sociologically problematic in the two cases. Inter-class relations are conceived of as inherently antagonistic, a condition only to be comprehended through the idiom of dichotomy and conflict. At the intra-class level, however, the emphasis upon competitive struggle gives way to a rather blander concern with the niceties of social differentiation. The subject of investigation here becomes (among the working class) variations in

life-style and social consciousness or (among the middle class) variations in the social composition and recruitment of elites. Sociological ingenuity is directed to mapping out the social contours of a territory in which a truce has been declared in the *omnium bellum contra omnes*. Social differentiation within a given class, moreover, is analysed by reference to conceptual categories that generally do not correspond to existentially based groups with the capacity for mobilization; even less could they be said to constitute social collectivities in mutual competition for scarce resources. It is this contrast between the use of existentially grounded social categories and purely formal or analytic categories that demonstrates the extent to which inter-class and intra-class relations are regarded as distinct phenomena requiring different conceptual treatment.

The emphatic shift from conflict to social differentiation as the guiding principle of intra-class analysis is largely attributable to the powerful assumption that social action cannot be explained in terms of its conflictual elements unless it is set within a framework of dichotomy. Where class is defined by reference to dual, logically exhaustive categories it follows that such antagonisms as occur *within* any given category cannot properly be understood as manifestations of class conflict in the accredited sense. A further difficulty stemming from the definition of class as a procrustean dualism is encountered in the analysis of the crucial middle levels of the stratification system. The assignment of social groups to one of two inclusive categories is highly productive of anomalies in the shape of those groups whose actions and beliefs depart from the standards identified as typical for the class as a whole. Thus, within the manual/non-manual definition of class the inclusion of lower white-collar groups within the ranks of the professional middle class is not easily reconciled with those political and economic activities that lend credence to the thesis of white-collar proletarianization. This problem is of course even more acute for the Marxist classificatory scheme in which the salaried bourgeoisie is located on the propertyless side of the capital-labour divide. Such anomalies necessarily arise from the use of a definitional framework in which the complexities of class are squeezed into a simple zero-sum model on the grounds that only this type of scheme is capable of capturing the conflictual essence of class.

One final difficulty with current usages is that the vocabulary of class does not readily lend itself to the analysis of stratification and cleavage associated with membership in racial, ethnic, religious, and linguistic communities. Communal divisions are normally seen as an outgrowth

of cultural diversity in which antagonisms between those of different colour, faith, or language are treated as the product of historically specific factors and not as inherent attributes of the social system.² The common properties of these diverse cleavages are not accorded the same theoretical weighting as the common properties of class; indeed, because class is characteristically held to be a systemic and universal feature of industrial society, and hence irreducible to specific cultural attributes, the temptation has been to treat communal antagonisms as a distorted version of class conflict or as residual, anachronistic features of an otherwise modern society.³

Alternatively, the acceptance of communal antagonisms as having a reality *sui generis* is generally accompanied by a theoretical recommendation to treat ascriptively based cleavages as fundamentally different in nature from the cleavages of class, such that the two phenomena need to be understood through the use of distinct sociological vocabularies.⁴ The appeal of such a position could hardly fail to feed upon the inadequacies of current definitions and usages of class, given that communal conflict is not easily aligned with the prevalent treatment of intra-class relations as mere social differentiation.

In brief then, it may be suggested that the conceptualization of class in terms of dual, logically exhaustive categories (whatever particular form this classification takes) raises certain difficulties in the analysis of intermediate levels of the stratification system as well as of intra-class relations, particularly those of a communal nature. An alternative approach to class analysis which preserves the traditional and necessary focus on dichotomy without its constrictive zero-sum accompaniments, is contained in embryo form at least in Weber's concept of social closure.

By social closure Weber means the process by which social collectivities seek to maximize rewards by restricting access to rewards and opportunities to a limited circle of eligibles. This entails the singling out of certain identifiable social or physical attributes as the justificatory basis of exclusion. Weber suggests that virtually any group attribute – race, language, social origin, descent – may be seized upon provided it can be used for 'the monopolization of specific, usually economic opportunities' (Weber 1968: 342). 'This monopolization is directed against competitors who share some positive or negative characteristics; its purpose is always the closure of social and economic opportunities to *outsiders*' (Weber 1968). Social closure can be effected by groups located at any level in the stratification order, although the criteria adopted for

exclusion purposes by any given group are likely to depend upon its general location in the distributive system.

Surprisingly, Weber's elaboration of the closure theme is not linked in any immediate way with his other main contributions to stratification theory despite the fact that techniques of inclusion and exclusion can properly be conceived of as an aspect of the distribution of power, which for Weber is practically synonymous with stratification. As a result, the usefulness of the concept for the study of class becomes conditional upon the acceptance of certain refinements and enlargements upon the original usage. An initial step in this direction is to extend the notion of closure to encompass other forms of competitive social action designed to maximize collective claims to rewards and opportunities. Strategies for laying claim to resources would thus include not only practices of social exclusion but also those adopted by the excluded themselves as a direct response to their status as outsiders. It is in any case hardly plausible to consider the effectiveness of exclusion practices without due reference to the countervailing actions of socially defined ineligibles. As Weber points out, 'such group action may provoke a corresponding reaction on the part of those against whom it is directed' (Weber 1968). In other words, collective efforts to resist a pattern of dominance governed by exclusion principles can properly be regarded as the other half of the social closure equation. This usage is in fact employed by Weber in his discussions of 'community closure' which, as Neuwirth (1969) has shown, bears directly upon those forms of collective action mounted by the excluded – i.e. 'negatively privileged status groups'. These brief remarks will have to suffice as ritual clearance for tampering with the original usage however unsatisfactory they are bound to seem to those who equate theoretical practice with textual exegesis.

The suggestion offered above to the effect that social closure refers to two distinct, reciprocal types of action can now be restated more formally as a distinction between two general strategies for staking claims to resources: those based upon the power of *exclusion* and those based upon the power of *solidarism*. These may be thought of as the two main generic forms of social closure, the former harbouring certain sub-types shortly to be identified.

Strategies of exclusion may be regarded as the predominant mode of closure in all stratification systems. The common element in these strategies is the attempt by a given social group to maintain or enhance its privileges by the process of subordination – i.e. the creation of another group or stratum of ineligibles beneath it. Where the latter in

their turn also succeed in closing off access to remaining rewards and opportunities, so multiplying the number of sub-strata, the stratification order approaches that condition of political defusion that represents the furthest point of contrast to the Marxist model of class polarization. The traditional caste system and the stratification of ethnic communities in the United States provide the clearest illustrations of this type of closure pattern, though similar processes are easily detectable in societies in which class formation is paramount.

Strategies of closure referred to here by the generic term *solidarism* may be regarded as collective responses of excluded groups which are themselves unable to maximize resources by exclusion practices. The crucial distinction between these two modes of closure is that techniques of exclusion exert political pressure downwards, as it were, in that group advantages are secured at the expense of collectivities that can successfully be defined as inferior; whereas strategies of *solidarism* direct pressure upwards in so far as claims upon resources threaten to diminish the share of more privileged strata. Thus whereas exclusion is a form of closure that stabilizes the stratification order, *solidarism* is one that contains a potential challenge to the prevailing system of distribution through the threat of usurpation.

All this indicates the ease with which the language of closure can be translated into the language of power. Modes of closure can be thought of as a different means of mobilizing power for purposes of staking claims to resources and opportunities. To conceive of power as a built-in attribute of closure is at the very least to dispense with these fruitless searches for its 'location' inspired by Weber's more familiar but completely unhelpful definition in terms of the ubiquitous struggle between contending wills. Moreover, to speak of power in the light of closure principles encourages a reconceptualization of class along the lines of a dichotomy which, as will be made clear in due course, is not subject to the inflexibilities of current models. At this stage, however, all that needs to be said by way of illustration is that the division between bourgeoisie and proletariat, in its classic as well as its modern guise, may be understood as an expression of conflict between collectivities defined not specifically in relation to their place in the productive process but in relation to their prevalent modes of closure: exclusion and *solidarism*. From this angle, it is possible to visualize the fundamental cleavage in the stratification order as that point where one set of closure strategies gives way to a radically different set. To make the same point differently, the main structural fault in any stratification system falls along the line where power undergoes change in its organizing principles and its

directional flow. This play with metaphor can now make way for a rather more concrete exposition of the argument.

SOCIAL CLOSURE AS EXCLUSION

As previously noted, strategies of exclusion are the predominant form of closure in all stratification systems. Historically, the rise and consolidation of ruling groups has been effected by the restriction of access to valued resources, such as land, esoteric knowledge, or arms, to a limited circle of eligibles marked out by certain social characteristics. Aristocratic domination and control of resources through the rules of descent is the obvious example from recent European history of this type of closure. Bourgeois forms of exclusion, by contrast, do not typically rest upon the restrictions of descent or similar group criteria for their effectiveness, but more upon what Weber calls the 'rational commitment to values'. Forms of exclusion based on such a commitment can be said to characterize those class or similar formations whose main political ingredient is the right to nominate successors rather than to ensure the transmission of statuses to lineal descendants. The medieval church and the Soviet communist party provide examples of ruling groups whose criteria of recruitment and exclusion are designed to ensure continuity through the nomination of suitable replacements and not by the simple transfer of positions to kith and kin.⁵ 'Classes of nomination' are thus the product of exclusion rules that single out the specific attributes of individuals rather than the generalized attributes of social collectivities. By contrast, exclusion practices centred upon the collectively defined qualities of men are strategies of closure typically adopted by 'classes of reproduction', since the emphasis upon group as against individual characteristics is the most effective way of transmitting privileges to one's own, whether defined by lineage, colour, religion, language, or whatever.

This suggests that the contrast between classes of nomination and classes of reproduction is best thought of as expressive of a more general distinction: that between individualist and collectivist rules of exclusion.⁶ Such a distinction refers not only to the processes underlying class recruitment and succession but also the means by which access to public goods and social resources in general is similarly monitored. It is not altogether sufficient to define class in terms of the denial of access to productive property, whether as ownership or control, since this form of exclusion is not necessarily coterminous with restricted access to political and civil rights, housing, education, and public

resources external to the division of labour. At any rate, the actual extent to which the collectively derived status of 'worker', arising from property exclusion, operates to disqualify men and their families from access to other social resources and opportunities is an empirical question the answer to which is certainly open to historical and national variation. In many respects, changes in class conditions over the past century or more can be seen as representing a gradual shift from collectivist to individualist forms of exclusion, such that class stigmata are less consequential for social relations beyond the workplace. Changes in the rules of political exclusion and the gradual extension of citizenship rights are indicative of this transition towards forms of social closure based more upon individual than group attributes. Similarly, the protracted struggle of the bourgeoisie against the aristocracy may be seen as an attempt by the former to dismantle purely collectivist rules of exclusion in favour of individualist criteria – as for example in the replacement of the patronage system of recruitment by one of public examination.

Individualist rules of exclusion reach their apogee in that complex of social practices that Miller (1967) has dubbed 'credentialism' – i.e., the reliance upon examination certificates as a means of controlling entry to valued positions in the division of labour. The political rationale of these practices is the establishment of universal criteria of selection and exclusion on the basis of specific personal qualities and attributes, so conforming to the classic liberal preference for classes of nomination over classes of reproduction. Strategies of credentialism appear to correspond closely to this ideal in so far as the continuous raising of examination hurdles as a means of monitoring entry to the professional middle class results in definite risks for the progeny of its present incumbents. As Miller's work has shown, in most advanced societies attempts by established elites to ensure that their status is reproduced by their own children are only about fifty per cent successful, indicating that the well born 'have no firm perch in the upper tiers of society' (Miller 1960: 50). However, it is well understood that the full attainment of the ideal liberal condition of individualist exclusion and class nomination is only feasible to the extent that the 'means of credentialism' are not monopolized by any one social group. If the relationship between individual capacity and performance standards is distorted by the transmission of what Bourdieu (1973) calls 'cultural capital' along kinship lines, then class selection by examinations and certificates results, intentionally or otherwise, in *de facto* collectivist exclusion and class reproduction.⁷ Individualist criteria of exclusion through the

application of universal rules thus cannot guarantee the liberal conditions of justice as long as the state tolerates the intrusion of socially inherited handicaps and easements that directly affect the individual's capacity to perform. This situation bears close comparison with the condition of political exclusion in the nineteenth century. Admission to the franchise was similarly governed by ostensibly individualist rules of property and residential qualifications and not by the open presumption of class membership. Workers able to meet the registration requirements were admitted to the suffrage whilst men of bourgeois origin who could not were excluded. Political exclusion thus appeared wholly compatible with the bourgeois rejection of collectivist discrimination. However the justice of such an arrangement was dependent upon the tacit disregard of those inequalities of condition that ensured that only a predictable few would be able to meet the standards of political entry.^{7a} This is not simply analagous to the modern case of educational exclusion through selective tests but an extension of the same principles. Involved in each case is an interpretation of distributive justice in which the rhetoric of individualism and the principles of class nomination obscure the processes of *de facto* collectivist exclusion and class reproduction.

Interestingly, the liberal critique of this situation has shown a similar consistency of principle. The essence of the liberal view is that the rules of exclusion conform to the standards of justice only in so far as they succeed in discriminating between individuals on the basis of those capacities and performances that are not attributable to the facts of social inheritance. The campaign by liberal reformers for the removal of the franchise qualification thus finds its modern equivalent in the various campaigns for 'compensatory education' to aid the disadvantaged young in the competition for certificates against their middle-class rivals. Both are inspired by the wish to ensure that exclusion practices are truly compatible with the tenets of bourgeois individualism by counteracting or negating those human endowments that are strictly social in character, so corresponding to that Durkheimian ideal in which 'social inequalities exactly express natural inequalities' (Durkheim 1964: 377).

In so far as exclusion practices vary along an individualist-collectivist dimension it should follow that the social character of excluded groups is related to the predominance of one or other of these tendencies. In ideal-typical terms, wholly collectivist rules of closure would produce a communal situation, characterized by a total negative status, of which the apartheid system is the clearest example, although the condition

of all social groups whose exclusion rests largely on the peculiarities of colour, religion, or language will approximate the communal pole. The opposite extreme is represented by closure practices based wholly on individualist criteria, so giving rise to a condition of segmental statuses – a model implicit in representations of the classless society as one of differentiated status groups. In non-fictional societies individualist and collectivist modes of exclusion always co-exist, if in different combinations, so that the actual range of possible class situations varies historically and nationally between the limits set by the communal and status group polarity. Changes in the overall class situation of the proletariat during the past century could thus be portrayed as a shift away from the communal towards the status group pole; that is, a situation in which the collective category ‘worker’ becomes less encompassing in its negative social consequences.

Another way of putting this is to say that changes in the predominant mode of exclusion are equivalent to changes in the legal and political foundations of exploitation. Exploitation is the term here applied to those institutional practices by which social groups seek to maximize rewards by closing off resources and opportunities to others, on whatever basis. Whether the chosen criterion of exclusion is property ownership or control, or examination certificates, or pigmentation, or faith, the processes involved are generically of a kind that exhibits the defining hallmark of exploitation: namely, the exercise of power in a downward direction to produce a condition of group subordination. To define exploitation in this way, as an inherent feature of exclusion practices, is to draw the sharpest possible contrast with solidaristic strategies of closure, the general aim of which is usurpation.

SOCIAL CLOSURE AS SOLIDARISM

Solidarism is a generic term designating the closure attempts of excluded groups, whether of a class or communal nature. Because they generally lack legal or state support, solidaristic efforts are heavily dependent upon the capacity for social mobilization on the part of the excluded. As Olsen (1965) has argued, there are special difficulties in mobilizing individuals for common goals under conditions of purely voluntary association. Rational calculus always poses a threat to solidaristic actions, so that the effectiveness of this mode of closure is always dependent in the last resort upon the exercise of physical or other sanctions upon recalcitrants. The power of solidarism is thus perhaps more fragile than the power of exclusion in so far as it incurs heavy costs of organization

and social control which the other does not, partly because the social costs of exclusion are borne mainly by the state and not directly by those who benefit from them. Exclusion practices in any case do not demand the same intensity of social collaboration because they do not generate the same degree of tension between individual and group interest; within excluding groups the problem of blacklegging is somewhat remote. This suggests the hypothesis that forms of closure based upon exclusion would generally be considered preferable to solidaristic practices, such that the adoption of the latter would be expected to result from an inability to maximize opportunities through exclusion strategies.

Solidaristic efforts are always directed at the usurpation of resources in the sense that claims to rewards, if successful, will normally result in some diminution of the share accruing to superordinate groups. The range of possibilities here extends of course from marginal redistribution to total dispossession. But whatever the intended scale of usurpation it is an aim that generally implies alternative standards of distributive justice to those solemnized by the rules of exclusion. For example, acts of social closure on the part of communal minorities generally contain a challenge to the monopoly of resources held by the majority group through an attempt to replace collectivist by individualist rules of exclusion. Civil rights movements by minority groups exemplify this form of action, in which the goal of social inclusion calls for the dismantling of the structure of privilege resulting from collective discrimination. Because these claims articulate well with the individualist tenets of liberalism, integrationist demands by the communally excluded tend to be regarded as completely legitimate, at least in principle, by influential sections of the dominant majority;⁸ the phenomenon of 'white liberalism' has its analogue in all situations of collectivist exclusion, whatever its basis.

Under purely class situations, solidaristic closure tends to bifurcate along industrial and political lines. The formal political expression of solidarism is of course the mass party, a movement whose social programme is generally not dissimilar from classic liberal ideals of justice as enshrined in the slogan 'equality of opportunity'. Indeed, social democracy can without too much exaggeration be regarded as the inheritor of that political tradition which seeks to establish the pre-conditions for a proper system of class nomination – a goal not unrelated to the presence of a credentialist stratum within its ranks.

On the industrial front, solidarism is confined almost exclusively to the redistributive conflict between capital and labour and with the

containment of managerial authority. It would appear that the long-term decline in the communal components of class is accompanied by a corresponding increase in the importance of industrial over political aspects of closure. The long-term shift away from purely collectivist rules of exclusion tends to produce a class situation in which the totalizing character of communal status, with all its potentiality for a wholly shared political identity, gives way to a somewhat more fragmented condition in which the inevitability sectional interests arising from the division of labour come to provide the main impetus for action. Partly in response to this situation, and partly as a result of those autonomous developments described by Michels, the ability of the mass political party to act as the *conscience collective* of the excluded class is thrown into question – a condition in which the industrial forms of solidarism are likely to become increasingly important as elementary forms of the political life. However, even though the incorporation of the mass party into the political apparatus and assumptions of the excluding class may increase the likelihood of the industrial front itself becoming politicized, there are definite limits to the extent to which industrial solidarism can fill the political vacuum. The main challenge from this quarter is not one of a constitutional kind but one that in effect questions the market system of distributive justice. Industrial solidarism relies increasingly for its effectiveness not simply upon the capacity for social mobilization but also upon the capacity for social and economic dislocation. Although the threatened withdrawal of labour has always been the main form of leverage available to organized workers, it seems likely that the increasing interdependence of functions under conditions of advanced technology has endowed certain groups with an unprecedented degree of bargaining power. Workers in a number of key industries now enjoy a form of leverage arising from their ‘disruptive potential’ which is quite distinct from the social facts of organizational unity. In other words, it is not merely the potential for collective action that governs the effectiveness or otherwise of solidaristic forms of closure but also the purely contingent features of production. Given the apparently increasing importance of system location over specifically social elements of organization, leadership, militancy, etc., there may well be a case for adding this as a fourth dimension to Lockwood’s tripartite definition of class (Lockwood 1958). At least it does now seem necessary to highlight the distinction between claims to rewards based upon market criteria such as scarce skills, and those based upon disruptive potential. The two sets of claims entail sharply opposed principles of allocation as dramatized by the efforts of excluding groups to anathematize these

effective forms of solidarism as blackmail.⁹ This is because usurpation carried out under the threat of economic and social dislocation challenges not only market principles of distribution but, indirectly, all the various strategies of exclusion that both feed upon and reinforce these principles. It is in this indirect challenge that the main political significance of industrial solidarism lies.

Interestingly, the lack of any formal articulation of this position probably reflects the uncertainty among organized labour as to the acceptability of disruptive potential as an alternative standard of allocation, if only because this would produce similar or possibly greater disparities within the working class than those generated by the market. It is the contrast between productively central and productively marginal groups that underlies those analyses of the current situation in terms of a radical cleavage within the working class – between those able to effect social closure and the new ‘pauper class’ unable to exert industrial leverage.¹⁰ Whatever reservations may be felt about this type of analysis it does serve to highlight the extent to which purely industrial forms of solidarism are not easily translated into political action on behalf of an entire excluded class. Significantly, there are few signs of any concerted attempt to use industrial leverage for any overt assault upon the institutional apparatus of exclusion itself – as against its mere distributive consequences – a fact which might be thought to have some bearing on the stability of social inequality.

DISCUSSION

The argument advanced in this paper is that the basic line of cleavage in the stratification system is that resulting from the opposition between two contrasting modes of social closure, exclusion and solidarism. This suggests that the distinction between, for example, bourgeoisie and proletariat may be conceptualized in terms of contrary principles of social action, rather than as differences in the formal attributes of collectivities. The concept of closure refers to the *processual* features of class, thereby directing attention to the principles underlying class formation. This processual emphasis gives due acknowledgement to the essential fluidity of class arrangements, something not readily captured by standard dichotomies. The assignment of particular groups to one of two categories creates anomalies in the shape of those groups whose actions and beliefs deviate significantly from the general pattern considered typical for the class as a whole. These anomalies arise not only within the context of Marxist property categories but also

within the more conventional manual/non-manual schema, more especially in analyses of the middle levels of the stratification order. The dilemmas arising from this procrustean treatment are felt, perhaps, to be an acceptable price to pay for the theoretical benefits accruing from the use of dichotomous models in highlighting the conflictual elements of class. The abandonment of such models would seem to be equated with the virtual dissolution of the class concept and its replacement by one of mere status differentiation with all its overtones of integration and consensus.

The position adopted in this paper is that dichotomy is indeed a proper device for the analysis of class, but that the use of *logically exhaustive* categories is not an essential requirement of this procedure. To define classes by reference to the processes of social closure is in fact to adopt the necessary idiom of conflict without resorting to the rigidities of formal dichotomy. It should be recognized that social collectivities can, and commonly do, adopt *dual* strategies of closure in seeking to maximize claims to resources. Although the class character of any group is determined by its primary mode of closure this by no means precludes the possibility of its adopting supplementary strategies of the contrary type. Indeed, the apparent anomalies of class may be seen to arise precisely from this tendency for certain groups to resort to the practices of both solidarism and exclusion. For example, the special position of the labour aristocracy in the class structure results from the use of certain exclusion techniques, such as the apprenticeship system, designed to restrict entry to skilled trades, in combination with closure strategies of a purely solidaristic kind aimed at the reallocation of resources between capital and labour.¹¹

The ambiguities in the class position of the 'white-collar proletariat' may similarly be understood in terms of their adoption of dual strategies. Here the reliance upon exclusion devices of a credentialist kind, epitomized by the efforts to attain professional status, is generally supplemented by the purely solidaristic tactics of organized labour. This resort to dual closure strategies is altogether characteristic of intermediate groups in the stratification order; moreover, certain of the political tensions within these groups arise from this very attempt to reconcile contrary modes of closure in the search for an optimal power strategy.¹²

An illustration of this same tendency is provided in the case of intra-class cleavages occurring along communal lines. Social closure on the part of white or Protestant workers against blacks or Catholics is a classic illustration of the use of exclusion techniques by social

groups that are themselves denied access to resources and opportunities by bourgeois rules of property and credentialism. Solidaristic responses to this latter condition appear to be fully compatible with the employment of exclusion tactics against minority groups, despite the apparent confusion of conventional political symbols.¹³ Although the exclusion of minority groups is based predominantly on collectivist criteria, whereas bourgeois forms of closure are typically weighted towards individualism, this should not obscure their essential comparability. Exclusion practices justified by reference to faith, pigmentation, or language are generically similar to those sanctified by property rights or credentials in so far as they represent exploitative forms of social action in the sense already defined.

The adoption of dual modes of closure is indicative of the fact that conflicts over the distribution of resources occurring within classes are not phenomena of a separate order from the struggles between classes. The objection to defining classes as logically exhaustive categories is that it seriously inhibits such an approach; if conflict is treated as an aspect of zero-sum relationships, such antagonisms as occur between groups *within* one of the diametrically opposed categories must have a different phenomenal status to that of 'pure' conflict. It is perhaps partly for this reason that the sociological treatment of intra-class affairs concerns itself largely with categorizing elements of social differentiation from which the conventional vocabulary of conflict is conspicuously absent.

The crux of the problem here is that the use of zero-sum categories precludes acknowledgement that the attributes by which one class is defined may also be possessed in lesser measure by the opposing class. Current usage requires us to treat collectivities as either manual *or* non-manual, propertied *or* propertyless, subordinate *or* superordinate; it is not logically possible to be partially manual, partially propertyless, or partially subordinate. And because classes are defined as logical opposites, relations within and relations between must refer to different orders of reality. Now it gives no affront to logic or common sense to state that a given social group may adopt strategies both of solidarism and exclusion; in other words that it possesses characteristics that are not merely typical of the opposing class but that are the very features distinguishing it as a class. Because it is entirely plausible to speak of primary and supplementary, or simply dual, closure practices it is possible to retain the necessary principle of dichotomy without the encumbrances of a zero-sum classification. Moreover, the emphasis upon modes of social action permits a definition of class that is sensitive to the possibilities of long-term changes in the position of different

groups or strata. To treat, for example, the increasingly important lower white-collar groups as part of the 'non-manual' class does little to highlight the transformations that have taken place within this stratum over the past century; whereas the focus upon closure practices does point up the changing fortunes and character of these groups through time in which their non-manual status has remained constant.

In summary, Weber's concept of social closure recommends itself as a means of defining class in terms of those stratagems by which collectivities lay claim to and seek to justify rewards under changing material conditions. By focussing upon class as process it is somewhat better suited to capturing the elements of flux and ambiguity in class formation than are standard classifications. Finally, the vocabulary of closure is readily translatable into the language of power – not through the portrayal of power as a mysterious something extra whose uncertain location complicates the stratification system, but as a metaphor for describing the very operation of this system.

Notes

1 Giddens has pointed out for example that the notion of the 'new working class' appears to have different meanings in different national contexts. In French sociology it refers predominantly to qualified technical workers, whereas for American writers it is used to refer to the 'ethnic poor'. In British studies it appears to designate the 'non-traditional' segment of the working class.

See Giddens (1973: 192-7; 215-222). Also Hörning (1971).

2 See the discussion of this point by Lockwood (1970.)

3 The view of racial and ethnic cleavages as anachronisms is of course an integral part of the convergence thesis:

'The differentiations among groups of workers that characterize the pre-industrial society – racial and ethnic groups, sex, residence and family – tend to be destroyed. A new set of priorities and differentiations is created based upon a wide range of occupations and job classifications, nationality or membership in labor organizations.' (Kerr, *et. al.* 1962: 250)

For a critique of this position in the field of race relations see Blumer (1965).

4 The notion of 'plural society' is the obvious example of an alternative approach to class analysis. See again Lockwood (1970).