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## **Game of Classes /Necessary Guidelines for an Alterglobalist/**

Writing about social classes in Poland has its historical limitations and dangers. The established cultural background, which reinforces social solidarism and drowns sociological knowledge in the national melting-pot, efficiently blocks a matter-of-fact attitude to the social structure and it often even curses and exorcises it as something which endangers the national community and national myths, which are functional for exercising class power.

It is not only the issue of a new-style neoliberal strategy or a historically shaped national-liberation ethos of fighting for independence. Additional reinforcement of that tendency, after a short period of increased class struggle just after the war, took place also in the realities of real socialism. Very soon simplistic visions of the class structure and social exploitation were replaced by products of a moral and political unity of the nation which was being constructed. Real socialism appeared to be not only a concrete national way of shaping social justice, but also the only accessible form of safeguarding independence of the Polish state and national self-determination. The defeat of the 2nd Republic and of its “exotic” – as they were described – alliances, the tragedy of genocide and occupation and – finally – moving borders to the west facilitated patriotic identification of real socialism with interests of the whole Polish society independently from class divisions and economic contradictions. All forms of splitting created moral and political unity were ideologically inconvenient and – if they went beyond commonplaces – they created redundant sources of knowledge-power constituting alternatives for administrative party structures. 1968 with its antisemitism and the anti-intelligentsia current was just the time of elimination of

such a threat coming from academic circles. It was not an incident that restrictions were mainly met by milieus connected with Polish sociology and philosophy.

Social approval for the described trend was all easier than real changes of property relations, historical dimension of the establishment of public property domination was also entangled in the concrete historical process of restitution of new post-war Europe. The defeat of Nazi Germany and moving borders to the west facilitated “annulment” of all forms of property of German capital in the whole area of the new Polish state. The defeat of the Axis powers caused that, for example, Italian capital – and generally each capital which was somehow connected with the “Thousand-Year Reich” – was lost forever. Extermination of Polish Jews had left the so-called “post-Jewish property” not only to individual appetites of entrepreneurial neighbours, who plundered it, but also to nationalizing decisions. The wartime escape of a part of the privileged strata from occupation (and – as a matter of fact – from various occupations) left an additional free space for post-war transformations. Property which before the war had been owned by English, American, Scandinavian capital was nationalized and then paid off by the Polish government for many years<sup>1</sup>. Class analysis of societies of real socialism was rather undesirable. A vision of a harmonious society which rationally solves its problems dominated and incapacitated the theory.

However, this is not a proper place for studying the presence of the theory of social classes in real socialism. Careers of the social theory are described by me more extensively in the book “Klasy społeczne. Z historii pojęcia” (Kochan, 1990). Here I am trying to present an encapsulated lecture on the class theory in a form corresponding – according to my intuition – with the state of consciousness of an average reader interested in the issue of social classes. I mean – not only an attempt at avoiding too specialist language but also taking into account the most common misunderstandings and forms of vulgarization.

### **When and how do social classes come into being?**

Classes did not always exist. We can confidently proclaim that they came into being a short time ago. For the majority of time of their existence humankind was getting by without classes, without politics, without the state and without private property. From that perspective a Marxian demand – or, as a matter of fact, a *prognosis* – for abolishment of classes and rising of classless society meant only closing some stage in the history of the human race and elimination of contradictions and injustice of class provenance. It had absolutely nothing to do with any vision of paradise, universal happiness, superhuman pleasures... or whatever else... Those additional ideas tell us much about diversity of readers of Marx’s works, about their education, lik-

<sup>1</sup> The Polish government was similarly paying off loans given by Western states for sustaining the Polish army in the West. W. Gomułka managed to complete their repayment at the end of the 1960s.

ings, dreams, but they tell almost nothing about Marx's theory. Similarly just after the war entrepreneurial dealers of devotional items sold in Polish villages portraits of Friedrich Engels as images of Saint Joseph, popular religious consciousness used catholic categories of salvation and heavenly harmony for interpreting theories of socialism and communism. And it does not refer only to the "simple folk" ...<sup>2</sup>

The very term "social class" is not Marx's invention. It also was used earlier – for example by the 19th century French historians. In allusive and blurred forms it has been appearing since antiquity. The origin of classes is usually shrouded in mystery and treated as mythologized prehistory. Their genesis is usually connected with the theory of conquest. It assumes that as a result of a conquest, subordination of natives to invaders takes place and the privileged class is recruited from the latter, which changes the conquered population into slaves. In modern philosophy such a theoretical solution can be found in G. W. F. Hegel's "Phenomenology of Spirit" in a famous chapter about "master and labourer"<sup>3</sup>. Hegel writes there about the master "proving in struggle" his superiority over the labourer. That political interpretation of the origin of classes, referring to coercion and struggle, exerts its influence also on later Marxist tradition. Its incorrectness consists in the fact that it reduces class relations to the relation of violence and domination and hence it limits itself to understanding them in terms of man-man, and not man-thing-man, relations. That way class relations take on a volitional form and generally there appears a theoretical illusion that their concrete historical shape is independent from the level of socialization of labour and development of productive forces. However, a possibility of permanent class domination assumes a permanent dependency, which is possible only on the basis of advanced labour division, complicated tools and forms of organization of production. If I can make a bow /a spear, a net, a hand axe, etc./ by myself, my permanent

<sup>2</sup> Andrzej Walicki expressed such a state of consciousness as late as in the 1990s. In his book "Marksizm i skok do królestwa wolności." (Walicki, 1990). Walicki reduces whole Marxism with Marx himself to a criminal utopia, a chiliastic vision of a paradise and salvation, which leads to genocide and murder. Walicki – besides other inanities – writes that "Marxian philosophy of history justified necessity of slavery" and that there is visible "inconspicuous lack of love of fellow human beings" /p.10/. Surprisingly enough, the author who – as he declared himself – wrote his books to warn Western intellectuals against Marx the criminal – is supposed in Poland to be a pinkish intellectual! Obviously everybody who writes about Marx is regarded to be leftist... and the book is too thick to read it. An analysis of that odd book by Walicki can be found in my book "Życie codzienne w matriksie" (Kochan, 2007, especially pages 59–73).

<sup>3</sup> I do not keep here the title of the Polish translation by PWN ("*Pan i niewolnik*" – "Master and Slave") because in my book "Wolność i interpelacja" I argued for translating it as "Master and Labourer" /it was "Herr und Knecht" in German, an English translation was "Lord and Bondsman"/, because Hegel's analysis does not concern only the slave, but it refers to all forms of productive labour known in history. That is why the "slave", which in Polish tradition arouses only exotic or antiquity-related associations, does not express Hegel's intentions. The heart of the matter is genially apprehended by Witold Gombrowicz in "Ferdynand" where "fraternization with a labourer" and the very "labourer" are figures expressing the essence of class contradictions and exploitation.

dependency on an owner of a bow is impossible. The situation is different when we have to do with a factory, a steam engine, an armour, a sword, etc. We should be aware that we talk about a “thing” only figuratively. In their concrete historical incarnations a “thing” which determines class structuration of the forms of socialization and development of productive forces may be a tool which cannot be easily reproduced as well as a weapon or the very form of organization of labour based on a specific involvement in nature... so, for example, a gathered herd or a created irrigation system! It was not an accident that in antiquity the greatest state systems developed in symbiosis with waters of the Tigris and the Euphrates, in deltas of the Nile or the Huang-Ho.

However, these different concrete historical forms are characterized by the same notional essence. In all of them the level, the character, the form of development of productive forces imply structurally generated social differentiation of class character, which has its justification and foundation first of all in the non-volitional sphere, which can be called the civilizational one. The theory of conquest forgets that a conquest can turn the conquered into slaves and the conquering into masters only when there are objective conditions for such a transformation /a proper level of socialization of labour, division of labour, their material and subjective conditions/. It is important to grasp the essence of a phenomenon while abstracting from a concrete historical form of its actualization<sup>4</sup>.

### **The polar vision of the class structure**

The polar vision of the class structure was described by Stanisław Ossowski as “a folklorist vision of the class structure”. The polar vision assumes that society is divided into capitalists and wage workers, the rich and the poor, the ruling and the ruled... in the historic version, into masters and slaves. Ossowski’s term is mocking and ironic towards commonplace images and the language of politics or propaganda. That irony is fully understandable and charming. However, it is also more deeply justified than it seemed to Ossowski.

Simply put, folksiness of the polar vision, its Manicheism, generates not only revolutionary zeal but also discouragement and resignation. How on earth can we talk about any basic change, if the poor and the rich, the exploited and the exploiters had “always” existed? A strategy which may be adopted in such circumstances by any reasonably knowledgeable person can consist only in individual social advancement, in

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<sup>4</sup> It is a very important remark, because it happened that seekers of feudalism in pre-Columbian cultures were helpless facing the fact that peasants had not had land. They were bewildered because agriculture had been taking place on rafts floating on lakes and using – as we would call it today – a hydroponic technique, what in a warm climate enabled harvesting crop three or four times a year. “Fact” and “concrete” often make blind, if historical erudition is not accompanied by theory and abstraction.

historical and social good luck, and not in an illusory vision of class advancement or abolishment of classes and exploitation. The class structure, social inequality, domination and wealth which appears repulsive when compared with poverty and destitution have their lovers and defenders first of all among those who have nothing except of hope for good luck and who usually die already deprived of that hope. From that viewpoint there is no progress, there is not even any change. There is only individual time and the perspective of a CV.

Of course for Marx subsequent economic formations of the class society /slavery, feudalism, capitalism, I omit here the complicated issue of the so-called “Asiatic mode of production”/ are not the same – also regarding features of basic classes connected with the dominant mode of production. The master – slave-owner, the master – feudal lord and the master-bourgeois are not the same. The same applies to the slave, the peasant and the wage worker. Regarding the latter, apart from the fact that they all are submitted in the sense of connection with directly productive labour and being exploited, there are differences between them which have a really epochal character.

However, in order to understand these differences we have to use a new category: *labour power ownership*. We must see that distinction of propertied classes, which rule because they own means of production, circulation and services, do not exhaust the analysis of the realm of ownership and of its class-creative influence. *The slave* – described by Aristotle as *instrumentum vocale* (a speaking tool) – is in his essence reduced to a thing. His characteristic feature is the fact that he neither has means of production, nor even himself. The slave is, as a matter of fact, a thing, if – like a thing – he may be an incapacitated object of trade, an involuntary object of selling and buying.

The situation is different in the case of the serf. Unlike the slave, he is a private owner of land, a house, livestock and even of some rights for using communal or feudal joint property /village pastures, rights for gathering brushwood, mushrooms in a royal or a lord’s forest<sup>5</sup>/. On the other hand, he is not the owner of himself. Feudal obligations make him not only a minion, but they also oblige him for numerous services and he is bound to the land, to the village to such a degree that he sometimes belongs to the village even after his death and after his own death he can be an object

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<sup>5</sup> Gathering brushwood in a royal forest, sometimes even hunting but not deer hunting. Robin Hood was well aware about it. European culture is extremely rich in documentation of traces of property transformations. Contention for easements was the subject of Marx’s interest in the years of his journalist activity in Germany and it indirectly forced him to emigrate. A conflict about a forest described by Reymont in “Chłopi” concerns the same issue of coming from specific feudal property relations to “normal” capitalist ones. A forest which has been common for hundreds of years in the light of capitalist understanding of property turns out to be nobody’s.

of trade<sup>6</sup>. The city makes him free<sup>7</sup>. The escape to the city is somehow the escape in the future.

The historical process of creation of the worker<sup>8</sup> is a Janus-faced phenomenon. On the one hand, it is indubitably a transformation of a land-bound peasant into a free wage worker, a free seller of his own labour power liberated of direct coercion and dependent “only” on impersonal forces of capitalist market economy. However, on the other hand, that freedom is paid with dispossession and exile from feudal decorations of private property. *The wage worker has nothing but himself* and *the wage worker is finally a free man* – these sentences describe the same social fact.

Thus the slave, the peasant, the wage worker are different from each other both in the field of ownership of means of production as well as regarding the second class form of ownership playing the essential role in structuralization of the class form ownership: *labour power ownership*. The slave is neither the owner of means of production, nor of his own labour power; the feudal peasant, while having means of production, is not the owner of his labour power; the wage worker is an owner of his own labour power deprived of ownership of means of production. Hence labour power ownership, “having only one’s own hands”, is not only an ironic formulation, but first of all a real ownership relation constructed by history. The wage worker is the first free direct producer in the history of class societies, who has his labour power at his free disposal in conditions of money-goods economy of the capitalist society. It has fundamental consequences for the whole culture, for the whole society, also for politics.

The differences between the classes which are complementary to the producing classes – slave owners, feudal lords and capitalists – are analogous. The distinctions between these classes require careful recognition of mechanisms of reproduction of slavery, feudalism and capitalism. They cannot be unified with a naïve power of the notion of “the rich”. At night – as it is well known – all cows are black.

So as we see, the polar vision of the permanent class division into the poles of the poor and the rich must take into account the fundamental fact of mutual irreducibility of slavery, feudalism and capitalism. However, the polar vision cannot be accepted also within a concrete economic formation of society because of, at least, two reasons:

*Firstly*, if we say that the social structure, the class structure of a given economic formation of society /capitalism, feudalism, slavery/ is determined by an opposition between the classes which are basic for a given society, it is because of the fact that – by the way of idealization – we take into account the dominant mode of production

<sup>6</sup> Gogol in “Dead Souls” presents such an extreme case in a daring way.

<sup>7</sup> There was a saying “Stadt luft macht frei” /“City air makes you free”/.

<sup>8</sup> Which was described probably in the most dramatic way by More in “Utopia” and by Marx in the chapter “So-Called Primitive Accumulation” placed in the first volume of “Capital”.

/slavery, feudalism and capitalism/. However, it is not difficult to see that real societies do not exist in a form reduced to a single mode of production. A single peasant who, together with his family, produces goods in a family holding, is a historical figure appearing – admittedly with different intensity – in all forms of class societies, he played also a significant role in societies of real socialism. Thus all presentations of class structures of concrete economic formations of society should be broadened by taking into account peasants as a separate, transformational class accompanying classes connected with the dominant mode of production. Similarly existence of slave labour on cotton plantations in the USA in the 19th century implements classes of slaves and slave owners on the stage of the class structure of the 19th century's North America. The situation is analogous in the case of craftsmen or various communities whose presence did not result from the logic of the dominant mode of production, but – for example – from unequal historical development. Clan communities in capitalism, or even in real socialism /some areas of the Soviet Union or Mongolia/ are a well-known fact. It is obvious that such co-existence of various modes of production enriches the class structure also in this sense that it disturbs and modifies functioning of the dominant mode of production and of the whole class system. If we take into account the perspective of universal history and of imperial colonization, colonial relations /for example in South America or in India in the 19th century/ were extremely significant for shaping ownership relations in Spain, Portugal and Great Britain, as well as for their social and political character. Of course the influence was exerted also in the other direction modifying situation in colonies.

*Secondly*, talking *e.g.* about capitalists and workers with regard to the capitalist society is also a drastic idealization. Neither capitalists, nor workers constitute a monolith regarding their property status. In both cases we have to do with differentiations resulting from historical development of capitalism and historical development of classes /trade capitalists, industrial and financial ones, big and small ones; and in the case of workers: workers in the strict sense, seasonal workers, peasants who are also workers, labour aristocracy/. We have also to do with property differentiations in the static scheme /kinds of coexisting capitals, differentiations regarding labour power ownership, the place of start-up in the socio-economical division of labour, capital and labour power/. Those differentiations are the source of *contradictions within social classes* among capitalists and among wage workers. They are related to ownership and just those ownership differentiations are the generator of contradictions splitting up classes, whose seemingly monolithic character is, as a matter of fact, relative and relational.

It can be seen very clearly in the case of wage workers. Owners of their own labour power undergo structuralization as a result of the division into the city and the countryside.

Thus, the contradiction between the city and the countryside /that enigmatic formulation hides a contradiction manifesting itself superficially in the fact that “the countryside” is interested in maximization of prices of agriculture products and “the city” is interested in maximization of prices of means of agricultural production coming from the city/ divides wage workers into contradictory interest groups on the basis of different forms of ownership. However, contradictions can concern also particular groups of workers, factory workforces, cooperating in the city. Similarity of their ownership relations does not change the fact that their real interests, which are determined by their current position in the social system of production, are continuously determined by their class in the playing field of market economy and its historical transformations.

It means nothing less than that the polar vision of the class structure is only a moment of the class theory. It is the moment connected with:

- analysis of the class scheme of the ideal mode of production,
- extraction of the dominating class scheme of the economic formation of society,
- determination of basic class dynamics and the direction of social transformations,
- localization of poles of political polarization of social consciousness and of the basic front of confrontation in the struggle for cultural and political hegemony.

However, the presented remarks lead us to a statement that the class theory goes beyond the horizon which has been outlined above and it can take up forms of a developed analysis of the class structure. Yet it is extremely important to remember that both the polar vision of the class structure and the developed class analysis assume studying ownership relations.

### **Developed formulation of class analysis**

Here comes the epoch of class societies in the history of *homo sapiens*. Slavery, feudalism and capitalism are examples of that type of societies. The axis organizing the class structure of such societies is a contradiction between the basic classes of a given formation. It does not exclude – and even require – a more detailed presentation of class structure analysis. As a result of it, besides contradictions between the basic classes, there are revealed contradictions resulting from the fact that in concrete historical conditions the dominant mode of production coexists with other ones as well as contradictions within great dominant classes /for example *among* capitalists or *among* workers/. They generate a mobile and changeable game of less or more short-term economic interests based on established but dynamic ownership divisions. It is important to understand their relativist and processual character. They are not, however, simple interests of a one-dimensional character. A frequently made distinction between contradictions of *antagonistic* and *non-antagonistic* character is worth introducing here.



It is the distinction many misunderstandings have accumulated around. Among various standpoints special attention is usually attracted by those which are more picturesque, bloody and Sadeian. According to them, antagonistic contradictions are connected with fight and bloody class dealings, while non-antagonistic ones are characterized by more civilized and softer forms of expression. Such “flat empiricism” has nothing to do with theoretically subtler interpretations of the issue. In their light the category of antagonism must be recognized on the level of the theory of formations and it simply means that from the historical perspective antagonistic classes are those which assume that elimination of contradictions between them must lead to elimination of one of those classes. In that sense the contradiction between, for example, workers and bourgeoisie has the antagonistic character and the contradiction between bank capitalists and industrial capitalist has not because the latter does not assume that its solution leads to a change of the formation and elimination of one of the classes. Quite the opposite: the solution of the contradiction between bank capital and industrial capital is coming into being of financial capitalists and the financial capital – that is, evolution of capitalism into a more developed form. Antagonistic classes are connected by the relation of exploitation – and the latter is neither incidental, nor accidental.

The best illustration of the relation of exploitation is of course the classical Marxian theory of surplus value. As it was proclaimed by Marx in the first volume of “Capital”, surplus value appropriated by the capitalist comes, in the most general sense, from the fact that the act of buying the worker by the capitalist is the act of buying a specific commodity. That act of purchase and sale assumes that the capitalist buys not the worker but his ability to work and he pays him not for a work done but only enough to enable him reproducing that ability. The difference between costs of reproduction and the value produced by the worker is just surplus value. The battlefield here is first of all working time. The worker wants to limit working time and intensity of work while the capitalist wants to lengthen and intensify work. This is the source of class antagonism and class struggle.

*The class struggle theory*<sup>9</sup> points out clearly that the source of class antagonism has an objective character in the process of reproduction of the capitalist society and it does not come only from the world of politics, ideology or theory. Class struggle

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<sup>9</sup> I write „the class struggle theory” and I remind here its Marxian roots, because presently it is too often referred to as “the class theory” /if of course it is referred to at all/. The term “struggle” is persistently removed. Contradiction, conflict are censured, never mind “struggle”. Why? It results of course from the organicistic way of understanding society and apologetic erasure, liquidation of each possibility even of talking about contradictions, conflict, exploitation... Especially in Poland – the country where there are neither bourgeoisie, nor capitalists – there are only employers and employees, what obviously turns the world upside down. In Poland the capitalist does not appropriate the surplus value. He g i v e s work! We have of course to do with diligently used remains of paternalism which is as old as feudalism and which can be triggered off in a relatively backwards country.

means not only barricades and revolutions, it is also lengthening or elimination of a smoking break, drinking coffee and a lunchbreak, struggle for holidays, free Saturdays, 8-hour workday and maternal or parental leave. Class struggle is struggle for labour legislation, for health and safety at work, for access to science and culture. It is struggle for political writes and the shape of policy of the state, including foreign policy.

Non-antagonistic classes are first of all classes within big social classes. They are of course non-antagonistic in their relation to each other, but they all can be antagonistic in the relation towards another big class. Even our earlier description of class differentiation – although superficial – has already revealed that when we talk about classes we can talk not only about big classes and their division into smaller classes, some kind of sub-classes, but also about classes which – regarding social formations – are not basic classes /like feudal lords, bourgeoisie.../. Typical representatives of such classes are peasants. The peasant who runs his farm with his family and connected with the village community constituted a transformative class which, with generally small modifications, successfully exists in slavery, feudalism, capitalism and real socialism. His relation with other, historically different classes – although full of contradictions – has a non-antagonistic and even just a transformative character.

Thus, the appearing possibilities of analysis of class contradictions turn out to be huge and their depth makes us ask a question about the limits of this analysis. Let's limit it for convenience to the capitalist society. It comes from the previous considerations that the class structure of class society during analysis reveals its subsequent levels, just like Russian nesting dolls. Just like there: a doll within a doll and in the latter another doll, and one more doll in it... similarly we can develop here our study as far as to the microsocal level and ask about the class affiliation of particular individuals, who represent class relations not always in an easy and clear way.

And that is not only because capitalism is an alive and dynamic process generating newer and newer forms of ownership and their hybrid versions, which connect elements which are old and new, ancient and modern, archaic and contemporary. Slavery in the 19th century's USA lives in symbiosis with modern capitalism, nowadays slavery and human trafficking coexists with globalization. It is also about complex ownership relations, which entangle, involve single human beings, particular individuals. A worker who lives in the countryside, cultivates land and commutes to work in a factory was traditionally described by Polish sociology as a peasant-worker. However, nowadays mixing of various ownership relations in one subject causes that it can be seen even more clearly that classes should stop to be conceived only as *sets of people* and class analysis should stop to be treated as an attempt at finding a way of counting everybody among some class. Treating classes as sets of people should rather have an illustrative, pedagogical character. If it is sometimes difficult to say

which class a concrete person belongs to, even greater difficulties must appear in the case of whole societies. In the case of a single human individual in more complicated situations it is possible to talk about a multi-class scheme of entanglement, about prevalence, domination of some bonds, about a contradictory ownership structure. Making somebody “counted among” some class on the basis of prevalence of some form should not make us “forget” about those minority connections. They do not undergo annihilation and annulment. It is not of course about using class entanglements for making simple political or worldview classifications. As it is well known, Friedrich Engels was a full-fledged capitalist and Karl Marx was to a considerable degree kept by him... and they both were communists and atheists... Nevertheless, in the statistical and holistic perspective, *ownership streams* – social powers of dependence and reproduction determined by ownership relations and regarded in a way free of simple anthropologization – determine general tendencies finding their expression in complex and contradictory political relations. Their quantification, measurement, evaluation can be made in very different ways and on different levels. Just as the class scheme of the whole society, the individual form of refraction of ownership relations is also full of contradictions. A naive aspiration for simplicity and clear-cuttedness is highly detrimental for truth.

### **Social classes: myths and ideologization**

It is maybe a good time to quote some examples of fundamental misunderstandings coming into being in connection with the class theory and also mention some of its developments which are at least “strange”.

The basic misunderstanding has already been discussed by me. It consists in treating classes and class struggle as phenomena from the realm of social consciousness and not of the objective space of social contradictions determined by economic and ownership factors, which exist independently from the degree the social actors are aware of them. They have always its representation in class consciousness, but usually in a deformed, symbolic, crashed and syncretic form. The very representation is a result of class struggle, which again cannot be reduced to conscious activity of particular individuals and institutions. It is also determined by epistemological veils produced by the system as a whole: reification, alienation, commodity fetishism, one-dimensionality, consumerism and other phenomena defined by theories which often compete against each other or have a mutually complementary character.

Shaping of *the working class' class consciousness*, the process of coming – as it is usually described – from a “*class in itself*” to a “*class for itself*” – is synonymous with the revolutionary process and the process of institutionalization of class consciousness in the form of loan associations, trade unions, political parties and various social movements contesting the *status quo* and, finally, of struggle for the capture of state power and for cultural hegemony. Thus, it is not about consciousness

treated in the epiphenomenal way and basically different from the social being, but rather about consciousness as a component of the social being, whose existence is an irremovable moment of the very being and of its reproduction. However, *class consciousness* is distinguished from *empirical class consciousness* and treated as getting self-consciousness in the historical dimension going beyond capitalist reality, as a some kind of liminal, potential, ideal consciousness. Its particular historical concretization is realized in the history of the revolutionary movement. On the other hand, empirical consciousness is real consciousness of all members of a given class and its shape in a given moment includes various forms and contents determined by the state of class struggle in a given moment. It may be completely colonized and instrumentalized by the existing social system. Absence of class consciousness is by no means synonymous with non-existence of a class. Problems of shaping and creating of class consciousness constitute, however, a separate broad issue.

Another notorious misunderstanding is treating the working class, wage workers as a monolith resembling the popular category of “people”. Then undifferentiated “people” are conceived analogously as nationalists conceive the category of “nation”. They become a mute generality with mystical power and mystical historical justice slumbering in. However, the pointed out notion of labour force ownership creates a clear perspective of ownership relations and of contradictions among workers or wage labourers. The history of capitalism is not only the history of capital. It is also the history of development and transformations of labour power ownership. The fact that together with the process of liberal globalization there is increasing concentration of capital and wealth causes that a bigger and bigger part of the global society meets the fate of English and Irish peasants “devoured by sheep”. They all are directly concerned by the issue of labour power ownership, of its structure, value, shaping and starting off. The discussed category is especially significant in those countries where the process of socialization of capital /either in the form of nationalization, or of developed public systems of redistribution of wealth/ is advanced. Contemporary reflection tries to interpret problems which are connected with it in various ways – among others by developed theories of *habitus* /P. Bourdieu/ or *ergodynamis* /St. Kozyr-Kowalski/. The discussed recognition of ownership differentiations regarding labour power ownership is a matter of fundamental significance for understanding differentiated political attitudes of members of the same class, conflicts between them and their vulnerability to making alliances outside their own class in order to optimize conditions of selling their own labour power. The Polish working class has fought its way into a globally privileged market for the sale of labour power by a movement under the slogan of solidarity, but it made it at the expense of degradation of farmworkers, unemployment of a considerable part of its own members in cities and forcing emigration of several million people with no chance for existence in a new reality. It made it in an alliance with international capital and local capital-

ists, including the elite of the society of real socialism transforming into “normal” capitalists.

We raise here a very significant issue of going beyond national boundaries by class contradictions and divisions and of their international entanglement. The fact that the Polish working class entered the European Union labour market enables its growing participation in privileges which has been obtained for the West in the global dimension by its bourgeoisie. The working class of colonial mother countries has its share in imperial looting of colonies and in neocolonial exploitation. Its relatively high civilizational status and benefits of “social peace” are a result of struggle, but also of bribery, which was possible as a result of colonial conquests, economic fall of “overseas countries”, genocide and killing. There is no imperialism, neocolonialism, Bushism without a support for militarists, fascists and “apostles of democracy” from workers, nationalists, *red necks*, who perceive military expansion as a source of real benefits for their families, wives and children... As one of my professors used to say: “Working class is not a holy picture”.

As early as in the 19th century workers prospering in capitalism – the so-called labour aristocracy – were set against other parts of the class. The unemployed were usually marginalized by their own class with no less cruelty than inhabitants of colonies. For example in Poland the unemployment level during the last twenty years have been up to 20% and I do not remember even a single strike, even a single demonstration – also among those organized by trade unions – defending the unemployed. On the other hand, there has been a lot of strikes and manifestations defending people getting fired and those working.

In the international scheme the division, proclaimed by Mao Zedong, into the exploiting *global city* and the exploited *global countryside*, criticism of the rich North living at the expense of the poor South as well as a developed theory of the world-system /I. Wallerstein, A. Gunder Frank, S. Amin/ more or less directly raise just the issue of class divisions and contradictions. Today these complex connections of a global character are fundamental for understanding the world. From the global viewpoint struggle for better conditions of sale of labour power has the fundamental character. It is both about *getting* access to good markets by workers from poor regions of the world as well as about *defence* of Western workers’ privileged position against competitors flooding the market. Of course, the defence of the labour market is sabotaged by cosmopolitan capital, which prefers, however, to make deals concerning purchase of cheap labour power in the Third World than reject walls and barbed wire fences built on the borders. Contrary to appearances, great capital is not an opponent of such barriers. While talking about global bourgeoisie and global proletariat you must take into account those issues.

It is also a misunderstanding to assume that class divisions include everyone. Classes are phenomena connected with divisions resulting from ownership and exist-

ing in the realm of production, circulation and service. Besides them there exist big groups of people who are not connected with those fields and who are employed in the educational system, the army, state administration, churches. Their connection with the state as well as some other features of their social situation are tried to be interpreted with *the theory of social estates*<sup>10</sup> constituting an integral part of the class theory. There is sometimes used a term “wage workers class”, which is not sensitive to estate-class differentiations. It has its justification, since it extracts a significant common feature of people living from selling their labour power. However, its careless use can lead to unjustified ignorance of differences between the estate and the class, to erasing differences in labour power ownership. It happens, for example, when huge salaries and golden parachute payments of directors and managers are perceived only as selling labour power and not as a masked form of big capitalist ownership. Fortunately it immediately changes into “normal” ownership of capital and shares, what constitutes a proof of belonging to bourgeoisie even for fundamentalists of empiricism.

An *ad hoc class* is, on the other hand, the term used by me in reflection aimed at explaining possibilities of a socialist revolution in Russia in 1917. As it is well known, the basic problem is understanding a possibility of a victory of a socialist revolution in the country when working class was scanty (Czubiński, 1973, p.12). Statistical data show that in pre-revolutionary Russia working class constituted 14.8% (including agriculture workers, who constituted 3.5%); smallholders, peasants and craftsmen – 66.7%; bourgeoisie (industrialists, merchandisers, landowners and rich peasants) – 16.3 (among them, rich peasants – 11.4%); intelligentsia – 2.2%. It turns out that paradoxically there were fewer workers than “bourgeoisie”. The *ad hoc class* is a category which provides an accurate picture of an unusual situation generated in that concrete case by a war. The *ad hoc class* is constituted mainly by masses of peasants who – as a result of the global capitalist contradictions solved with the world war, have been mobilized and organized in imitation of the most modern working class in order to produce “cannon fodder”. A revolt of such a class is aimed first of all against a drastic form of exploitation taking place on the front, which enforces not only work but – literally – sacrifice of one’s own life in the interests of the global high finance. Of course after the revolution the *ad hoc class* stops to exist and there appears a problem of socialist power of workers’ councils without a working class and in a semifeudal country devastated by war. Cruel years of Stalinism show how tragic are its consequences. The term *ad hoc class* seems to give an accurate picture of specificity of a historically produced situation and it is the key to understanding

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<sup>10</sup> In a developed form the theory of estates can be found as early as in Hegel, it has also its developed position in Max Weber’s works. In Poland the theory of estates appears in rich life’s work of St. Kozyr-Kowalski and Jacek Tittenbrun. See especially: (St. Kozyr-Kowalski, 1999).

the issues of real-formal subjection of work in the system of real socialism and of the dramaturgy of the 20th century history.<sup>11</sup>

### Definition of a social class

Earlier considerations have had the character of some analyses and characteristics made without defining the notion of social classes. My trust in definitions and their significance is limited<sup>12</sup>. They are too often a clumsy substitute for theory and knowledge. The situation is similar in the case of the definition of social classes. The presented remarks show clearly that a theory of social classes, a theory of class struggle which is adopted here has connections with the Marxian analysis and theory of capitalism. As it is well known, Marx himself managed only to begin and give the title to the chapter about classes. Thus, there is no systematic elaboration of the Marxian theory of classes. We live over one hundred years after Karl Marx's death. Even a careful reconstruction of his theoretical assumptions is insufficient for analysing modern world. Contemporarily the theory of classes is a huge branch of knowledge. However, the way of understanding classes which is presented here refers to the fundamental Marxian assumption that classes are shaped on the basis of ownership relations and hence they are beings which have economic – and not mental or political – foundations. It is also different from all theories of social stratification, which, as a matter of fact, take up the issues of classes only allusively and attempt to be a theoretical background for the pragmatic practice in the spirit of organicistic theories of society<sup>13</sup>.

A complex character of the theory of class struggle causes that defining the phenomenon of social classes is difficult and has its thunderous history<sup>14</sup>. In the Marxist tradition – in the face of the fact that Marx did not leave a definition of classes – it was the most common to refer to Lenin's definition. Also today in the entry “social

<sup>11</sup> I wrote more about it in “Życie codzienne w matriksie”, (Kochan, 2007, pp. 44–55). A distinction between *real* and *formal* refers of course to an application of those categories for description of the origin of capitalism in the first volume of “Capital” by K. Marx / the problem of formal and real subjection of labour to capital // vol. 1, pp. 375–376/.

<sup>12</sup> That limited trust goes back to the time when in antiquity man was tried to be defined as a featherless biped.

<sup>13</sup> Toughly speaking. However, for example P. Bourdieu's conception of classes, based on distinction of social cultural, economic and symbolic capital, is open for contradictions and conflict. Apologetics appears in Bourdieu's work only when he rashly broadens the category of *capital* with social, cultural and symbolic capital... what blurs the essence of class divisions of an antagonistic character. There disappears the basic difference between /using Max Weber's words/ ownership classes and wage-labour classes.

<sup>14</sup> The history of the theory of classes in Poland was broadly discussed by me in a book “Klasy społeczne. Z historii pojęcia”, Warsaw 1990, the arguments about the definition of classes in a paper “Leninowska definicja klas społecznych w polskiej socjologii powojennej”, “Prace Filozoficzne Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego” 1989/LXI, pp.75–94.

class” in Polish *Wikipedia* the central place is surprisingly occupied by Lenin’s definition, although the level of description of the discussed entry is not too developed.

Seeing that – and regarding that *Wikipedia* is the most popular source of knowledge – let’s try to quote the definition which is described there and provide it with a correcting commentary.

“*Classes* – proclaims the definition – *are large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated by law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organization of labor, and, consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it. Classes are groups of people one of which can appropriate the labour of another owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy.*”[Lenin, p. 421].

When we look at this definition which is almost a century old, it reveals that – in the light of earlier remarks – it has several significant limitations. Thus, in the context of the earlier analysis, classes are not large groups of people. The class analysis can be applied to the micro-level social phenomena and on the level of sociology of everyday life. The relation to the means of production does not consist in simple “have” or “do not have” /as it is often interpreted/, but it assumes a complex structure of “places” in the social system of production. In that sense the class of agriculture labourers is different than the class of industrial workers. Both of them are classes which “do not have the means of production”, but they are contradictory to each other /although it is a non-antagonistic contradiction/. The formula “in most cases fixed and formulated by law” appropriately opens the way to studying black market, criminal organizations and various other extralegal economic ownership relations. Ownership relations need not be reflected by law, they can be extralegal or even illegal – and the true reality of class relations is constituted just by them.

Thus, the relation to the means of production should be given a broad meaning. History produces there a number of, sometimes highly amazing, forms of dependence. The definition accurately turns attention to differences not only regarding *the dimensions* but also *the mode* of acquiring of “the share of social wealth”. Classes are not aggregates of people of similar income. A peasant, a worker, a craftsman, an office worker can earn the same money, but the way of getting it not only differentiates them proprietary – in the sense of involving them in specific type of economic practices of peculiar logic, principles and chances for functioning – but it also induces distinct, sometimes drastically different, social and political behaviours. The second sentence of the definition is an abbreviated generalization and summary of the whole definition. It is worth paying attention that it does not close relations of exploitation in national frames and can be successfully applied, in the alterglobalist spirit, for class interpretation in the planetary dimension.



Nor the definition closes the way to class interpretation of divisions within great social classes of various societies. It seems to be open for class divisions resulting from differences in labour power ownership – both within nations or states as well as from the viewpoint of the global market. Moreover, in the whole definition there is not even a single word about bourgeoisie or capitalism. Thus, from its perspective social classes are not something specific for capitalism. Elaborating it we can add that even within capitalism itself class divisions have not a static character but a dynamic one. The place in a definite social system making it possible to appropriate other people's labour is a very general formulation and, in some sense, it is only a trail and following it means making a concrete historical analysis of class relations, relations of exploitation and domination. Folklorist divisions into the poor and the rich, bourgeoisie and proletariat belong rather to the world of Manichean search for good and evil than to subtle rules of the theory of class struggle. And it results not only from the fact that large classes divide into smaller ones, that we have to do with a developed structure of classes and that classes from various social formations are mutually irreducible.

The class structure has a dynamic character in the sense of its sensitivity to the money-goods economy market. So what we need is rather a market conception of social classes, a market conception of class struggle<sup>15</sup>, since only taking into account of market dynamics of social structure makes a concrete historical attitude to the theory of classes – that is, fulfilment of its basic assumption and theoretical requirement – possible. Such a market interpretation of the theory of classes is separated from the quoted definition by almost one hundred years of studies, research and discussions.

### Classes and politics

Classes, the theory of classes, the theory of class struggle... The Marxian tradition connects the origin of classes with coming into being of politics and the state. Politics is the realm of confrontation of class conflicts, the state is a form of hegemony held in order to provide reproduction of class domination. The class analysis has not, by its nature, a contemplative character. As old Marx used to say: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to *change* it".

Classes, the theory of classes, the theory of class struggle... find their extension in *class politics*.

The fulfilment of the theory of classes is the class analysis of politics and class politics. An ideological need of presenting class politics as universalism and technical rationality makes the case harder. But if the theory of classes is to be authentic, its essence must reveal itself in its ability to present class criticism of the *status quo* and

<sup>15</sup> It seems that reflection which was practiced by Ralph Miliband in a book *The State in The capitalist society* headed also in this direction – towards a market interpretation of the theory of classes.

class criticism of political opponents' politics, in the art of exposing class interests behind successive moves of the government and behind successive programs of concrete parties, which – while taking on, as a chameleon, new and new colours – still smuggle old class interests.

The class analysis and the class conflict in the face of the health care system reform, the class sense of abolishment of inheritance taxes, the class dimension of government guarantees for bank deposits up to hundreds of thousands złotych... struggle for a “wage disparity” bill restricting managers' incomes, struggle for a minimal wage, elimination of unemployment, pre-school care and nurseries, length of paid holidays, retirement age, the retirement system, the class sense of the women's liberation and equal rights movement, the class cultural and educational policy... Class politics is neither easy, nor obvious. It often errs, sometimes raves. The solution or understanding what does the class politics in a given case, in the face of a concrete situation, consists in is always risky and it takes place “in the heat of battle”. The Communist Party of Poland supported Józef Piłsudski's May Coup. Then it recognized it as “the May mistake”. Instead of anticapitalist changes a former member of the Polish Socialist part – Revolutionary Fraction signed a pact with Polish landowners. When today a leftist writer calls for a boycott of goods produced in China, does he care for Chinese workers' working conditions or is it a neocolonial defence of world markets from competitive cheap workforce endangering Western workers – defence which perpetuates poverty of the Third World?

The case was not and is not easy, but the class theory abolishes “invisibility” of the social conflict and contradictions, it abolishes taboo and de-taboos social reality, it is a form of defence of *homo sapiens*' rationality and of the rational tradition of Enlightenment. It does it, however according to human – not divine – capabilities.

I have mentioned that the class struggle theory reveals that the simplest form of class struggle and class exploitation is struggle concerning working time. If in contemporary Poland a checkout assistant in a supermarket is forced to wear diapers in order not to waste time for “senseless” going to a toilet, it is ridiculous and outrageous. But we should know that those diapers are put on a wage worker by capital in order to maximize surplus value and that those diapers are instruments of class struggle.

In the history of maximization of surplus value, in the history of class struggle capital has dared to do much worse to wage workers...

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## ABSTRACT

The article presents the basic principles of analyzing the contradictions of capitalist societies of the era of globalization. It presents research on both large social structures and class conflicts in the micro-scale and in everyday life. There is also a way of analysing class relations in the countries of real socialism and problems connected with the real and formal socialization.

**Keywords:** Social classes, Marx, real and formal socialization, contradictions, class struggle