

Developments in Marxist Class Analysis

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Introduction

During the efflorescence of Marxist theory during the 1960s and 1970s, class analysis emerged as one of the central objects of debate and discussion. Those years were among the most fecund in the twentieth century for the development of scholarship around class issues. It was certainly the only time in Western academia that the concept came to occupy a central place across the disciplinary divide. This was a direct expression of the growth of interest in Marxism among a new generation of students coming out of the many social movements of the 1960s. As student interest in exploring Marxism exploded across the academic spectrum, so did an interest in the concept most centrally associated with that tradition. By the 1990s, this interest had either ebbed significantly, or had transmuted into a shift away from the Marxist variant of class analysis, toward more fashionable avatars steeped in cultural and discursive commitments. To the extent that an interest in class analysis, of a recognisably Marxist kind, can be found in Anglo-American academia, it exists in somewhat small and isolated pockets. Perhaps the one discipline where scholarship concerned with

class has maintained a significant foothold is in Sociology, though here too, it is nowhere near as popular as it was a generation ago.

We will examine developments in class analysis along three dimensions central to its deployment as an analytical and political category: class structure, the labour process, and class formation/class struggle. *Class structure* refers to the location of social agents in the basic property relations, or production relations of an economic system. The *labour process* refers to the organisation of production, in which is produced the surplus that the dominant class appropriates from the direct producers. *Class formation* refers to the process through which agents located in differed classes organised around their interests. *Class struggle* is what happens when agents engage in the contentious pursuit of their interests.

Class structure

The concept of class structure has always been at the very heart of Marxist theory. Even though Marx was not alone in seeing class as critical to the basic dynamic of capitalism, he is the only modern thinker to build his social theory around the concept. It is therefore somewhat surprising that careful interrogations of its basic properties and its internal coherence as a concept were hard to find among twentieth-century Marxists before the New Left. Debates at the time of the Second and Third Internationals revolved far more tightly around empirical and political issues. The concern with unpacking what class denotes, at a fairly high level of generality, was simply not very visible among Lenin's contemporaries. Its prominence among late twentieth-century theorists is undoubtedly a product of their environment: the fact that they were typically housed in universities, where the mainstream opinion regarding class concepts ranged from scepticism to outright hostility. The development of class theory in this setting required a simultaneous clarification and defense of the concept against its critics.

In this newer generation of theorists, there is little doubt that the most significant stream of work has been produced by the American sociologist, Erik Olin Wright. Starting with the publication of *Class, Crisis, and the State* in 1978, Wright has produced a steady outpouring of scholarship on the logic of class as a concept, as well as an extremely ambitious cross-national survey of class structure. The project has been remarkable not only for its ambition, but for

the stamina with which Wright has stuck to a consistent research agenda. The central elements of this project have been two closely related questions: first, what the properties of class structure are at the highest level of abstraction, and second, how it can be concretised in a fashion that is both empirically adequate – so it captures the most important observable tendencies in the contemporary setting – and theoretically consistent – so theoretical adjustments to empirical findings are not in tension with the abstract definitions of the concept.

The basic class concept

At the highest level of abstraction, class structures are defined by the distribution of the means of production – the productive assets – in a society. The degree of control that agents exercise over the means of production determines the range of strategies they available to reproduce themselves. Consider the difference between the following scenarios: one in which an agent has no productive assets at all, leaving him with just his physical powers, and another in which the agent owns a plot of land, or directly produces some commodities that can be sold on the market. The first case will have little choice but to find some way of earning money, typically by offering to work for someone else; the second, because of his ownership of productive property, has the option of escaping the burden of working for someone else. Different ownership situations bring about quite dissimilar sets of choices. As Wright summarises this principle, 'what you *have* determines what you *have to do*' to make a living.

It is important to note that property relations do not automatically generate class relations. They do so only when they assign power over assets *unequally*, so that one group of agents can enforce claims on the productive activities of another. When the former group can actually live on the claims it makes on the labour of the latter, Marxists regard it as a relation of exploitation, and hence, a class relation. The *fact* that productive assets are distributed *unequally* means that one class *can* exploit another; the precise *enumeration* of those rights will determine *how* the one class exploits the other. So, for example, the fact that rural landlords under feudalism enjoy superior but not absolute rights over land means that they can claim some of their tenants' labour as rent; but because their claims are not absolute, and peasants also have partial

rights to the land through custom, lords must wield the threat of physical force to realise their claims. In capitalism, by contrast, the exploiting class does not have to rely centrally on a direct use of coercion to extract labour. The fact that one group has no direct access to productive assets means that the only reasonable option open to them for survival is to hire themselves out to others for work, in exchange for money; for this, they actively seek out those in society who do possess productive assets. Thus, there is an extraction of labour effort in both feudalism and capitalism. But whereas in feudalism, it is the exploiter who must seek out the exploited, in capitalism it is the other way around. And whereas in feudalism, the exploiter must rely on the use of force – or the threat of force – in capitalism, the labouring class has no choice but to offer itself up for exploiting. As Marx observed, the 'dull compulsion of economic relations' replaces the interpersonal coercion of feudal times.

The preceding discussion carries two central implications. The first comes from exploitation being central to class. Exploitation occurs when one group lives of the labour of another, by either directly forcing work out of them, or by forcing them into a *situation* where they have to offer their work to the potential exploiters. The process of exploitation thus creates an interdependence between the two groups; but this interdependence is, at its very core, an antagonistic one. The fact that there is some measure of coercion involved in the process means that the exploited always resent their situation – hence the antagonism. But the dominant group must not only exercise power over the labouring group, it must also take some responsibility for the latter's wellbeing. Exploiters *need* the exploited. Class thus generates an antagonism, but it is one that must be contained so it can be reproduced. Classes constantly struggle against each other, but they also reproduce each other.

A second implication of the concept is that, since class structures set the strategies that agents must follow to reproduce themselves, qualitatively different class structures will generate very distinct patterns of social reproduction. This leads to a foundational principle for Marxist theory: societies with qualitatively different class structures ought to be seen as entirely different *social systems*, with entirely different logics of economic reproduction, different mechanisms for income distribution, and quite distinct aggregate development patterns. This is true at any given point in time: at any moment in history, regions with different basic class structures should be expected to exhibit very distinct systemic properties. But it is even more potent as an axis

for historical periodisation. In different historical epochs, social reproduction has been governed by very distinct class structures – different modes of production – which have generated recognisably different 'laws of motion', to use a favorite phrase of Marx. Hence, human history can be divided into distinct epochs, each characterised by its own basic class structure, and its own laws of motion. Class thus becomes not only a principle of differentiating between agents, or groups of agents, but also a means of differentiating historical epochs.

The past two decades or so have witnessed some very ambitious efforts to cash out this claim for class structures as markers of epochal breaks. In the classical schema proposed by Marx, Eurasian history could be broken into at least three distinct social formations, three epochs distinguished by their modes of production – classical antiquity, feudalism, and capitalism. Marx suggested that each of these had its own laws of motion, but, famously, he only made progress on elucidating the laws of capitalism. The older forms were left largely untouched, but for some very provocative observations. The most ambitious attempts by twentieth-century Marxists on this score came during the 1980s. For antiquity, we have Geoffrey de Ste Croix's monumental *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World*, which, despite its title, ranged all the way to the fall of Rome.¹ Ste Croix's work was not only recognised as an instant classic as a purely historical account; it was also hailed as one of the most theoretically sophisticated works of Marxist sociology, as it carefully showed just how the class relations of antiquity generated a particular development logic – distinct from the social systems that followed it historically. And around the same time, American historian Robert Brenner developed a highly influential analysis of medieval feudalism, showing with exemplary clarity just what the 'laws of motion' of the feudal economy were.² And, more importantly, he showed more clearly than any other Marxist before him, how feudalism exhibited entirely different economic dynamics than capitalism, based on the way that its class structure generated a distinct micro-logic for economic actors.³ By the 1990s, Marxist theory could justly claim to have come

¹ Ste Croix, 1981.

² Brenner 1976; Brenner 1982.

³ Brenner 1985.

some distance toward demonstrating Marx's basic intuition about relation between class and historical differentiation.

Dealing with Complexity

On the basic concept of class, as defined above, there was and remains a wide-ranging consensus among Marxists. Problems begin when we confront the reality of occupational structures in capitalism, which do not reflect the simple two-class schema laid out in the abstract conceptualisation. Most pointedly, there is a thick layer of positions which seem to fall somewhere in between the position of worker and capitalist. Developing a conceptual apparatus that incorporates this reality, in a way that is consistent with the more general criteria for class laid out above, has been an overriding concern of contemporary Marxists. If class is defined by coercive appropriation of labour effort, what is the class position of actors who are in the middle strata?

There have been two general responses to this challenge. One is to make the argument that many of the positions in the middle class are really just more complex forms of the basic class relations of exploiter and exploited. Hence, though these positions may seem to be neither capitalist nor worker, this is misleading. On closer inspection, they can be assimilated into this more basic structure, so that, for the most part, the basic two-class schema does end up mapping on to the empirical realities of capitalism.⁴ Another, more common response, has been to recognise that middle strata are irreducible to one of the two fundamental class positions. This is the approach favoured by Nicos Poulantzas, Guglielmo Carchedi, and Erik Olin Wright.⁵

Wright's arguments on this score have been the most influential, and are worth examining in more detail, since they have evolved over time. The basic idea to which he has remained committed is that occupations in the middle class are so defined because they simultaneously embody elements of both the workers and capitalists. So, whereas one solution is to insist that positions in between capitalist and worker are actually more complex forms of either one or the other, Wright proposes that they are simultaneously one *and* the other. Middle-class occupations thus combine aspects of the worker with aspects of

being a capitalist. The most obvious example is the 'owner-operator' in agriculture – the independent farmer – or the independent artisan in urban sectors. In both cases, the actor possesses the means of production like a capitalist does, but also has to directly put these implements to work as wage-labourers do. Hence, she has a managerial position, but she manages – herself. She works for a living, but she 'is her own boss', as the saying goes. More complex forms are supervisory positions within a firm, such as middle managers. In this case too, they embody aspects of the fundamental class positions. Managers directly control the labour of others in their supervisory capacity, as do capitalists; yet, they do not own the means of production. They are employed by capitalists, sometimes for a wage, and are working only at their employer's pleasure. In this respect, they are like workers. In both cases, the owner-operator and the middle manager, the class position has been described in a manner that is consistent with the more abstract definition – they are in the middle because they embody those elements that define a worker and a capitalist. Finally, because they objectively share in the properties of both classes, they have interests that are also pulled in both directions. Hence, Wright refers to them as 'contradictory class locations'. This is meant to capture the dictum that the middle class does not generate a political programme of its own, that its politics cannot be predicted outside of the political conjuncture. Since it is pulled both toward the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, which way it leans will depend on facts about the political scene.⁶

The labour process

The labour process occupies a central place in Marxist class theory, because of the underlying centrality of exploitation. This link is not a conceptual one: there is nothing in the concept of exploitation that necessarily leads to an examination of the labour process. The connection is based on an empirical fact about capitalism – that the pressure on capitalists to increase the rate of surplus extraction leads to an intensification of control and domination within the firm, at the level of the shop floor. In order to drive down costs to meet

⁶ Wright 1978, 1985, 1989, 1995. The broader conceptual apparatus in which this insight has been located has shifted over time for Wright. But the commitment to seeing the middle class as *sui generis*, and as comprised of conflicting elements, has remained steady.

⁴ Loren 1978; Fredman 1973.

⁵ Poulantzas 1978; Carchedi 1977; Wright 1978.

competitive pressures, capital is forced to constantly reorganise the internal division of labour, as it brings in new technology and new work relations. This is because, in capitalism, the labour process is actually organised by capital itself. Feudal class relations, in contrast, left the labour process largely in the hands of peasants. The intensity and the quality of work therefore remained out of the hands of the lordly surplus extractors. To secure an increase in the rate of surplus extraction, lords did not have the option of manipulating the actual organisation of work. They had to renegotiate the terms on which peasants handed them their seasonal harvest, or their labour services – which typically required threats and force. Thus, in the two systems, the use of interpersonal coercion occupies a very different place. Capitalists can rely on the worker's own circumstances to get her to commit to work; but once she comes to work, the pitch, intensity, and care of her work is undetermined. To affect these, managers take direct control over the labour process and exert control over its details – through dominating the worker. In feudalism, lords cannot rely on the peasants' circumstances to get them to work for the lord. Coercion is required for this very fact. Once they consent to give some of their labour to the lord, the actual process of work is left in their hands. The place of coercion is thus neatly reversed in feudalism and capitalism – located within the labour process in one, and outside it in the other.

Precisely because production is organised by capitalists and their lieutenants, they are forced to devise ways to better extract labour effort from their employees. And this, in turn, involves a reduction of the employees' autonomy on the shop floor, their subordination to ever-increasing and changing demands. The result is that the class antagonism at the macro level within capitalism is reproduced at the micro level, within the workplace, as employers and employees lock horns around the organisation of work. Class struggle within capitalism thus extends from the detailed organisation of work to the distribution of resources at the level of the social system as such.

The work that made this point most dramatically, showing with great drama and flair how capital extended its control over the labour process over the twentieth century, was Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, perhaps the most widely-read Marxist work of the 1970s.⁷ It had always been a staple of radical theory – Marxist as well as non-Marxist – that the employ-

⁷ Braverman 1974.

⁸ Womack et al. 1990.

ment relationship was a conflictual one. Braverman made this argument much more specific by zeroing in on the central instrument through which managers ensured their domination over labour: the drive to reduce worker's control over the labour process by deepening the division between mental and manual labour. This in turn was secured by an ongoing effort to reduce the level of skill associated with any particular job classification. The progressive deskilling of labour has two critical consequences favorable to capital: it removes the only leverage that workers possess as atomised sellers of labour-power – their possession of scarce skills; and it also reduces their ability to hinder management's dictation of the pace and intensity of work. Whereas craft production rests on the worker's possession of significant autonomy to set the pace of her own work, the usurpation of her knowledge of the production process makes possible the shift to industrial production – and the reduction of the worker to a mere appendage of the machines she is operating.

In Braverman's argument, management's drive to dominate workers on the shopfloor was built into capitalist production. Starting in the late 1980s, however, a stream of literature appeared that argued against any such determinism. Perhaps the most heralded of such work came from an MIT project to study the effect of changing technologies on industrial relations. In *The Machine that Changed the World*, James Womack, Daniel Jones and Daniel Roos suggested that new production designs and the increasing skill requirements in manufacturing had made possible a new era in industrial relations.⁸ In this new régime, shopfloor despotism was not only unnecessary, but counter-productive. In order to take advantage of the possibilities created by new technology, managers had to elicit the creative abilities of their employees and enter into a co-operative relation with them. Instead of the old, rigid system of production-line work associated with Fordism and Taylorism, you would now have groups of workers collected into small teams, which handled multiple tasks and poured their creative energies into solving problems – a system that became known as 'lean production'. The lines between managers and production line workers would have to be obliterated, and co-operation would replace conflict as the organising principle for production. The authors took their inspiration from a particular understanding of Japanese industrial

relations, and predicted that this nimble, synergistic approach would soon become the standard practice in American industrial production.

By the early 1990s, this line of research had produced a flood of literature expressing enthusiasm about the possibilities offered by this new approach, and recommending that the old industrial relations apparatus built up in the US over the past half-century – based on collective bargaining, union representation, and an assumption that the employment relation was an adversarial one – be dismantled and replaced by a new system premised on a mutuality of interests between labour and capital. It was especially popular among progressive scholars of labour and industrial relations. Apart from its empirical base, it drew upon a powerful sentiment among progressive intellectuals, to the effect that traditional Marxist approaches were too rigid in their understanding of capitalism, and too ‘objectivist’ about interests – there were no objective interests ‘out there’, to which politics had to be adjusted. Rather, interests were endogenous to institutional and organisational settings. It was thus mistaken to assume that the labour-capital conflict was built into the system because of their objective interests. There was every possibility, the argument went, that the two actors could coalesce around a joint project, which was positive-sum with regard to the outcome.

This line of analysis seemed to spell the death of Braverman’s influence. But almost immediately, a response was offered by some labour intellectuals that undercut the argument’s main elements. Interestingly, the first response did not come from within academia. It came from labour strategists and journalists, most notably Kim Moody, Mike Parker and Jane Slaughter. Associated with the Detroit-based labour publication *Labor Notes*, they showed in great detail that, far from opening a new era of industrial relations, lean production actually intensified the deskilling and the speed-up associated with Taylorism.⁹ Lean production was not much different from Taylorism in its aims, but it was much more skilled in its propaganda. Though it took academia some time to catch on, Parker and Slaughter were eventually followed by a rapid-fire release of critiques of lean production, buttressed with more evidence of the gap between rhetoric and reality. It was found that the new techniques, where employed, resulted more often than not in more speed-up, more stress, less autonomy, and more ‘bench-marking’ – pitting employees against one

another so that the fastest times became the norm to which all workers had to perform.¹⁰

In 1997, Ruth Milkman published one of the most detailed studies of lean production in *Farewell to the Factory: Auto Workers in the Late Twentieth Century*, and Kim Moody released his *Workers in Lean World*. While these books further undermined the case for jointness and the promise of the new work relations, they also marked, in retrospect, a surprisingly quick end to the debate. Whereas the scholarly enthusiasm for post-Fordism and lean production had been at an extraordinary high in the early nineties, it had largely dissipated by the end of the decade, perhaps under the weight of the mounting evidence compiled by its critics. This did not signal by any means a resurgence in Marxist approaches to industrial relations or a rejuvenation of Braverman’s line. The general turn away from traditional class analysis continued largely unabated, and has since. What it did signal was that, at least for the time being, one very ambitious challenge to Braverman’s conceptualisation of the labour process had lost steam. The fundamental conclusion of his work – that the relation between capital and labour is intrinsically antagonistic, and this antagonism is reproduced on the shopfloor – seems to still have traction.

Class formation and class struggle

The final aspect of class analysis to consider is the problem of class formation and class struggle. This is perhaps where there has been the greatest turn within radical scholarship. During the 1970s, and even into the ‘80s, there was a concerted effort at recovering the conflictual history of labour-capital relations. These were the years when, under the influence of E.P. Thompson, Herbert Guttman, and David Montgomery, labour history experienced a veritable explosion of interest in Anglo-American academia. But for the most part, there was a lack of connection between those Marxists working on political economy and the labour process on one side, and those working on labour history on the other. Among the latter group, there was, from the start, a much greater valence given to culture and ideology – reflected in the fact that among social historians, the influence of Thompson and Guttman continued to grow through the eighties, even as the stature of Marxism was declining. This no

⁹ Parker and Slaughter 1988.

¹⁰ Grenier 1988; Babson 1995; Berggren 1993; Graham 1995.

doubt reflected the enormous weight the two pioneering historians placed on cultural mediation, and even on cultural construction. Hence, while someone like Braverman stressed capital's built-in drive to deskill labour, and labour's ubiquitous resistance to it, the influence of this approach never extended very deeply into social history – where contingency, context, and malleability were stressed much more than the unrelenting pressures of capital accumulation.

Labour history did not take long to start expressing an impatience for the Marxist insistence of a connection between class structure and class formation. If class formation depended critically on workers' consciousness of their situation, and if this consciousness was mediated by the discourses in which workers were steeped, then surely an interest in class formation had to concentrate first and foremost on the problem of culture, ideology, etc.? If workers organised against capital only if they perceived their commonality with others, then surely a focus on identity was of the first order – what were its roots, whence did it emerge? Not surprisingly, the conclusion of much of this research was that there was no necessary relation between occupying the position of a worker in the class structure, and internalising it as one's primary identity. Why, then, privilege class as an identity? This line of argument generated a subtle shift in radical analysis from looking at class as a something that structures the actual range of strategies that actors can pursue, to a focus on it as a kind of identity. Naturally, once it is re-conceptualised in this way, there is no reason to give it any more prominence as a structuring principle than any other identity.

The notion that class depended on identity, and that such identities were hard to come by, made for a general disillusionment about the whole Marxist programme. The unease was given plenty of succour by the fact that, as the worries about class formation were setting in, the political power of labour organisations was beginning to ebb across much of the capitalist world. It seemed to offer proof that Marxists vastly overestimated the importance of class as a critical factor in political life.

The noteworthy aspect of this whole line of reasoning was that it concentrated its focus, almost without exception, on *one* class – workers. But all the while that this class was being declared unfit for travel, the other end of the class divide, capital was reconstituting itself as a political actor in the most spectacular fashion; even more, it was using its organisational muscle to wage one of the most intensive attacks on labour that had been witnessed in the

twentieth century. Hence, in the very years when social history was writing an obituary for Marxist class analysis, a class war of remarkable proportions was being waged in the Atlantic world.

The political constitution of capital during these years did not go entirely unnoticed among radical scholars. It was captured and studied with great care, mostly by American sociologists. Starting in the mid-1980s, several scholars produced a stream of analysis on the New Right, which showed its base in the American corporate class. There were two aspects to this work. First, it examined the organisational basis for capitalist political action. The core political actor was taken to be financial firms, which were able to act as co-ordinators because of their wide connections to the entire corporate structure. But added to this was the presence of a small group of CEOs and managers, who sat on several corporate boards and served as an interlocking directorate, straddling several sectors, and hence organisationally able to rise beyond the narrow interests of one firm or one sector.¹¹ The second dimension studied was the means by which these power centres mobilised their resources to shift the balance of power. Here, the key mechanism was financial donations to political candidates, funnelled through Political Action Committees (PACs).¹² The peculiarity of the American electoral system is that it is overwhelmingly run on private funds. This made it relatively easy for a highly mobilised capitalist class to channel its influence to the political arena, as its financial prowess simply overwhelmed that of labour. This scholarship continues to grow and deepen, and has provided a rich analysis of how capital has organised around its interests, and then stamped them on the political scene.

The most important consequence of the business offensive, at least with regard to the issue of class formation, was a massive decline in the level of unionisation within American labour. From a high of about 36% after the Second World War, union density declined to just over 10% by the middle of the 1980s – basically as a result of intensified resistance by employers.¹³ Underlying this shift in class strategy was a precipitous decline in the economy-wide rate of return on investment, which set in during the late 1960s. As businesses across the country found their profit rates declining, they set about

¹¹ See Mizuruchi 1996 and Burris 2005 for surveys.

¹² Burris 1987; Salt 1989; Akard 1992; Jenkins and Eckert 2000.

¹³ Goldfield 1987.

dismantling many of the postwar institutional supports for labour that, in happier times, they had learned to live with. In part this was accomplished by shifting location, from the traditional heartland of manufacturing in the Midwest, to the non-unionised South. But, even more importantly, they dug in their heels in the daily struggle on the shopfloor – resisting new unionisation drives and breaking some of the key strikes of the decade.¹⁴ By the late 1990s, workers in the US were so demoralised that, even as unemployment dropped to its lowest levels in two decades, wages hardly recovered at all – a sign that workers were too cowed to demand raises, even in tight labour markets.

Conclusion

Despite the general turn away from class analysis in radical circles, there has been much work done in the area over the past two decades, and it still continues to progress. There is no denying that Marxist theorisation of class is richer and more sound today than it was at the start of the Reagan-Thatcher era. Still, if we look to the future, there is some reason to worry. There is a clear generational gap in the enthusiasm for Marxist theory among intellectuals, with much of the most interesting work still being done by stalwarts of the New Left. Younger scholars have neither shown as much interest, nor produced as much. This will most likely show up as a noticeable decline in the quantity and quality of theorising by the second decade of the millennium.

There is also a conspicuous unevenness in production along the disciplinary frontier. Class theory has, for the time being, established a toe-hold in American sociology, and also geography, but has been retreating along much of the remaining intellectual landscape. Perhaps most conspicuous has been its decline among historians. Much of the most innovative work on class was produced, understandably, by a new generation of labour historians during the 1970s and '80s. But labour history has, like much of social history more generally, lost its enthusiasm for studying the themes central to Marxist theory. To the extent that it still soldiers on, the field is largely dominated by the study of discourse and identity formation. One consequence of this, which seems to have gone unnoticed by practitioners, is that there has been very little progress on the themes opened up by Robert Brenner and G.E.M. de

Ste. Croix – the study of the internal dynamics of precapitalist formations and long-term change more generally. Indeed, the most heralded work on these themes in recent years has been by non-Marxist theorists, and offered as an explicit critique of the Marxist framework.¹⁵ Apart from the work of Brenner and de Ste. Croix, one cannot point to much original scholarship produced by Marxists on feudalism, or on antiquity, in the past two decades.

In the study of politics, there has also been a similar retreat. To take but one example, there are still very few studies of the rightward shift of the Democratic Party since the 1970s, despite the general recognition that this shift was a critical component of the assault on labour and the welfare state. The analysis of how the New-Deal era came to an end is thus woefully incomplete. While there are a large number of studies on how the Democrats were forced to accommodate labour and other oppressed groups in the 1930s, there is no parallel study of how and why it came to attack them after the 1970s. Every four years there is a vigorous debate among American progressives on how to orient to the Democrats – but still no detailed study of their transformation after the Carter presidency.

Hence, while progress in class analysis has been significant, the momentum behind it is weaker now than at any time in recent memory. The balance-sheet is therefore somewhat mixed. Whether, and to what extent, there is surge of interest in it again will depend on broader social and political conditions. But in the event that such an interest should re-emerge, it will have a solid foundation of research and theory to build upon.

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