The Aristocracy of the English Working Class: Help for An Historical Debate in Difficulties

by Michael J. PIVA*

> The English proletariat is actually becoming more and more bourgeois, so that this most bourgeois of all nations is apparently aiming ultimately at the possession of a bourgeois aristocracy and a bourgeois proletariat *alongside* the bourgeoisie.
>
> Frederick Engels.[1]

I

Many Marxists assume that the working class should by definition be radical. Yet historians recognize that the working class in most western countries has not generally been noted for its revolutionary zeal. Many Marxist historians have as a result refined their analysis and argued that under the conditions of nineteenth-century capitalism the working class had not achieved the unity necessary to promote a distinctly proletarian political programme. In this way scholars have examined the divisions which existed within the working class during the nineteenth century and have developed the concept of the "aristocracy of labour" which, according to its most famous proponent, E. J. Hobsbawm, "plays a great part in the Marxist analysis of the evolution of labour movements."[2]

The concept of the aristocracy of labour was first articulated in the second half of the nineteenth century by Frederick Engels. When the Chartist movement collapsed after 1848, Engels became convinced that the English proletariat was becoming increasingly bourgeois. But Engels could never be consistently cynical about the English proletariat and over the years he vacillated in his position. During periods of trade union militancy and expansion, as in the early 1870's or late 1880's, he became elated at the rebirth of class consciousness. However, during periods of relative trade union inactivity, as in the late 1870's, Engels became disillusioned and blamed lack of militancy upon class collaboration.

By the 1880's, Engels was convinced that the failure to organize the revolutionary potential of the English proletariat was due primarily to the structure of the trade union movement. According to Engels, trade unions

* Graduate student, Department of History, Concordia University.

1 F. Engels to K. Marx, October 7, 1858, Karl MARX and Frederick ENGELS, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow: n.d.), pp. 132-133.

2 E. J. HOBSBAWM, *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour* (London: 1964), p. 302.

were an obstacle to the organization of workers as a class since unskilled and semi-skilled workers did not qualify for membership.[3] Though not strictly correct, Engels' views have had a widespread impact upon the writing of labour history. Marxist historians have tended to explain the failure of working-class radicalism in terms of the exclusiveness of the trade unions. Such historians argue that the skilled workers who controlled the trade unions formed an aristocracy of labour. Owing to higher income and greater security, the labour aristocracy in time merged with the lower-middle class. In the process the "aristocracy" turned its back upon the Chartist traditions of working-class political radicalism and increasingly adopted the more conservative status-quo ideas of the middle class. This conservatism and organizational strength of the skilled "aristocrats" militated against the development of radicalism within the working class. In this way the thesis of the aristocracy of labour explains the apparent contradiction between assumed radicalism and observed conservatism in the development of the working class.

Resembling this thesis is one advanced by a number of liberal sociologists which we shall call the "embourgeoisement thesis." Like Marxist historians, liberal sociologists have their own assumptions about the nature of class. They argue that overt conflict is not readily apparent and that, therefore, class as an analytical tool is invalid. The theory of "embourgeoisement," by contrast, claims to describe a social process by which the working class today is merging with the middle class both in terms of status and values. Like the proponents of the aristocracy of labour thesis, the proponents of embourgeoisement single out "affluence" as the dynamic in this social process.

This article will examine the debates which have evolved concerning these two hypotheses. Despite the widespread use of the term "aristocracy of labour," the concept has remained ill-defined. By examining the work of E. J. Hobsbawm the concept may be defined more precisely and the implications of the thesis examined thoroughly. The criticisms which have been levelled against Hobsbawm by Henry Pelling,[4] will be discussed but, as will become clear, neither Hobsbawm nor Pelling has presented conclusive evidence to support his position. Yet insights into the nature of the problem facing the historian may be gleaned from an examination of the parallel debate over embourgeoisement.

The aristocracy of labour and the embourgeoisement theories are based upon the same premise. Both recognize that the working class is internally divided between skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers. The

[3] Engels to H. Schlüter, January 11, 1890, Karl MARX and Frederick ENGELS, *On Britain* (Moscow: 1953), p. 524.

[4] Henry PELLING, *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain* (London and Toronto: 1968).

skilled workers and the lower-middle class are assumed to have merged in terms of income and values. As a result the skilled workers have adopted the more conservative political attitudes of the middle class. Both of these theories put forward the simple equation that high income equals middle-class identification which in turn leads to political conservatism.

As much of the literature involved deals with England, major emphasis will be placed upon the English working class. Some literature dealing with other countries will be discussed.

II

Edward Thompson, in his provocative book, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1964), has gone to great lengths to show that the working class had "made itself" by the 1830's.[5] Thompson describes a plethora of small, diverse movements ranging from the "chiliasm of despair" of Joanna Southcott to the industrial sabotage of Luddism. Though serious methodological and conceptual criticisms have been levelled at Thompson's work, it is nevertheless clear that by the late 1830's and 1840's a massive and distinctively working-class movement had emerged in Britain, namely Chartism. Asa Briggs had argued that the importance of Chartism lay in the "attempt to create a sense of class unity" which could bind together the varied elements within the working class.[6]

Despite its widespread appeal the Chartist movement failed to achieve its objectives during the 1840's. As it declined Karl Marx became convinced that the proletariat in Britain had contracted a "bourgeois infection." In the 1860's both he and Engels turned to the trade unions as the sole remaining source of working class radicalism. Of one London Trades Unions meeting in 1863, Marx noted that only here did the workers speak "with a complete absence of bourgeois rhetoric and without in the least concealing their opposition to the capitalist."[7] Engels supported Marx's position, declaring in 1875 that the trade unions were "the real class organization of the proletariat."[8]

The early 1870's witnessed the emergence of a new militancy among organized workers.[9] In the heady atmosphere of these years Engels gloried

[5] E. P. THOMPSON, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: 1964), p. 194.

[6] Asa BRIGGS, "The Local Background of Chartism," in Asa BRIGGS, ed., *Chartist Studies* (London and New York: 1959), p. 4.

[7] Marx to Engels, April 8, 1863, MARX and ENGELS, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 172.

[8] Engels to A. Bebel, March 18-28, 1875, MARX and ENGELS, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 356.

[9] G. D. H. Cole has described the period between 1867 and 1875 as an era of widespread industrial strife during which large numbers of workers flocked to the trade unions. During these years the labour movement freed itself from many of the legal

in the trade union struggles. But as trade union militancy waned and as the labour movement began solidifying its position, Engels reversed his previous pro-union stance. By the late 1870's he was convinced that the trade unions had become a major impediment to the organization of workers as a class. In a letter to E. Bernstein in 1879 Engels commented: "For a number of years past the English working-class movement has been hopelessly describing a narrow circle of strikes for higher wages and shorter hours, not, however, as an expedient or means of propaganda and organization but as the ultimate aim." [10]

Engels' chief criticism was what he took to be trade union exclusiveness. He believed that unions had become organizations of privileged groups of highly skilled workers which spent as much time barring the unskilled from union membership as fighting the employers. [11] This "exclusiveness" had the effect of splitting the working class into two waring factions. In 1890 Engels told H. Schlüter that

> These fools, "in order to keep the supply of workers low," have a law that *nobody who has not been through the regular period of apprenticeship* may be admitted to their union. By this means they have created an army of rivals, so-called black-legs, who are just as skilled as they themselves and who would gladly come into the union, but who are forced to remain black-legs because they are kept outside by this pedantry which has no sense at all nowadays. [12]

Engels admitted that this aristocracy of labour, organized into exclusive craft unions, had been able to improve greatly the wages of their members, which obviously appealed to the workers. Yet the unions, to Engels' intense irritation, in order to raise wages, had in effect placed themselves in an alliance with their employers.

Concomitant with the class collaboration of the craft unions was the development of the "new unionism" of the unskilled and semi-skilled workers after 1889. Engels' comments on the new unions in the last years of his life indicates that he was not opposed to trade unions *per se*. Unlike the older craft unions, the new industrial unions, according to Engels, were led by socialists and attracted "the masses, whose adhesion gave them strength." [13]

After Engels' death even the unions adopted many of the policies of the traditional craft unions. Hobsbawm, following Engels' lead, has argued

restraints of common law conspiracy. It was also during these years that the first post-chartist attempts at working-class political organization were undertaken. G. D. H. Cole, *A Short History of the British Working Class Movement*, Vol. II: *1848-1900* (New York: 1927), p. 119.

[10] Engels to E. Bernstein, June 17, 1879, Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 386.

[11] Engels to A. Bebel, October 28, 1885, Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, pp. 462-463.

[12] Engels to H. Schlüter, January 11, 1890, Marx and Engels, *On Britain*, p. 524.

[13] Marx and Engels, *On Britain*, pp. 31-32.

that "job-monopoly" became the core objective of the new industrial unions, thus perpetuating the "army of rivals" to which Engels had referred.[14]

For Hobsbawm, as for Marx and Engels, the most regrettable characteristic of the aristocracy of labour was its tendency to eliminate, or at least obstruct, the development of a militant and radical working-class political movement. It was the aristocracy which defined the values and political attitudes of the working class. As Marxist historian G. D. H. Cole has noted:

> The governing factor, despite the setback to real wages after 1900, was still the almost unquestioned belief of the ordinary man in the stability of British capitalism, which met, until after the outbreak of war, no real challenge to its position in the markets of the world... If the Labour Party was moderate and gradualist, it reflected accurately, in being so, what was still the habitual attitude of the ordinary worker.[15]

Despite its wide usage in the literature, the concept of the aristocracy of labour has remained somewhat vague. Not until the publication of *Labouring Men* by Hobsbawm in 1964 was it given the detailed attention which it merits.

III

Hobsbawm begins his essay on the aristocracy of labour by observing that the term has been traditionally used to describe a "certain distinctive upper strata of the working class, better paid, better treated and generally regarded as more 'respectable' and politically moderate than the mass of the proletariat."[16] Hobsbawm thus isolates the two points which give the concept its meaning. The aristocracy is distinct because it is "better paid" and "better treated." It is assumed that the aristocracy is *more* conservative than the rest of the proletariat. The critical point emerges in the implication that the relative affluence of the aristocracy somehow explains its more moderate attitudes and values. Hobsbawm accepts all of these points *a priori* and the rest of the essay becomes an exercise designed to isolate the aristocracy and define its limits.

Hobsbawm argues that there are six considerations which can be used to differentiate the aristocracy: 1) the level and regularity of earnings, 2) the prospects of social security, 3) the conditions of work, 4) the relations with the social strata above and below them, 5) living conditions and 6) prospects for the future advancement of their children.[17] Of these six

[14] HOBSBAWM, *Labouring Men*, pp. 189-190.

[15] G. D. H. COLE, *British Working Class Politics, 1832-1914* (London: 1941), p. 235.

[16] HOBSBAWM, *Labouring Men*, p. 272.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 273.

factors, Hobsbawm considers the level of earnings to be the most important. He implies that all other characteristics of the aristocracy follow from the fact that it enjoyed incomes which approached those of the middle class and he points out that the aristocracy was considered by some nineteenth-century observers to be part of the lower middle class.[18] This absorption of the labour aristocracy into the middle class explains to a large extent the politics of the aristocracy—"its persistent liberal-radicalism in the nineteenth century is easily understood, as also its failure to form an independent working-class party."[19]

Though Hobsbawm makes some use of wage data to isolate the aristocracy of labour from the rest of the working class, he relies primarily upon trade union membership to estimate its size. He argues that trade unions represent the "characteristic 'strong bargainers' of the period" and by using trade union membership prior to 1889, shows that the aristocracy was at best a small minority.[20] Hobsbawm thus asserts that the trade unions and the aristocracy of labour were the same group and in this way he finds that at most 15 per cent of the working class qualified as aristocrats.[21]

In view of their higher incomes and social status the aristocracy acted as a political buffer between employers and wage workers. It is this aspect of the concept of the aristocracy of labour which is pivotal for Marxist historians for it explains to a large extent the failure of the working class to develop a radical political movement. Indeed, Hobsbawm, like Engels before him, tends to see trade unions as an expression of this conservatism. Hobsbawm argues that, in the case of cotton and the boot and shoe industries,

> We may therefore assume that the extreme conservatism of the cotton aristocracy sprang from the knowledge that they defended positions of privilege in an industry in which, under normal circumstances, they would have stood much lower; and the somewhat less extreme conservatism of the boot and shoe workers from the fact that they had carved out an abnormally large group of 'middle incomes' from what would otherwise have been a much larger proportion of depressed ones. In fact we know that British cotton workers were the only ones of their kind in Western Europe to build permanent craft unions; boot and shoe workers the only group composed in part of mass-production factory workers to build permanent unions before the end of the nineteenth century.[22]

[18] *Ibid.*, pp. 273, 296.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 274.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 279.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 279. Hobsbawm notes that his estimate of size is based upon "more or less plausible guesses." His use of 1889 as a cut off date is important as in that year the General Unions of the semi-skilled workers began to emerge in several industries. After 1889 the aristocracy of labour, it would seem, ceased to be synonymous with the trade unions although Hobsbawm argues that in later years even the General Unions adopted aristocratic objectives such as "job-monopoly."

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 287.

Hobsbawm does not define the precise relationship between high incomes, the formation of unions and extreme conservatism, yet the aristocracy of labour thesis is applied although in the case of both cotton and boot and shoes we are not dealing with the traditionally highly skilled craft unionist protected by apprenticeship regulations. Despite the lack of definition a relationship is implied and Hobsbawm states quite definitely that "the political and economic positions of the labour aristocracy reflect one another with uncanny accuracy."[23] He has not, however, explained what he means by conservatism up to this point in the essay and later only comments in passing on the aristocracy's failure to oppose piece-rates or to support the Labour Representation Committee. Hobsbawm has produced a simple equation between trade unions and high incomes arguing that both together equal political conservatism. The main weakness is the comparison between conservative aristocrats and the radical masses. Hobsbawm fails to produce any evidence that the mass of workers were in fact more radical than the aristocracy.

IV

The most important of Hobsbawm's critics, Henry Pelling, has endorsed his comments in *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain* (1968). In this study he takes issue with Hobsbawm's emphasis on the size and distinctiveness of the aristocracy of labour in terms of income. This is understandable since Hobsbawm placed a great deal of importance on this particular aspect of the question.

Pelling sees the concept of the aristocracy of labour as a Marxist rationalization designed to explain away Marx's faulty analysis of capitalist development. According to Pelling, Marx predicted the increasing impoverishment of the working class which in fact did not occur.[24] Pelling argues that "the term 'labour aristocracy' really derives its significance from its use by Marxist writers in their efforts to reconcile the observable phenomena of Victorian and Edwardian life with the Marxist theory of economic development."[25] Thus Hobsbawm attempts to show that the proportion of the working class which enjoyed a significantly high wage and living standard was necessarily rather small. Hobsbawm also puts forward the argument that, in terms of income, the line of demarcation

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 287.

[24] Pelling's argument here is misleading. Marxists do not argue that there was or would be an absolute impoverishment of the working class. Rather they argue that there was a relative impoverishment. See G. D. H. COLE and Raymond POSTGATE, *The Common People: 1746-1946*, Revised Edition (London: 1966), pp. 139-140, or THOMPSON, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 318, for an example of the Marxist view of the standard of living debate during the early years of the industrial revolution.

[25] PELLING, *Popular Politics*, p. 37.

was fluid at the top, merging with the lower middle class, and static at the bottom.[26]

Pelling attacks Hobsbawm's use of wage data to define the aristocracy by first noting that individual wages do not provide an index of relative affluence because they neglect factors such as the size of families, earnings of the wife and children or the family's "financial self-discipline, foresight, intelligence and temperance."[27] This line of argument, however, is filled with inconsistancy. For example, a family with more than one wage earner will clearly experience a quite different life style than one with only one wage earner even though the total amount of money brought into the home is the same.

Rather than use wage figures for various trades, as has Hobsbawm, Pelling prefers to look at the social classifications offered by various "social investigators," particularly Charles Booth. Booth's celebrated *Life and Labour of the People in London* (1902)[28] surveyed households in East London and ranks them on an A to H scale with G and H representing distinctively middle class groups.[29] In Booth's classification, class F represents the aristocracy of labour and included 13.4 per cent of the population. After noting Booth's rather impressionistic observation that classes E, F and G "consert together in a free and friendly way," Pelling points out that class E contained no less than 42 per cent of the population.[30] Having noted this large proportion in the class E group Pelling concludes that "the implication is that even in East London there was not so much a labour aristocracy of Dr. Hobsbawm's size of 10 per cent, but rather a very wide class of workers with some degree of comparative comfort (by the limited standards of the time)."[31] Pelling also notes that Booth's findings parallel those of B. S. Rowntree for the town of York.[32]

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 40.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 52.

[28] Pelling uses the 1902 edition, series i, part i. This material, however, had originally been published in 1889.

[29] PELLING, *Popular Politics*, p. 54. Booth defined his classes as: "A. The lowest class of occasional labourers, loafers, and semi-criminals. B. Casual earnings — 'very poor.' C. Intermittent earnings. D. Small regular earnings. [C and D are] together the 'poor.' E. Regular standard earnings — above the line of poverty. F. High class labour. G. Lower middle class. H. Upper middle class." Charles BOOTH, *Life and Labour of the People in London* (London: 1904), p. 33f. The population breakdown between these classes was: A, 1.25 per cent; B, 11.25 per cent; C, 8 per cent; D, 14.5 per cent; E, 42 per cent; F, 13.5 per cent; G, 4 per cent; and H, 5 per cent. See pp. 37-62.

[30] PELLING, *Popular Politics*, p. 54.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 54.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 54. Rowntree's work on York appeared about ten years after the original publication of Booth's work and Rowntree was clearly influenced by Booth — " the great value of Mr. Charles Booth's classical work . . . led me to hope that a similar investigation made for a provincial town might be of use." B. Seebohn ROWNTREE, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* (London, Edinburgh, Dublin and New York: [1901]), p. xvii. Rowntree adds

Thus it would seem that the income differential between the aristocracy of labour and the majority of the working class was not as drastic as Hobsbawm implies.

Another aspect of the problem which annoys Pelling is the supposed stratification of the working class which resulted from the apprenticeship system in the unions. Pelling argues that too much emphasis has been placed upon the assumed tightness of the apprenticeship system. He points out that the industrial revolution had led to the "rapid destruction of the privileges of craftsmen in some industries and the gradual erosion of their privileges in other industries."[33] In the cotton industry, for instance, there emerged not an aristocracy but a "more homogeneous class of factory worker" who received relatively high wages. In the mining industry, aristocrats like the hewers were distinct from other miners only because of their superior physical power and strength.[34] Pelling recognizes that though a hierarchical wage structure existed this was not the result of apprenticeship restrictions, adding that "In the later nineteenth century a secure body of highly-paid artisans, protected by apprenticeship restrictions enforced by their trade unions, was only to be found in a few industries and then only in some centres of each industry."[35]

Pelling, however, does not address himself to the subjective aspect of craft identification. Even if the level of skill required to perform a specific task had been watered down by technical advances, this does not necessarily mean that the artisan's evaluation of his position within society was lowered. The skilled worker may have felt himself superior to the labourer because of the high status traditionally accorded the craftsman.

Concerning the exclusiveness of the trade unions Pelling also notes that it was the comprehensive unions in mining and cotton which provided the backbone of the Trades Union Congress and that the new unions of the unskilled workers found entry into the Trades Union Congress relatively easy in the late nineteenth century.[36] This was also true of the co-operative societies which tended to be concentrated in Lancashire "where the typical worker was not an artisan but a factory worker."[37]

Though Pelling attacks Hobsbawm primarily on the issue of the size and exclusiveness of the labour aristocracy, he also makes a few impressionistic observations on the politics of the aristocracy. Pelling, hav-

that his description of conditions in York "might be taken as fairly representative of the conditions existing in many, if not most, of our provincial towns," and throughout the narrative he introduces comparative data on other towns. *Ibid.*, pp. xvii-xviii.

33 PELLING, *Popular Politics*, p. 42.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 47.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 51.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 56.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

ing noted that one essential feature of the Marxist use of the aristocracy of labour concept is the argument that this small élite of the working class was conservative and that it succeeded in imposing its conservatism on the rest of the working class, argues that this aristocracy was usually more radical than the mass of workers. Pelling cites H. Mayhew's observation:

> The artisans are almost to a man red-hot politicians....The unskilled labourers are a different class of people. As yet they are as unpolitical as footmen, and instead of entertaining violent democratic opinions, they appear to have no political opinions whatever; or if they do possess any, they rather tend towards the maintenance of "things as they are" than towards the ascendency of the working people.[38]

Pelling argues that the Independent Labour Party received most of its support from "those who were distinctly above the level of ordinary unskilled labour."[39] This may be true of the leadership of the Independent Labour Party, but Pelling will have to present more precise evidence if the generalization is to be accepted for working class support as a whole. Nevertheless, Pelling calls into question the hypothesis that the aristocracy was the most conservative portion of the working class. Though he certainly has not proven that it was the most radical portion, his impressionistic evidence warns us against the assumptions of the aristocracy of labour thesis.

V

As neither Hobsbawm nor Pelling has presented satisfactory arguments, the debate on the aristocracy of labour is unresolved. It seems that conclusive evidence is simply lacking despite the prevalent use of the concept by labour historians of Britain and other western countries.

The working class in the late nineteenth century was certainly not a monolithic group within society. Divisions existed between skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers particularly in terms of income, although the differences probably were not as drastic as Hobsbawm asserts. It is not clear whether the divisions within the working class were sociologically more important than the division between manual and non-manual workers. Evidence for the merging of the aristocracy of labour with the middle class does not lend itself to precise analysis. There is no evidence to indicate that the labour aristocracy saw itself as part of the middle class or that the middle class accepted the aristocracy as a *bona fide* member of that class. "Respectability" cannot be used as a yardstick to measure middle class identification because "respectable" and "middle class" are not synonymous. Equally questionable are the assumptions that a rise in in-

[38] Henry MAYHEW, *London Labour and the London Poor*, Vol. III, p. 233, cited in PELLING, *Popular Politics*, p. 57.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 58.

come leads to conservatism and that the aristocracy of labour was more conservative than the mass of the proletariat.

Some insights into the nature of the problem can be received by a study of a related debate among sociologists. The arguments advanced by proponents of what is called embourgeoisement are remarkably similar to those of the aristocracy of labour. The theory of embourgeoisement was developed in the late 1950's and early 1960's. The theory was designed to explain the relative decline in class antagonism which supposedly accompanied the development of what J. K. Galbraith has called the affluent society. Proponents of embourgeoisement have assumed that the social effects of affluence are distinctively contemporary social phenomena. It has already been noted that Engels in 1858 described the embourgeoisement of the working class; when an analysis of the modern varient is made, it is soon clear that, contrary to the claims of its proponents, there is nothing new in the theory.

Like the aristocracy of labour thesis, embourgeoisement rests on the assumption that increases in the standard of living necessarily lead to conservatism in political and social values. It is argued that as the income differentials between the upper levels of the working class and the lower levels of the middle class disappear, the working class is converted to middle class values and aspirations. As a result proponents of embourgeoisement focus their attention upon the new middle-class ethos of affluent workers. A corollary of the argument is that the skilled workers, the labour aristocracy, have become middle class and that the major class division in society lies between the skilled and the semi-skilled rather than between the manual and non-manual workers.

VI

The first step in the development of the embourgeoisement thesis was the observation that wage differentials between manual and non-manual occupations were narrowing. Kurt B. Mayer in the United States noted in 1956 that the wage differential had not only narrowed but had disappeared. Mayer argues that "The 'proletarian' wage earners are becoming homogeneous with the white collar workers and are joining the middle class. If these trends continue, and there is no reason to assume otherwise at the present time, the class structure of American society will once again become predominantly middle class in the near future."[40] On the basis of this income overlap between the skilled manual workers and the non-manual middle class, Mayer concludes that "the line which sets off the 'aristocracy of skilled labor' from the bulk of semiskilled and unskilled

[40] Kurt B. MAYER, "Recent Changes in the Class Structure of the United States," *Transactions of the Third World Congress of Sociology*, Vol. III (London: 1956), p. 78.

manual labourers is more significant sociologically than the dividing line between skilled craftsmen and lower middle class white collar workers which has become increasingly blurred in recent years."[41] Mayer sees this blurring of the class lines in terms of income directly paralleled by the acquisition of middle-class values such as the desire for real property, consumer goods and upward mobility.[42]

One of the most complete expositions of the theory of embourgeoisement is found in Ferdynand Zweig's study of the British working class, *The Worker in an Affluent Society*, which appeared in 1961. Zweig maintains that "Working-class life finds itself on the move towards new middle-class values and middle-class existence....The change can only be described as a deep transformation of values, as the development of new ways of thinking and feeling, a new ethos, new aspirations and cravings."[43] As an example of this change Zweig notes a shop-steward who had moved into his own home and who commented that "in the previous house the front door was never meant to be used; we had a settee across it. Everyone, including the postman, called at the back door. Now it is different. We've moved to the front."[44] For Zweig, moving to the front is full of deeper meanings and demonstrates a distinct change in values—moving to the front "stands for the shedding of the sense of inferiority of the old-fashioned workman."[45]

Similarly Zweig notes that in three-quarters of his sample the husband-wife relationship was described as one of equality and concludes that this, too, is evidence of a change towards middle-class values in the home.[46] Zweig asserts that there was a general decline in domestic "authoritarian behaviour" on the part of the workers.[47] But by far the

[41] Kurt B. MAYER, *Class and Society*, Revised Edition (New York: 1967), pp. 41-42. Mayer's use of the term "aristocracy of skilled labor" is interesting since he is in fact denying the historical legitimacy of the term as used by Hobsbawm and others. As has been noted the concept implies that the skilled worker had already merged with the lower middle class. To accept the concept of the aristocracy of labour is to argue that no change has occurred recently in the lines of social demarcation.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 47.

[43] Ferdynand ZWEIG, *The Worker in an Affluent Society: Family Life and Industry* (London: 1961), p. ix.

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

[46] *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

[47] The concept of working class authoritarianism comes originally from S. M. LIPSET, *Political Man* (Garden City, New Jersey: 1959), Chapter IV. The hypothesis has been strongly criticized by a number of sociologists including S. M. MILLER and Frank RIESSMAN, "Working-Class Authoritarianism: A Critique of Lipset," *British Journal of Sociology*, XII (September, 1961), pp. 263-276, and Richard F. HAMILTON, *Affluence and the French Worker in the Fourth Republic* (Princeton, New Jersey: 1967), Chapter III, and *Class and Politics in the United States* (New York: 1972), Chapter XII. The concept of working class authoritarianism remains prevalent in both the sociological and historical literature on the working class, despite the solid evidence leveled against it.

most important middle-class value supposedly picked up by the new affluent worker was "home-centredness' which was accompanied by consumption of domestic goods. According to Zweig "most of the spare money of these people is spent on the home, which assumes a possibly romanticized image of refuge, giving delight as well as status." [48]

Zweig's analysis is filled with *a priori* assumptions about the traditional worker; the data which he presents concerning the new middle-class worker is impressionistic and superficially handled. For instance Zweig's assertion that the marriage relationship of today's worker represents a change in values rests upon the unsubstantiated assumption that traditional working-class marriages are unequal while middle-class marriages are equal. Even if we accept Zweig's contention that the contemporary worker's description of the husband-wife realtionship represents a change, it is still a moot question whether or not the relationship itself has changed or that it is equal. Moreover, Zweig's belief that equality exists between middle-class husbands and wives appears untenable.

Zweig also implies that in the past the worker ignored the home. In this context it is important to note the "home-centredness" of the nineteenth-century American worker. Stephan Thernstrom, in his study of social mobility in nineteenth-century Newburyport, Massachusetts, notes the critically important role which "property mobility" played in the lives of working people. He insists that the accumulation of property "was not merely a possibility; it was a strong probability." [49] For the worker the purchase of property "required immense sacrifices — sacrifices so great as almost to blur the dichotomy between 'property' and 'poverty'." [50] Given Thernstrom's evidence of the priorities placed upon home ownership by American workingmen, it might be more appropriate to argue that the "home-centredness" described by Zweig simply represents an increase in the worker's standard of living — rather than a change in values, we have a change in opportunities.

Zweig concludes his book by summing up the various aspects of what he calls the "new ethos" of the working class. The new affluent worker is noted for his security-mindedness, particularly in terms of employment, and he now has a "recognized niche and social position." There has been a sharp rise in his acquisitive instincts. He has developed a new "home-centredness" and a "family-mindedness." This in turn has led to an in-

[48] ZWEIG, *The Worker in an Affluent Society*, p. 10.

[49] Stephen THERNSTROM, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge: 1964), p. 118. It should be added that Thernstrom shows that the semi-skilled and unskilled workers enjoyed property mobility. The skilled worker enjoyed occupational mobility.

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 137.

terest in his off-spring and "the bullying father or the father whose authority was used as a bogey has largely disappeared, and instead an older brother relationship comes to the fore." The traditional "hard-working, hard swearing and hard-playing" worker with his "rugged and rough" manners has now been domesticated. There is more individualism but the worker is less gregarious. Finally, the "class divisions are no longer marked out by hostility and segregation" but rather by a "quest for respectability." [51]

One other point which should be noted is Zweig's location of the source of this new middle "classness" of the British worker. The initiative in this social restructuring of Britain did not come from the worker, nor from the unions, nor even from the middle class, but rather from the employing class. According to Zweig

> It took the employer a long time to imbue the worker with his own values and to turn him into a full and willing partner in the acquisitive society, but he has finally succeeded, and the results seem to reinforce the working and the fabric of the society and to make it more secure from inside. The acquisitive society has succeeded in expanding its frontiers and converting its natural antagonist to its own creed.[52]

It has also been argued by some political observers, particularly C. A. R. Crosland, that the embourgeoisement of the working class in terms of income and values has had a direct impact upon the nature of working class politics. Following the Conservative Party's electoral victory in 1959, Crosland employed the embourgeoisement thesis to explain Labour's failure. According to Crosland, affluence worked against parties like the British Labour Party which "are identified in the public mind with a sectional, traditional, class appeal." [53] He added that "the lines of class-division are... more blurred than they were a century ago," and that "economic prosperity and social security have softened the acerbities of political conflict." [54] Crosland concluded that if socialism and the Labour Party are to have a future, the party must adopt a " 'revisionist' line and drop its commitment to nationalization and 'class struggle' " in order to attract the votes of the middle class. [55]

[51] ZWEIG, *The Worker in an Affluent Society*, pp. 205-212.

[52] *Ibid.*, pp. 211-212. The idea that the worker, before his conversion, was the natural enemy of the "acquisitive society" is remarkably superficial. This implies an asceticism on the part of the working class. Workers for years have done without many of the necessities as well as most of the luxuries of life but Zweig would do well to realize that workers did not choose poverty because they preferred to do without.

[53] C. A. R. CROSLAND, "The Future of the Left," *Encounter*, XIV (March, 1960), p. 5.

[54] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

VII

The similarities between the analysis of the aristocracy of labour and the embourgeoisement of the working class are remarkable. But it is ironic to note that while Marxist historians are the architects of the aristocracy of labour thesis, Marxist sociologists lead the attack on the theory of embourgeoisement.

During the early 1960's criticisms leveled against the embourgeoisement theory resulted in certain modifications of the thesis. Mark Abrams, for instance, offered limited support for the thesis by arguing that despite affluence only a portion of the affluent working class voted conservative. Abrams concluded that the real problem facing the Labour Party was the "bifurcation of the prosperous working class." [56] Similarly Gerald Handel and Lee Rainwater in the United States found only limited evidence of embourgeoisement. They noted that many of the similarities in behaviour and attitudes, such as the desire for higher education, are superficial. They demonstrate that although both the working class and the middle class desire higher education for their children, the content of this desire is markedly different — the worker seeing education as job training, the middle class emphasizing status. However, there is, according to Handel and Rainwater, an overlapping of values in terms of family life; the worker has turned his back on the traditional working-class extended family and has converted to the middle-class nuclear family. [57]

The criticisms put forward by Abrams and Handel and Rainwater modify but do not significantly alter the assumptions upon which the embourgeoisement thesis is argued. By the mid-1960's, however, much more sweeping criticisms of embourgeoisement began to surface. Taken together these criticisms, based upon a wealth of new evidence, undermine completely the embourgeoisement thesis.

The argument that the wage differential between the upper level of the working class and the lower middle class in the United States is disappearing has been challenged by Richard F. Hamilton. Though it is true that some skilled manual workers report higher incomes than the lowest ranks of the non-manual workers, this fact masks the continuing differences in wages for several reasons. First, there is a disproportionate number of women in the lowest non-manual groups — sales and clerical workers — and the overlapping wages are thus the result of sex discrimination in hiring and wage practice rather than a blurring of class

[56] Mark ABRAMS, "The Future of the Left: New Roots of Working-Class Conservatism," *Encounter*, XIV (May, 1960), p. 58. Of the prosperous working class, 29 per cent would vote Conservative according to a 1959 opinion poll.

[57] Gerald HANDEL and Lee RAINWATER, "Persistence and Change in Working-Class Life Style," in Arthur B. SHOSTAK and William GOMBERG, ed., *Blue-Collar World: Studies of the American Worker* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: 1964), pp. 38-41.

lines.[58] Again the overlap in wages obscures the marked differences in the career patterns of manual and non-manual workers. The highest paid manual worker is usually at the apex of his career while the lower non-manual worker is only beginning his career; he enjoys reasonable prospects for future advancement which the manual worker does not have.[59] Lastly the Department of Labor figures in the United States include foremen in the manual group. Since foremen are paid significantly higher wages than other manual workers and since they perform non-manuals tasks, their inclusion in the manual group is questionable as well as misleading.[60] Once the data are controlled for sex and age the reversal in income disappears.[61]

In another essay Hamilton looks specifically at the high income skilled groups and again finds no support for the embourgeoisement thesis. He notes that the skilled groups make less than white-collar workers and when controlled for income "the best-off skilled [workers] tend to show the most pronounced working-class pattern."[62] Hamilton argues that the limited number of "Tory workers" can easily be explained by downward mobility.[63] If home ownership is to be used as a criterion, Hamilton points out that ownership is *not* a middle-class phenomenon; skilled workers show a much higher degree of ownership than the lower middle class. If a comparison is to be made, the parallel would be between the working class and managerial groups.[64]

Concerning the British case, John H. Goldthorpe, David Lorkwood, Frank Bechhofer and Jennifer Platt come to similar conclusions in what proves to be the most sweeping critique of embourgeoisement to date. They fault the thesis first for its imprecision. Embourgeoisement does not state exactly what patterns of social stratification are changing and the

[58] Richard F. HAMILTON, "The Income Differences Between Skilled and White Collar Workers," *British Journal of Sociology*, XIV (December, 1963), p. 365.

[59] *Ibid.*, p. 365.

[60] *Ibid.*, p. 368.

[61] Gavin Mackenzie, testing some of Hamilton's arguments and concentrating on the age factor, comes to slightly different conclusions. Gavin MACKENZIE, "The Economic Dimensions of Embourgeoisement," *British Journal of Sociology*, XVIII (March, 1967), pp. 29-44. Mackenzie does introduce an interesting argument when he notes that the introduction of middle class values into the working class does not result from an increase in affluence but rather enters the working-class family via the influence of the wife. See p. 39. The hypothesis that women are more status conscious than men, however, is questionable. If the hypothesis is to be accepted we should find a much higher percentage of women subjectively identifying with the middle class than men but as W. G. Runicman shows, this is not the case. See Eric A. NORDLINGER, *The Working-Class Tories: Authority, Deference and Stable Democracy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: 1967), p. 168.

[62] Richard F. HAMILTON, "The Behaviour and Values of Skilled Workers," in Shostak and Gomberg, ed., *Blue-Collar World*, p. 54.

[63] *Ibid.*, p. 55.

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 52.

thesis fails to distinguish between income and social outlook and social norms. Embourgeoisement has placed too much emphasis on income comparability between white-collar and manual workers, thus ignoring "the fact that the two categories remain much more clearly differentiated when their members are considered *as producers.*"[65] Proponents of the thesis have failed to show whether or not the manual workers are considered as equals by the middle class or if they are accepted into distinctively middle-class status organizations. Proponents have been too eager to consider the new home-centredness of the worker as a shift to middle-class values and they have failed to show that the workers "actually aspire" to middle class social acceptance.[66]

To test the embourgeoisement thesis Goldthorpe and his associates chose to study an area where embourgeoisement was most likely to have occurred — the affluent town of Luton, Bedfordshire.[67] They investigated three aspects of working class life which were supposed to be affected by the shift to middle class values — work, patterns of sociability and aspirations and social perspectives.[68] They conclude their study by stating that

> In the case of the workers we studied there remain important areas of common social experience which are still fairly distinctively working-class; that specifically middle-class social norms are not widely followed nor middle-class life-styles consciously emulated; and that assimilation into middle-class society is neither in process nor, in the main, a desired objective... our evidence is sufficient to show how the thesis can in fact break down fairly decisively at any one of several points.[69]

Proponents of the thesis of embourgeoisement have been guilty of making too many superficial assumptions concerning the trends in working-class life. Of particular note is the emphasis placed on consumer goods. As Goldthorpe and his associates point out the purchase of a washing machine or any other durable product in itself implies nothing about class values. Similarly Eric A. Nordlinger argues that consumer goods "may be bought to make life easier and more pleasurable, not to imitate a higher status."[70]

In the case of other western countries we find that the embourgeoisement thesis has been tested and again found wanting. In the case of West Germany, Hamilton finds that

[65] John H. GOLDTHORPE, David LOCKWOOD, Frank BECHHOFER and Jennifer PLATT, *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure* (Cambridge: 1969), p. 24.

[66] See *ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

[67] For an analysis of why Luton was chosen see *ibid.*, chapter II. p. 30f.

[68] A separate chapter is devoted to each aspect of the problem. See *ibid.*: Chapter III-V.

[69] *Ibid.*, p. 157.

[70] NORDLINGER, *The Working-Class Tories*, p. 165.

> Contrary to theories in West Germany and other western societies about a blurring of class lines, the evidence shows a substantial income gap between manual and non-manual categories, no perception of trends toward equality seen by the respondents, and an increase in the differences in consumer-good ownership. At equivalent income levels the workers' consumer behaviour and political choices match the behaviours of less-well-off workers rather than those of the middle class.[71]

Hamilton comes to similar conclusions in his studies of French workers under the Fourth Republic.[72]

The most important aspect of the embourgeoisement thesis still to be considered is the theoretical connection between rising income and increasing political conservatism. Mayer, contrary to the expectations of the embourgeoisement thesis, has discovered that in 1945 in the United States the workers most favourable to an increase in working-class power in government were the semi-skilled followed closely by the skilled. White-collar groups were significantly less favourable to the proposal; hence a primary political division continued to exist between manual and non-manual workers with the "aristocracy of labour" being more "radical" than unskilled workers.[73] In the West German case, Hamilton notes that "achievement of a 'middle-class' income level does not lead to political conservatism." He goes on to observe that "In fact, the political differences between the classes are greater at this high income level."[74] S. M. Miller and Frank Riessman, commenting on Arthur Kornhouser, Harold Shepard and Albert Mayer's study of automobile workers (*When Labor Votes*), point out that these "most highly skilled, best paid and best educated workers" — workers most like the middle class economically and socially — were "the most pro-union, the most likely to participate actively in the union, the most likely to vote Democratic and the most likely to think in liberal terms. If one were to develop a scale of class-consciousness, this group would be the closest to the fully class-conscious pole."[75] In Italy, where the Communist Party is strong, Lawrence E. Hazelrigg notes that "class differences are a major stimulus to the formation of political divisions."[76] The same is true in France, another country where the Communist Party remains strong despite affluence. Hamilton shows that in France the high income workers tend to be the most actively involved in the Communist C.G.T. and that while unskilled workers

[71] Richard F. HAMILTON, "Affluence and the Worker: The West German Case," *American Journal of Sociology*, LXXI (September, 1965), p. 144.

[72] HAMILTON, *Affluence and the French Worker.*

[73] MAYER, *Class and Society*, p. 62.

[74] HAMILTON, "Affluence and the Worker: The West German Case," p. 151.

[75] S. M. MILLER and Frank REISSMAN, "Are Workers Middle Class?" *Dissent*, VIII (Autumn, 1961), pp. 511-512.

[76] Lawrence E. HAZELRIGG, "Religious and Class Bases of Political Conflict in Italy," *American Journal of Sociology*, LXXV (January, 1970), p. 501.

prove to be more radical than skilled workers this is not due to income differences but to other factors such as geographical mobility patterns.[77] Hamilton concludes that affluence, rather than weakening the Communists, has the effect of creating "well-off Communists."[78]

One aspect of embourgeoisement which has not received the attention which it deserves is the question of "Tory" workers. Hamilton suggests that the presence of Tories within the working class can be explained by downward mobility patterns and his position is supported by S. M. Lipset and Reinhard Bendix.[79] Yet downward mobility, important as it undoubtedly is, cannot alone explain the political behaviour of the minority of workers which votes for conservative parties. In this connection Eric A. Nordlinger's study of British working class Tories is of interest.[80]

Although Nordlinger is primarily interested in developing a theory of "stable democracy" he nonetheless offers data which suggest that affluence does not lead to Conservative voting or to identification with the middle class. Nordlinger shows that a close correlation exists between subjective identification with the middle class and Conservative voting — 53 per cent of the workers who described themselves as middle class vote Conservative while only 29 per cent of the working-class identifiers vote for that party.[81] Yet middle-class identification does not result from either affluence or status strivings.

Nordlinger argues that if middle-class identifiers actually aspired to *bona fide* membership in the middle class this would be reflected in attitudes concerning status. The data, however, do not show this to be the case. Concerning education the respondents were asked if they would have stayed in school longer if given another chance; no significant difference emerged between middle-class identifiers and the rest of the working class.[82] Nordlinger points out that this finding is supported by the work of

[77] HAMILTON, *Affluence and the French Worker*, pp. 130-131, 134. Where unskilled workers were more radical it was found that they were recent arrivals from rural areas which had long traditions of agrarian radicalism.

[78] *Ibid.*, p. 185.

[79] S. M. Miller has pointed out that *"downward movement is a more compelling fact about mobility than upward."* S. M. MILLER, "Comparative Social Mobility," *Current Sociology*, IX (Winter, 1960), p. 34. Italics are Miller's. S. M. Lipset and Reinhard Bendix show that upwardly mobile workers tend to adopt the conservative attitudes of the host class while those who are "reduced to working class status... remain adherents of conservative movements." S. M. LIPSET and Reinhard BENDIX, *Social Mobility in Industrial Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: 1967), pp. 70-71.

[80] Nordlinger points out that in Britain, a country in which two-thirds of the population is working class, one-third of that class votes Conservative and that the working class provides nearly half of the Conservative Party's electoral strength. NORDLINGER, *The Working-Class Tories*, p. 13. Also see Mark ABRAMS, "Social Class and British Politics," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, XXV (Fall, 1961), p. 343.

[81] NORDLINGER, *The Working-Class Tories*, p. 163.

[82] *Ibid.*, p. 167.

F. M. Martin. Martin's data show that when asked until what age their children should continue their education, "middle class" workers' and working-class mean responses were virtually identical: 16.7 and 16.6 years respectively.[83]

Similarly no significant differences appeared between middle-class identifiers and the working class in terms of status aspirations. When asked if they would prefer their son to become friends with a cabinet maker's son or a bank clerk's son, 6 per cent of the working class responded that they preferred the bank clerk's son as compared to 7 per cent among middle-class identifiers.[84] Although many more workers hoped to see their children occupationally mobile there was only a 2 percent difference between working-class and middle-class identifiers, and Nordlinger insists "that only a small percentage of workers are concerned with the social status aspect of middle-class membership for their children."[85]

Concerning affluence, Nordlinger asserts that there does exist an income overlap between the manual and non-manual workers but he shows that Tory voting does not increase with income. In fact Nordlinger's data show the reverse relationship—30 per cent of the workers above the average income voted Conservative as compared to 39 per cent below the average.[86] Affluence alone cannot explain the presence of Tory workers. More important as a variable is economic "satisfaction" which operates independently of relative affluence. Nordlinger points out that Labour Party supporters consistently have higher economic expectations which remain unfulfilled. His data show that the rate of Conservative voting increases from 26 per cent among workers who were unsatisfied with their economic position to 34 per cent among the partially satisfied and 40 per cent among the satisfied workers.[87] Satisfaction also leads to middle-class identification.[88]

Goldthorpe and his associates forward a quite different argument to explain the Labour Party's loss of support during the 1950's and again in the 1970 election. They point to the critical role which political leadership plays and the influence of the embourgeoisement thesis on the politics of the Labour Party. As noted earlier in the paper, intellectuals like Crosland

[83] F. M. MARTIN, "Some Subjective Aspects of Social Stratification," in D. V. GLASS, ed., *Social Mobility in Britain* (London: 1954), p. 68. Both the professional and the salaried middle class thought children should remain in school longer.

[84] NORDLINGER, *The Working-Class Tories*, p. 167. It should be noted that only six per cent of the entire sample preferred the cabinet maker's son. The vast majority responded either "don't" or both were equally preferable, p. 183.

[85] *Ibid.*, p. 168.

[86] *Ibid.*, pp. 169-170.

[87] *Ibid.*, pp. 170-171.

[88] *Ibid.*, p. 172.

accepted the legitimacy of the embourgeoisement thesis and called upon the Labour Party to adopt a "revisionist" position.[89] This was done following Labour's marginal victory in 1964 and its more substantive victory in 1966. Following the 1966 election the Labour government adopted prices and incomes and labour relations policies which were not favourable to the working class. As early as 1967 opinion polls indicated that working-class sentiment was shifting away from the Labour Party. Goldthorpe and his associates argue that the thesis of embourgeoisement thus became a self-fulfilling prophecy. In their book they accurately forecast the defeat of the Labour Party in 1970.[90] They advance the argument that the Labour Party lost working-class support because it turned its back on labour. In Britain the Labour Party rather than the working class became bourgeois during the 1960's and the working class failed to support the party for precisely this reason.

VIII

The weakness of both the aristocracy of labour and the embourgeoisement theories is that their proponents have been too quick to generalize from data which they have collected. Hobsbawm, with hindsight, is aware that the British working class did not develop a clearly radical or revolutionary movement. He believes that the working class should have developed in a radical direction and he searches for the source of this assumed social anomaly. Hobsbawm finds that the trade union movement did share some of the values of the middle class and observes that the workers involved in the trade union movement enjoyed more economic security than other workers. From these valid observations Hobsbawm then concludes that the unionized workers were conservative because of their higher incomes and that they held back the development of radicalism within the working class.

In the same way liberal sociologists observe that the standard of living enjoyed by most workers has risen markedly since the last war and they argue that overt class conflict is not readily apparent in most western countries. They then conclude that class in the Marxist sense does not correspond to the reality and should be dismissed as an analytic tool in the study of society. Critics of embourgeoisement point out that manual workers continue to form a distinct social group within the larger society in terms of jobs as well as income and to a lesser extent in terms of values.

To date the aristocracy of labour thesis has not been either proved or disproved. The thesis, however, is based upon certain assumptions which

[89] See above p. 19.

[90] GOLDTHORPE et al., *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure*, pp. 191-192. The same point is made by HAMILTON, *Affluence and the French Worker*, p. 292.

it shares with the embourgeoisement thesis: that skilled workers earned wages which were high enough to allow them to enjoy a middle-class standard of living; that this in turn led to the merging of the skilled aristocracy with the middle class; and that, as a result, the labour aristocracy absorbed the more conservative political attitudes of the middle class. The critics of embourgeoisement have shown that these assumptions are untenable in contemporary western societies. By implication the thesis of the aristocracy of labour is based upon unfounded theoretical premises and should therefore be rejected as a working hypothesis when researching the history of the working class.

But the "problem" of the supposed lack of overt conflict remains. During periods of relative social calm most societies are characterized by a cohesion based upon a widespread sharing of fundamental values. But social cohesion must not be allowed to obscure the class divisions which continue to exist.[91] These divisions periodically can, and do, emerge into overt conflict. For example we have the trade union movement. Though it is clear that, at least in North America, the trade unions are neither revolutionary nor radical they continue to function as vehicles of working-class action and they articulate to some extent the aspirations of wage workers. The classic form of overt conflict, the strike, has become institutionalized and chanelled along safe avenues, yet strikes do occur. Indeed it is possible to argue that overt conflict has been recognized as a normal social occurrence. This point is easily forgotten during quiescent periods. In Canada we have the example of the wave of strikes which swept the country during 1965-1966. At the time many observers, believing in the embourgeoisement theory, considered this wave of strikes as somehow peculiar and inexplicable. Other observers, Stuart Jamieson in particular, point out that the strikes of 1965-1966 were not unique at all but rather were consistent with the traditional pattern of Canadian labour conflict.[92]

Similarly we can see in the recent events in Britain confirmation that British society continues to be characterized by a high degree of class

[91] In this context the theory of hegemony developed by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci proves useful. Gramsci distinguishes between the coercive power of the state and the directing power of civil institutions. It is the directing power which he calls "hegemony" and he insists that hegemony is the normal form of social control. Gramsci argues that during normal periods the working class, as a subordinate class within society, "borrows" the ideas of the dominant class "and asserts this borrowed world view in words" but Gramsci adds that "in action a contradictory world view is manifest." *The Open Marxism of Antonio Gramsci*, translated and annotated by Carl MARZANI (New York: 1957), p. 21. Also see Gwyn A. WILLIAMS, "The Concept of 'egemonia' in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci: Some Notes on Interpretation," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XXI (October-December, 1960), pp. 586-599, and John M. CAMMETT, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism* (Stanford: 1967), pp. 204-206.

[92] Stuart Marshall JAMIESON, Privy Council, Task Force on Labour Relations, Study No. 22, *Times of Trouble: Labour Unrest and Industrial Conflict in Canada, 1900-1966* (Ottawa: 1968), pp. 2-4.

polarization. From its election in 1970 the Heath government pursued a policy antagonistic to organized labour. The conflict became most acute in the coal industry where the miners openly challenged the government's wage policy. Superimposed upon this conflict was the industrial crisis which worsened considerably during the winter of 1973-1974. Early in the new year Heath threw down the gauntlet to the labour movement by calling an election. Although the old Wilson government had failed to implement working-class policies during the late 1960's, workers rallied to the party and Labour emerged from the election with a minority government.