

Course: M.A. (Sociology)

Semester: II

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Paper Title: Social Stratification and
Mobility

Topic Covered: Chapter 3: 'A General
Framework for the Analysis of Class' of
the book *Classes*, Verso, London, 1985
by Erik Olin Wright.

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- Author Erik Wright in the third chapter titled 'A General Framework for the Analysis of Class' in his book *Classes* opens the debate on the analysis of class problematizing the existing dominance of the concept of exploitation in explaining the pervading inequalities.
- Wright advocates the formulations of John Roemer as more viable solutions in getting the diagnosis of the prevailing inequalities.
- He as a sound researcher suggests the readers also some modifications and additional argumentativeness to the explanations of Roemer.

○ 'Concept of Exploitation':

- Exploitation has been conventionally defined in terms of economic inequality reflected usually in the causal aspects affecting and influencing the other aspects.
- These exploitative structures further seen in different income based groups.
- But, here siding with John Raumer's analytical formulations Erik Olin Wright opines that all inequalities other than the economic one does not have the same conventional patterns.

- John Raumer uses causal explanations of Karl Marx in two ways:
 - First focusing on the flow of ‘surplus labour’ from one section to another
 - Secondly exemplifying and relating it to various forms of exploitation reflected in ‘game theory’
- First approach is termed as ‘the labour transfer approach’ by Wright and has been accepted as the extended explanations of the conventional Marxist position of labour theory.
- Here, wage has been focussed and discussed.

- John Raumer further explains this exploitative labour transfer under two other heads and terms:
 - Exploitation is embedded in the ownership of the means of production, but in the form of ‘physical asset’ only, but in other forms too.
 - Symmetry situations and contexts reflect in the ‘capital hiring labourers’ and ‘workers renting capitals’
- Furthermore, John Raumer under the credit and labour market presents a brilliant comparison and analysis of class based structures and exploitation patterns.

- Moreover, this comparison is made on two what Erik Wright terms as ‘imagined islands’.

TABLE 3.1^a
Assets Ownership, Exploitation and Class in Capitalism

<i>Class</i>	<i>Hires labour power</i>	<i>Sells labour power</i>	<i>Works for self</i>	<i>Exploitation</i>	<i>Amount of assets</i>
1. Capitalists	Yes	No	No	Exploiter	A great deal
2. Small Employer	Yes	No	Yes	Exploiter	Moderate
3. Petty Bourgeois	No	No	Yes	Ambiguous	Close to per capita share
4. Semi-proletarian	No	Yes	Yes	Exploited	Little
5. Proletarians	No	Yes	No	Exploited	None

^aAdapted from John Roemer, *A General Theory of Exploitation and Class*, chapter 2.

- Wright divides these ‘imagined islands’ into two:
 - ‘labour market island’ and ‘credit market island’.
- Further based on these two what Raumer terms ‘strategies’ explanations go more comprehensive and analytical.
- He explains these ‘strategies’ with two other theses:
 - Every ‘island’ has a definite correlation.
 - This relation is reflected amongst its ‘class location’, ‘exploitation status’ and ‘quantity of assets owned by the individual’

- Raumer thus postulates that ‘market based exploitation’ and ‘class relations’ reflect in the ‘property rights’ and ‘means of production’.
- Game theory approach:
 - Raumer argues that when ‘market based exploitation’, ‘class relations’, reflected in the ‘property rights’ and ‘means of production’ get complex and ambiguous with the involvement of other factors, the need of the ‘game theory’ is very much evident.

- Here, Raumer comparing the set of exploitative systems terms systems of production as ‘game’:
 - “The basic idea of this approach is to compare different systems of exploitation by treating the organization of production as ‘game’. The actors in this game have various kinds of productive assets (i.e. Resources such as skills and capital) which they bring into production and which they use to generate incomes in the basis of a specific set of rules. The essential strategy adopted for the analysis of exploitation is to ask if particular coalitions of players would be better off if they withdrew from this game under certain specified procedures in order to play a different one. The alternative games differ in the ways assets are allocated. Different types of exploitation are defined by the particular withdrawal rules that would make certain agents better off and other agents worse off.”

- Raumer further talks about the additional factors influencing also the diagnosis/solutions of and he terms it as ‘exploitative inequalities’.
- With the help of these propositions and postulates outlined by Raumer, Wright explores the possible solutions of these ‘exploitative inequalities’.
- Raumer further charts out four types of exploitation:
 - ‘Feudal Exploitation’
 - ‘Capitalist Exploitation’
 - ‘Socialist Exploitation’
 - ‘Status Exploitation’

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TABLE 3.2
Assets, Exploitation and Classes

<i>Type of class structure</i>	<i>Principal asset that is unequally distributed</i>	<i>Mechanism of exploitation</i>	<i>Classes</i>
Feudalism	Labour power	Coercive extraction of surplus labour	Lords and serfs
Capitalism	Means of production	Market exchanges of labour power and commodities	Capitalists and workers
Statism	Organization	Planned appropriation and distribution of surplus based on hierarchy	Managers/ bureaucrats and non-management
Socialism	Skills	Negotiated redistribution of surplus from workers to experts	Experts and workers

● 'Class and Exploitation':

- In the subsection Raumer focuses on 'productive assets' and terms it alternatively as 'property relations'.
- Wright finds these explanations of Raumer of class as limited and full of ambiguities unlike his earlier explanations.
- He says that Raumer failed to make a clear cut distinction between Marx's notion of class defined as production oriented and Weber's position of it as market-situation.
- He accuses Raumer of making this otherwise stark difference more complex thus full of ambiguities and overlaps.
- Out of this appointment with Raumer's analytical formulations, Wright argues for a 'general framework of class analysis'

● General Framework of Class Analysis:

- This section explores the framework invented by Wright.
- He does this with modifying and extending the propositions and arguments provided by Raumer.
- Though Wright disagrees with Raumer in this effort, but does not brush aside the logic of him completely and thus appears with more suggestions:
 - “first, it will be helpful to introduce a distinction between economic exploitation and economic oppression; second, we need to recast Roemer’s account of feudal exploitation in terms of a distinctive type of productive asset; and third, we need to replace Roemer’s concept of status exploitation with a new concept, which I shall label ‘organization exploitation’.”

- However, Wright is not predictive and thus says:
 - “Four such problems seem particularly pressing: (1) the status of ‘organization’ in organization assets; (2) the relationship between skill exploitation and classes; (3) causal interactions among forms of exploitation; (4) non-asset-based mechanisms of exploitation. While I will suggest possible strategies for dealing with these issues, I regard them as genuine problems for which I do not have entirely satisfactory solutions.”

- In the direction of developing the ‘general framework of class analysis’ Wright points out at some genuine arguments:
 - “There are basically two reasons why I think the concept of class should be restricted to exploitation rooted in production relations and not extended to encompass all possible social relations within which exploitation occurs. First, the concept of class is meant to figure centrally in epochal theories of social change, theories of the overall trajectory of historical development. In such epochal theories, the development of the productive forces - of technology and other sources of productivity - play a pivotal role. Even if we do not accord the development of the productive forces an autonomous, trans-historical, dynamic role in a theory of history, nevertheless it can be argued that whatever directionality historical development has is the result of the development of the productive forces. If we grant this, then the effective control over the productive forces and the exploitation which such control generates has a particularly important strategic significance in the theory of history. Such control - property relations broadly conceived - defines the basic terrain of interests with respect to historical development. For this reason, it can be argued, it is appropriate to restrict the concept of class to property relations.”

● Conclusion

- Wright though problematizes Marx's position on class and sides with Raumer's propositions and postulates with few modifications and elaborations with few modifications and elaborations his analysis is also not flawless which he himself has accepted. Moreover, his 'general analysis of class' cannot be generalised.

Thank You

