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# Erik Olin Wright (1947-2019): classes and utopia

TARRIT Fabien\*

*All past history, with the exception of its primitive stages, was the history of class struggle (Engels, 1880).*

This claim has sometimes been used in a simplistic way, as if class relations could exclusively explain all social issues, omitting the interaction between a vast number of other explanatory items. Besides, world-wide economic and social transformations since the end of the Second World War have notably revolved around social classes, and new questions appeared on that issue. We display three groups of authors according to their use of that notion<sup>1</sup>.

Marxists authors, like Edward P. Thompson (1963), view classes as a historical process which cannot be analysed in a formal way. Class experience is determined by relations of production, so that a social class is defined by people who live their own history and then class consciousness is the cultural achievement of their own experience.

Non Marxist authors including Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst (1978) articulate classes around categories of distribution with no reference to domination. Since social groups are articulated around distributional categories, relations of domination only exist as incidents. They admit the existence of social classes, but they claim that there is no necessary correspondence between classes and politics, and that political struggles are not a fight between classes. Such an approach rests upon a Weberian background, and it leads to a system of stratification, which distributes the population in continuous levels, in the middle of which the "middle class". It leads to empirical descriptions and to statistical data that are autonomous from the historical record, and then the analysis of social differentiation gets separated from the analysis of conflict.

Others non Marxist authors articulate classes around categories of domination with no reference to distribution. Ralf Dahrendorf (1959) defines classes in exclusive terms of power. He criticises the consequences of Weber's theory on Marx's classes without completely rejecting it: his approach could be characterised as an objective pluralism, namely that many groups are generated by objective relations. He criticises Marx's theory as a historicism, which would ignore continuous minor changes, and for that reason, would not relate to historical record.

Those contradictory issues lead us to analytical Marxism, with Erik O. Wright's contribution - he defends an approach in terms of contradictory class locations - and its interaction with John Roemer's, complemented by Gerald A. Cohen's. Analytical Marxism's insight is an attempt to reconstruct Marx's theoretical corpus with methods that are traditionally considered as contradictory with it<sup>2</sup>. This paper is specifically aimed to study its contribution to the understanding of the concept of social class within the current capitalism. Class transformation will be dealt as an aspect of the inner dynamics of capitalism.

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<sup>1</sup> We arbitrarily exclude the authors who deny the existence of social classes.

<sup>2</sup> Tarrit, 2006.

The paper is articulated as follows. First, we display how Wright reconstructs the Marxian theory of classes with the concept of contradictory class locations (1). Then, we analyse how such an approach corresponds to an alliance between Marxism and non Marxist social science (2). Next, we show how Roemer relates class theory with exploitation through game theory (3). Finally, we describe how Cohen makes the issue of social classes a normative issue rather than a structural one, and we propose that dialectics is necessary to avoid it (4). We will attempt to consider the necessity to integrate the issue of social classes within the historical process of social transformation.

## **1. Middle classes and contradictory class locations**

Until recently it has been widely claimed that the transformations of capitalism after the Second World War allowed the development of a new social class, known as the middle class, which is neither proletarian nor bourgeois, and this would blur the traditional class distinctions. Wright dealt with such an evolution with a view to preserve the Marxian concept of social classes. We discuss how he considers the issue of the middle class (1.1), and then we study how he answers to that challenge with the concept of the contradictory class locations (1.2).

### **1.1. Classes in changing social structure**

Social classes must be understood in the context of a noticeable change in the social structure appreciably since the Fifties. Wright intends to save Marx's social classes (1.1.1), which obliges to grasp the distinction between profession and class (1.1.2). He introduces a new approach on the middle class (1.1.3).

#### **1.1.1. Marx's classes in danger**

It is often claimed that Marx did not anticipate the consequences of capitalist development on the evolution of class structure. The evolution of the pattern of social locations in the production system would separate, on the one hand, the proletariat as a group of persons that are excluded from the means of production from, on the other hand, the proletariat as a set of productive workers. So, it seems that there are indeterminate social relations in terms of class.

Such an evolution stimulated Wright's research program. Social classes have been his main research subject<sup>3</sup>. He reformulates the explanatory content of the Marxian concept of social class. He questions its central role through the structural dynamics of capital, *i.e.* labour relationship, with a view to better taking into account the differentiated character of the contemporary capitalist class structure, without dropping the idea of class polarization. He aims to reassert the specificity of the Marxian class concept in enlarging the definition of class beyond the production process.

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<sup>3</sup> See Wright, 1979, 1985a, 1997b.

### 1.1.2. A fuzzy boarder between professional structure and class structure

He examines the interactions between class and profession, with four concepts – class formation, class struggle, class structure and professional structure – and he presents four sets of claims:

1. Class structure sets limits on class formation, on class consciousness and on class struggle.
2. Class structure is the main social frontier in social change.
3. The concept of class deals with social relations.
4. Social relations are antagonistic rather than symmetrical, and exploitation would be the objective foundation of those relations.

*I am not arguing that class structures define a unique path of social development. Rather the claim is that class structures constitute the lines of demarcation in trajectories of social change. There is no teleological implication that there is a 'final destination' towards which all social change inexorably moves. (Wright 1985a: 32)*

He examines the distinction between “white collar workers” and “blue collar workers”, wondering if it appears within the working class or between classes. In the latter case, it would be a foundation for an additional level in the class structure, and he concludes that, for allowing an understanding of class struggle and of class formation, class structure cannot be analysed for itself.

*Not only should class structures be viewed as setting the basic limits of possibility on class formation, class consciousness and class struggle, but they also constitute the most fundamental social determinant of limits of possibility for others aspects of social structure. (Wright 1985a: 31)*

### 1.1.3. Wright's original approach on middle classes

He claims that the Marxists have never given a satisfying answer to the issue of the “middle class”. He displays four sets of answers, within Marxian academics:

1. The middle class is an ideological illusion. This approach would be the traditional Marxist one, and Wright considers it as deficient since it avoids the problem.
2. The middle class is a part of another class (Poulantzas, 1973).
3. The middle class is a new class (Gouldner, 1979).
4. The middle class stands in various classes, which would correspond to the existence of contradictory class locations (Wright 1985a).

For Wright, two kinds of non polarized positions appear: the traditional petite-bourgeoisie, which is neither exploited nor exploiter, and cross relations of exploitation, which result into being both exploiter and exploited. Besides, extra-classes identifications would stimulate internal divisions - like racial, ethnic, linguistic, national, religious ones - within the working class and they would blur class distinctions<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Such divisions might well be a conscious strategy of the capitalist class for splitting the working class.

## 1.2. The conceptualization of contradictory class locations

Wright's answer to the middle class is the concept of contradictory class locations. We will first give a brief account of this concept (1.2.1), before stating that it is a peculiar interpretation of Marx's theory (1.2.2).

### 1.2.1. The birth of a concept

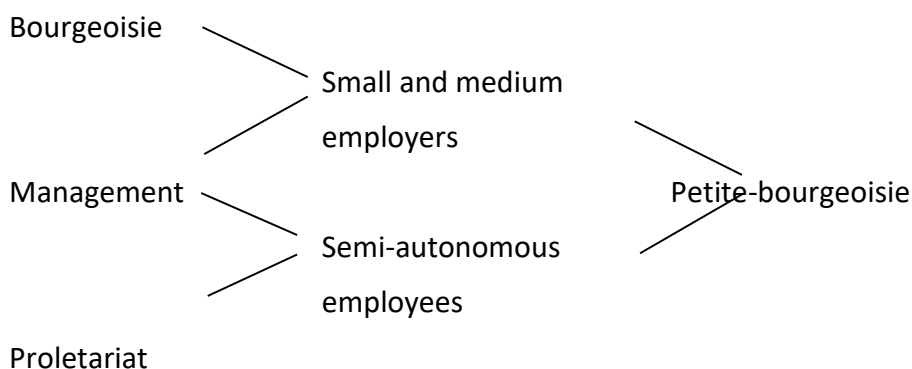
For Wright, the capitalists do not implement all the functions of capital, and the non polarized categories described above are contradictory rather than intermediate, both because they are in two classes at the same time and because they share interests of the two classes, hence their ambiguous role in the class struggle.

*Instead of regarding all positions as located uniquely within particular classes and thus as having a coherent class character in their own right, we should see some positions as possibly having a multiple class character; they may be in more than one class simultaneously. (Wright, 1985a: 43)*

In order to specify the way relations of production are the mechanism of exploitation, he displays three essential and interrelated dimensions: the control on money capital (investment), the control on physical capital (means of production) and the control on labour (production process). The pure capitalist exploitation would then rest upon the exclusion of the workers, by the capitalists, from all those relations.

He claims that the pure capitalist mode of production is not straightforwardly operational, since the exclusion from the three dimensions above does not necessarily coincide, so that there would be "contradictory locations within class relations" (*Idem*), mainly the managers, the employers in small or medium-sized business and the semi-autonomous wage-earners. The managers control labour and a part of the physical capital, but not money capital; they are socially situated between the working class and the capitalist class. The employers in small or medium-sized business control labour and physical capital, but not money capital; they are socially situated between the petite-bourgeoisie and the capitalist class. The semi-autonomous wage-earners, like engineers, only control some parts of labour; they are socially situated between the working class and the petite-bourgeoisie.

#### BASIC TYPOLOGY



## 1.2. An arrangement of Marx's theory of classes

Wright presents his theory as “*Neo-Marxist*” (1985b: 231) at variance with the “orthodoxy”, and his method as an anti-empirical one: the concepts are constrained by the theories in which they work, so that the priority must be given to logical consistency. He claims that the existence of contradictory class locations obscure exploitation and class relations, and it corresponds to the existence of non capitalist forms of exploitation. Namely, various forms of exploitation - in terms of qualification, of organisation, of status...- would exist beyond the traditional Marxist one, so that it would be possible to be both exploiter and exploited.

He does not pretend to expound the Marxist statement on classes, but just a possible statement in the Marxist tradition. He preserved what he judges as the fundamental criteria, namely that the difference between class structures is based on the mechanisms of appropriation of the surplus. The nature of a social structure is established by the nature of the relations of exploitation which substantially generate a set of contradictory interests<sup>5</sup>.

Wright's aim is to specify the concept of class in the Marxist theory, in order to make it operative. He builds his own theoretical posture between, on the one hand, the *economism* and *essentialism* that he attributes to the Marxian “orthodoxy” and, on the other hand, the relativism and subjectivism of some critics of Marxism. He asserts that the essentialist idea of a genuinely socialist revolutionary proletariat which is determined by its class location clashes with the observation that most of the working class departs from this, if it ever occupied it. He claims that defining classes on the exclusive basis of the social relations of production is not a firm foundation for specifying particular classes in any social organisation of production, since it would tend to *economism* and to class reductionism. Here he took a further distance from the traditional Marxian conception, according to which any form of domination can be ultimately explained in terms of relations of production, and at the same time he got closer to a Weberian-type conception.

## 2. Beyond a Marxist definition of classes

The theoretical background of Wright's approach is not exactly the Marxian one. More precisely, his theory is between Marx's and Weber's (2.1), and it can be seen as a static approach (2.2).

### 2.1. Classes and professions: between Marx and Weber

Wright separates professions, defined as positions within technical relations of production, from classes, defined as positions within social relations of production, and capitalist organisations are articulated with both social relations and technical relations. Yet he departs from a Parkin-type approach<sup>6</sup>, for which the class structure is essentially determined by the professional structure. He distinguishes the class structure from a typology of professional categories. Then, class and profession fill two fundamentally distinct theoretical spaces, and Wright aims to work out a conceptual relation between class and profession, with the concept of organisation, through the analysis of their empirical relation. Socio-professional

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<sup>5</sup> It might be noted that Wright has paradoxically presented his model not only as a structural one but as well as a dialectical one, since class struggle may transform the conditions of its own determination.

<sup>6</sup> See Parkin 1979.

categories contain heterogeneous class elements, and professional distributions vary between classes.

Such a Weberian-type typological sketch reproduces the pre-Marxist dualism between subject and object, and Wright's Marxism is a *sociologised* Marxism, as the expression of a neo-Weberian logic of social stratification. Basically the difference between Marx and Weber rests upon the explanatory primacy. Marx defends a primacy of the economic structure, whereas Weber advocates a causal pluralism which weakens the intelligibility of class conflicts.

Wright states three levels of abstraction: the mode of production defines a class structure, the social formation defines class alliances and the circumstances define the organisation of production. Here he departs from Weber, who did not distinguish a mode of production and a social formation, since he never considered historical development as a pattern of class structures. As a result, Wright claims that the consequences of classes on society are not limited to class struggle and, rather than claiming that classes are crucial for social change, he simply judges them as important for social change, alongwith the "new social movements" (feminism, environmentalism...). Then "*traditional forms of class struggles - the direct confrontation of organised workers against the capitalist class - are less central to the politics of Western democracies in the 1990s than they were in the 1930s or 1960s*" (1997: 120). Therefore, in order to be effective, a structural analysis must be complemented with an autonomous analysis of culture and of ideology<sup>7</sup>.

## **2.2. A static approach**

It might be the case that one of the strongest charges against Wright's theory is that it is non dynamic. This might be due to a structuralist influence (2.2.1); we will propose a dynamic approach instead (2.2.2).

### **2.2.1. A structuralist influence**

It seems that such an approach has been inspired by Nicos Poulantzas, who describes classes exclusively by relations of exploitation and of domination, and who restricts the working class to manual work without responsibility. For Poulantzas (1974), like for Martin Nicolaus (1967) or for John Urry (1973), the definition of classes is exclusively structural, and class interests can be objectified. Yet, for Wright, the form of class struggle is defined by economic, ideological and political relations in a given historical situation. Such a differentiation leads him to set up taxonomical categories in order to work out a terminology for a distinguishing class locations.

### **2.2.2. For a dynamic approach**

For Marxists like Edward P. Thompson, a class is not a thing with an independent existence, it cannot be defined in mathematical terms and it cannot be attributed "*the class-consciousness which 'it' ought to have*" (1963: 10). Instead, a social class is a relation, so that a precise definition would lead to confusion rather than to clarification. Therefore, status and

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<sup>7</sup> Our point is that they face obstacles that are closely with the class structure, and that are inspired by the capitalist class power.

stratifications are considered as dogmas of the bourgeois sociology, and they lead the sociologists not to deeply reflect on their own subject.

*The finest-meshed sociological net cannot give us a pure specimen of class, any more than it can give us one of deference or love. The relationship must always be embodied in real people and in a real context. (Idem: 13)*

Social classes are not given before the history of concrete struggles, and social reality does not appear directly to us. Classes are constituted during struggles that are articulated by objective - *i.e.* economic, political and ideological - conditions, which in return shape movements that organise the workers into classes.

### **3. Social classes, rational choice and game theory**

Wright explicitly relies upon Roemer's work, mainly his *General Theory of Exploitation and Class*. We will see first how Roemer founds classes on rational choice (3.1), and then how he articulates classes and exploitation with game theory in a historical materialist background (3.2).

#### **3.1. Class relations and rational choice**

With Rational Choice Theory, Roemer's peculiar reading of Marx seems contradictory with Marx's own insights. His approach corresponds to a counter-intuitive reading of Marx (3.1.1), which influenced analytical Marxism, and Wright in particular, on the ground of class collaboration (3.1.2).

##### **3.1.1. Roemer's counter-intuitive reading of Marx's**

Like Morishima and Steedman, Roemer reconstructs the Marxian theory of exploitation independently from the labour theory of value. He considers exploitation as a transfer of the value of any commodity, not necessarily labour, so that any commodity can be exploited.

*There is a decided superiority of our formulation of capitalist exploitation in the game-theoretic manner to the Marxian formulation in terms of surplus-value: the game-theoretic formulation is independent of the labor theory of value. (Roemer, 1982: 20)*

He further confuses the distinction between Marx and Weber, in denying any structural content to social classes and to exploitation. "*Exploitation... does not appear to be of direct interest from either the positive or the normative viewpoint*" (Roemer 1988: 89). His definition of classes is formulated in terms of relations of property, with the *Class-Exploitation Correspondence Principle*: Any agent is exploited if he cannot afford as many goods as his amount of labour contains, and he is exploiter if he can afford more goods than his amount of labour contains. Thus, all the producers who optimize in selling their labour force are exploited, and all the producers who optimize in hiring labour force are exploiters. At the equilibrium there are three groups: exploiters, exploited, and an "obscure" area, which corresponds to Wright's contradictory class locations. Then, the institutional reasons for exploitation would not be the appropriation of labour, but the existence of competitive markets and the differential ownership of the means of production.

*A goal of this book has been to demonstrate that the central Marxist concepts of exploitation and class do not require a special logic for their construction. They can be studied in a model of private property system, using standard tools of microeconomic analysis. (Idem: 172)*

Roemer explains classes exclusively in terms of individual behaviours, and he misses the theoretical link between individual positions and social phenomena. His microsocial logic only allows a social analysis in aggregating individual unities. Such an approach of the relationship between structure and consciousness seems to be static and deterministic, close to the behavioural sociology, and it achieves an unlikely union between individualism and structuralism.

### **3.1.2. Analytical Marxism and class collaboration**

In such a rational choice framework, Adam Przeworski, an analytical Marxist as well, claims that if the transition to socialism leads to a worsening, even a temporary one, of the workers' welfare and if the workers are allowed to improve their material situation in cooperating with the capitalists, then the socialist perspective cannot result from the material interests of the workers.

*A vigorously developing capitalism in which workers can reasonably expect to benefit from past exploitation is the second best for workers as well as for capitalists. The struggle for improvement of material conditions under capitalism is precisely that. It is not a struggle for socialism. (Przeworski 1980 : 146)*

Insofar as these authors claim that class polarization corresponds to capitalism and socialism, the development of contradictory class locations obscures this distinction, as well as the distinction between exploiters and exploited.

*The practical objective of class struggle is not smashing the capitalist class, but creating a viable compromise with capital... To forge a class compromise workers need to be able to deliver to the bourgeoisie a well co-ordinated and disciplined labour force. (Wright 1997a: 114-115)*

It would then be possible to abolish capitalist exploitation within a market economy; this may explain the interest of the analytical Marxists in market socialism (see Roemer, Wright 1996).

*A completely non-market socialism is not a stable and suitable form of economy and, in any event, is unlikely to be compatible with democratic institutions. (Wright 1997a, 103, stress in the original)*

It is noteworthy that, in Roemer's and Wright's theoretical background, with new class divisions, Philippe Van Parijs (1987), an analytical Marxist too, has been led to assume that class struggle now occurs between steady employees on the one hand, and unemployed and precarious employees on the other hand.

### **3.2. Exploitation, historical materialism and game theory**

Now, we will see how the analytical Marxists expound classes in an historical materialist framework, with the help of game theory. Roemer's approach is based on Cohen's historical

materialism (3.2.1). We defend the claim that game theory is not a suitable basis for historical analysis (3.2.2).

### 3.2.1. Exploitation and historical materialism

Roemer analyses the former so-called socialist countries as an abnormality in the Marxian framework, and he aims to explain what appeared to be class relations in those countries. He uses the concept of exploitation as a specific mode of explanation of inequalities, as a causal relationship between individuals' incomes. He develops this analysis in terms of game theory: each individual is exploited if there is a potential alternative in which he would be better situated.

*I shall construct the model so that, as before, classes are endogenously determined by individual optimization.* (Roemer 1982: 110)

He defines four historical situations of exploitation according to the rules of retreat and to the main good which is unequally distributed.

- The feudal exploitation is founded on an unequal ownership of the labour force.
- The capitalist exploitation is founded on an unequal ownership of the means of production.
- The status exploitation or organization exploitation, corresponding to statism, or to bureaucratic state socialism, is founded on an unequal control of the planning process.
- The socialist exploitation is founded on an unequal ownership of the qualifications.

*“Each revolutionary transition has the historical task of eliminating its characteristic associated form of exploitation”* (Roemer 1982: 21). It must be noted that such a stagist approach rests upon Cohen's historical materialism (2000), namely that the development of productive forces determines the historical pattern of the modes of production. Wright admits *“an extended engagement with the theoretical work of the economist John Roemer”* (Wright 1985b: 250), which would set a rich foundation for empirical study and for theoretical elaboration of class structure, and which would rigorously allow the establishment of a contradictory class structure. On such a basis, he constitutes a typology of class structures, which roughly corresponds to the analytical Marxist theory of history, of exploitation and of classes:

Type of class structure	Principal asset that is unequally distributed	Mechanism of exploitation	Classes	Principal contradictory locations	Historical task of revolutionary transformation
FEUDALISM	Labour power	Coercitive extraction of surplus labour	Lords and serfs	Capitalists	Individual liberty
CAPITALISM	Means of production	Market exchanges of labour power and commodities	Capitalists and workers	Managers / bureaucrats	Socializing means of production
STATISM	Organization	Planned appropriation and distribution of	Managers / bureaucrats and	Experts	

		surplus based on hierarchy	non-management		Democratization of organizational control
SOCIALISM	Skills	Negotiated redistribution of surplus from workers to experts	Experts and workers		Substantive equality

Different classes have an objective interest in corresponding social structures: The capitalist class in capitalism, the middle classes in statism, and the working class in socialism. Marx's theory is then challenged on three points: Socialism is not necessarily the future of humanity, the proletariat is not the only holder of the revolution, and socialism may lead to exploitation.

### 3.2.2. The limits of game theory

It might be the case that game theory is useful for explaining some individual behaviours. Yet, it is not able to explain the general laws of society. The conceptual and methodological peculiarity of Marxism is swamped within the abstractions of game theory, that are antagonistic with historical abstractions. Classes are replaced with individuals, the collective interest in social change is replaced with individual consciousness, the relations of production are replaced with professional categories.

A class is a group of people who by virtue of what they possess are compelled to engage in the same activities if they want to make the best use of their endowments. (Elster, 1986: 147, stress in the original)

For Roemer, as for Elster, Marx chose labour force as a reference for political reasons - *"clearly, then, historical materialism directs us to construct a theory which views people as exploited, and not corn, as the most efficacious research program"* (Roemer 1982: 284) - and for normative reasons - *"if the exploitation of the worker is an important concept, it is so for normative reasons - because it is indicative of some injustice and not because the exploitability of labor power is the unique source of profits"* (Roemer 1988: 54) - but not for scientific reasons.

## 4. From structure to norm: the need for dialectics

For Roemer, a normative approach is necessary for analysing social classes. Cohen develops further that point, and he relates it to historical materialism (4.1). We propose the claim that such a turn results from the initial structural and non dialectical proposition on classes (4.2).

### 4.1. Class heterogeneity and normative approach

For Cohen, the central explanatory foundation for the retreat of critical thinking is the transformation of the class structure rather than the collapse of the Soviet world. The current class structure of capitalist societies would not allow a peculiar social group to have both a capacity and an interest for social change.

*That class, traditionally conceived, had four characteristics which, taken together, ensured that it would produce a socialist revolution. First, it was the section of society on whose productive activity everyone depended. Second, it constituted the great majority of society. Third, it was composed of the exploited people in society. And, finally, its members were in serious need; they experienced a substantial lack of the essentials of a fulfilling life... In practical terms, what are the implications of the fact that the working class is not what it used to be, or what we once thought it was? (Cohen, 2001)*

The social transformation would not rest upon the resolution of structural contradictions, but on issues in social justice. For Cohen, normative answers are necessary, because the change in the class structure of the capitalist societies since the early eighties does not allow any longer the specification of a social group which can hold the social transformation. The tendency to more diversity and less polarization - less workers strictly speaking, a larger petite-bourgeoisie, a change in the structure of qualifications, a weaker labour movement... - should lead to ask ethical questions and to give normative answers to this new background.

*The questions about base and superstructure and forces and relations of production... occupied me for some twenty years, before my interests shifted decisively in the direction of moral and political philosophy. I think, instead, that our shift of attention is explained by profound changes in the class structure of Western capitalist societies, changes which raise normative problems which did not exist before, or, rather, which previously had a little political significance. Those normative problems have great political significance now. (Cohen 1990 : 364)*

#### **4.2. The limits of a structural definition – class in itself and class for itself**

We state that classes are not given before the history of class struggles, and social reality is not directly understandable. *“The term 'working class', properly understood, never precisely delineated a specified body of people, but was rather an expression for an ongoing social process”* (Braverman 1974: 17). People get conscious of social relations through ideology. Therefore, political actions result from the process of conviction and organization by ideological and political forces. Marxism is not only a theory of class structure, but a theory of class formation and of social change as well. Class structures are then part of the explanation of structural constraints.

*The propertied class and the class of the proletariat present the same human self-estrangement. But the former class feels at ease and strengthened in this self-estrangement, it recognizes estrangement as its own power and has in it the semblance of a human existence. The class of the proletariat feels annihilated in estrangement; it sees in it its own powerlessness and the reality of an inhuman existence (Marx, 1845: 36).*

For Marx, human features are powers, that are capacities to produce. In the capitalist mode of production, property is what is produced, so that having some property corresponds to creating ownership. The worker creates ownership, in an alienated way, and then he has properties, in a distorted way. The capitalist, as an ownership owner, has no properties. He does not possess his ownership, in that possessing something corresponds to be intimately connected with it. The capitalist is then an affected owner - he is not the creator then he is not the real owner - and the worker is a defective creator. Therefore, any human being is dominated by capital: the machine for the workers, money for the capitalists.

Wright and Roemer do not consider social classes as an organized social power. There is no peculiar interest to an economic structure and the distinction between class in itself and class for itself is rejected. A class in itself refers to structural positions within social relations of production - classes in organisations - and a class for itself refers to classes as organized social forces - organisations in classes. Cohen defines classes in a structural way, as an objective reality. *"A person's class is established by nothing but his objective place in the network of ownership relations"* (Cohen 2000: 73). Paradoxically, he implicitly admits the distinction between class in itself and class for itself, in acknowledging the existence of subjective expressions in a political or cultural form, as class identity, but he assumes that political struggles, consciousness and culture do not make up class structures, but are just its expressions, its effects.

### **Conclusion**

As an answer to a central challenge of contemporary class societies, namely a visible weakening of the polarization between social classes, Wright attempts to preserve the Marxian conception of social classes. His approach, with an alliance between a Marxian background and the Weberian sociology, is founded on and complemented with Roemer's work, that establishes classes within a methodological individualist framework. Cohen joins that posture in stating that classes are not the vector of social transformation anymore.

Our point is that the analytical Marxists insufficiently integrate their approach within the historical process, and they have linked two conflicting approaches within the field of social sciences, namely on the one hand, the Althusserian-type structuralist materialism, as originally advocated by Wright, and on the other hand, methodological individualism, to which Wright got gradually closer. In separating the analysis of social structure and the theory of history, as it was defended and then revised by Cohen, the analytical Marxists present a *sociologised* Marxism. It has been outlined that its effectiveness in terms of analysis of the social and structural transformations and in terms of political action is limited.

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