



Did You Just Say **CLASS?**

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WE SEEM TO FACE A SERIOUS CLASS CRISIS WITHIN our movements and organizations that has taken two forms: 1) the issue of class has fallen off the list of priorities, and 2) those that do spend adequate attention to it, have the wrong class analysis, rendering it useless. As a member of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), I see that we are not immune to this problem; therefore this essay seeks to briefly, but succinctly, tackle and address these problems, beginning with the latter. The traditional Left's two class analysis will be scrapped in favor of introducing a third class—the coordinator class; and after identifying this new class, I will discuss the ramification it has on our movements and organizations, drawing especially from SDS experiences. It should be noted that class is going to be examined in a more simplistic nature than it should; however, keep in mind that the author believes that class can never be defined as an individual oppression separate from other oppressions that stem from community and cultural, kinship, and authority relations; but rather, each is actively entwined with one another (what is sometimes called a “totalist” approach, or “complimentary wholism”).



CLASS IS DEFINED AS A GROUP OF PEOPLE that has shared interests, circumstances, and powers by virtue of its on-going position in the functioning of the economy; though income may be a factor due to a class' increased bargaining power, it is not as essential as the liberal notion of class makes it out to be. Furthermore, a class must be able to, at least potentially, develop a consciousness that gives it the ability and will to act autonomously. The position of a class results, as well, in it forming its own psychology and culture distinct from other classes. Moreover, it can be said that class can be defined by its role in social production. Now, the controversial question is, what positions and roles are the basis for determining a class?

The traditional Left's answer to this question is that class antagonism is solely based on the relationship to the means of production. A small group of people, capitalists, own the means of production, and workers are those people who must sell their labor for a wage to the capitalists, because they do not own the means of production. Based on this definition of class, we can agree that capitalists and workers both, indeed, constitute two

classes. The capitalist class has shared interests in maximizing profits and increasing control over the production process—at the detriment of the workers, of course. To help ensure so, they organize business organizations, political parties, clubs, etc. Capitalists also develop a culture and mentality of greed and superiority, as well as in many cases, thinking of workers as mere statistics and instruments of their wealth.

Workers, on the other hand, have an interest in extracting the highest wages possible for the least amount of work, the exact opposite of the capitalists'. And again, to pursue this, workers form unions and other workplace organizations, sporting clubs, political parties and organizations, etc. The fact that workers must sell their labor, even if they do not want to do the work, results in an alienation from one's labor. And given their economic position, workers are obviously going to pursue and live within different cultural conditions. This is the basis of the traditional Left's class analysis, and the root of its conception of class struggle (Of course, there are more nuanced analyses, but these features remain at the core of most of them).



I HAVE PRESENTED THE TRADITIONAL Left's two class analysis and shown that it comes far too short of being sufficient in developing a framework for class analysis and struggle. In its place, I have argued that a third class, the coordinator class, should be recognized as a class between labor and capital. This new class arises not from the relationship to the means of production but from the division of labor. Additionally, I showed how our movements are coordinator class dominated and classist, and I presented some possible solutions. I could be wrong, but I think the proof is in the pudding. Take what I have said to a working class person and see how much resistance you get. Then, do the

same with someone who would fall under what I recognize as the coordinator class. I am willing to bet that there will be many more coordinators denying that they exist than working class people saying coordinators do not exist. My purpose, however, is not to be right out of spite; but, instead, to bring the issue of class back to the forefront, side by side with issues of race, gender, authority, and others. I hope what I have presented can at the least fuel the ever growing discussion on the topic, and at best convince a few people. Either way, my ultimate goal is classlessness and SDS being an active agent in this struggle, and recognizing the coordinator class is the first step towards achieving it.

- Holding hands or chanting at a meeting
- Elaborate, ritualized consensus decision-making processes
- Nudity at rallies
- Property destruction at rallies
- Speaking in acronyms or jargon
- Serving tofu as the only main dish at a coalition event
- Sitting on the floor; providing no chairs, only cushions
- Unwashed hair or clothing
- Bandana facemasks

If you would like to a more in-depth look at inessential weirdness, go to www.classmatters.org. However, for now, people might get the idea.

Finally, there is the issue of working class culture being looked down upon by the Left (more so, amongst what you could call the white Left).

Working people are looked down upon for eating at McDonalds, but it's fine for people on the Left to eat at vegan restaurant, where the workers are no less exploited. They are looked down upon for watching sports, even though they get some fulfillment out of it and it allows them to talk to their peers at work or at school the next day, Oh, but wait! It is fine to watch certain sports, like golf and tennis. They are looked down upon for reading the New York Post, while the Left reads what they themselves call the lying, war mongering, New York Times; meanwhile, the working class person is reading the only section of the paper that tells the truth, the sports page. These are somewhat of generalizations but speak up if it does not resonate with you. The list could go on...



THIS ANALYSIS HELD BY THE LEFT—Marxists, independent socialists and anarchists alike—however, is wrong. Though we do accept that the relationship to the means of production is a criteria for class division, it is not the only one. It is not only theoretical wrong but historical examples prove otherwise, also. There is a third class that lies in between workers and owners, labor and capital—the coordinator class—which arises from the division of labor, giving coordinators the relative monopoly of empowering knowledge and skills, and as a result have considerable say over their own jobs and the jobs of workers below them. These are the waged and/or salaried high-level managers, engineers, doctors, lawyers, and other professionals.

Coordinators defend their skill, knowledge, and authority against workers below them, and fight to gain more wealth, autonomy, and bargaining power from the capitalists above them. They see capitalists as obnoxious impediments to reason and believe that their technocratic solutions to economic and social production are superior. Conversely, coordinators occupy economic positions which generate feelings of self-worth and capability, and in turn, view workers

paternalistically with a great sense of elitism and just rewards, often adopting conceptions as “workers are intellectually incapable or psychologically ill-equipped to administer their own lives without our compassionate aid.” They also form their own organizations to protect their class status—such as professional associations like the American Medical Association, for doctors, and the American Bar Association, for lawyers—or, even, create organizations to help them ascend to the position of new ruling class, which we have seen done under the guise of a “vanguard” party. The latter point, that the coordinator class could have the desire and ability to become a new ruling class, is key to solidifying it as a class. It also allows us to better understand the so-called “socialist” or “communist” revolutions of the past, where in fact they were “coordinatorist.” In other words, the coordinator class can be explicitly anti-capitalist but not be for working class self-management.

As we can see, coordinators have their own shared interests, circumstances, power, psychology and culture, and ability to become a new ruling class; therefore it fits our definition of a class.

Another Look at the Working Class



IN ADDITION TO RECOGNIZING A whole other class, the existence and definition of the coordinator class can help us better define the working class. Now instead of not owning the means of production and merely working for a wage being sole criteria for the working class, we can say that the working class is comprised of wage or salaried workers who do mostly rote, onerous, and disempowering tasks, and have their work defined for them by coordinators or capitalists, because they have been systematically denied access to the skills, knowledge, time and energy, and decision-making power to have it otherwise. Subsequently, in the United States and nearly all other industrialized countries, the class breakdown goes like this: 1-5 percent capitalist, 15-20 percent coordinator, and 75-80 percent working class (keeping in mind that there are various strata within the each class, but right now, we are just trying to get a basic understanding of a three class outlook).



THE PROBLEM OF COORDINATOR CLASS domination not only violates participatory democratic decision-making within movement institutions; however, it is also a problem because working class people are not idiots, contrary to coordinators' beliefs, and will be weary to join coordinator class dominated movements and organizations. Why? Because they tend to be classist. Would a person of color want to join a racist movement and/or organization? Probably not, and we have seen the ramifications of this, also. In fact, working class people tend to have more visceral reactions towards coordinators because most of them have never actually met a real capitalist before. The coordinators are the ones who hassle them at work, discipline them at school, and betray them in their unions

Classism can take many forms structurally by the mere fact that a movement and/or organization has coordinator leadership/majority membership, but it can appear structurally also in the form of extremely long meetings, and no money to fund working class people's transportation to important events, Then there are the actual interactions between working class people and coordinators. We have seen both kinds of classism with-

in SDS and we have been consciously combating it, but more attention definitely needs to be paid.

Here is a list of The Top 10 Mistakes of Middle-Class Activists in Mixed-Class Groups, from the ClassMatters.org website. What they refer to as the Professional Middle-Class is quite similar to what I call the coordinator class (however, in the end, our class analyses and specifications are different).

1. Overlook necessity
2. Overlook intelligence
3. Romanticize working-class people
4. Impose inessential weirdnesses
5. Hide who they really are
6. Think they know it all
7. Think they know nothing
8. Focus on education more than organizing
9. Focus on goals and tasks more than people
10. Take over

I would also like to show some examples of what they call "inessential weirdness":

- Herbal tea and no coffee at an event
- Waving hands in the air instead of applauding

to even show up to the meeting. This will happen because the corporate division of labor still exists and those with the most initial knowledge, experience and skills will occupy these positions, thereby the structure that allows for the coordinator class to rise is still in tact (Again, remember that this is merely focused on class as a whole. Race, cultural, kinship, and other oppressions and factors are also at play).

So what do we do to remedy this class division within our own movements and organizations, including the new SDS? Well, first, we need to recognize there is a problem—so far, that has not been easy. Second, we need to incorporate the idea of “balanced job complexes” into our movements. Basically, we rearrange the tasks that make up jobs and institutional positions, so that there is a relatively equal amount of empowering and disempowering tasks. For example, speakers at events and those that write press releases should be rotated, as well as each time pairing a more experienced member with someone less experienced. This way, the latter can learn and not feel on their own, and next time they will be the experienced one paired with a lesser experienced person, and so on. This should be done wherever possible, and in cases where delegation of tasks and/or authority might be needed for periods

of time, those positions should have term limits, frequent rotation, immediate recall, and clearly set guidelines for responsibilities. Also, to tackle the problem, in general, of unequal development, study groups and other such activities should be held within chapters, so that people’s can gain the knowledge and skills needed to bridge any gaps. Third, we need to recognize the need for and right to form strictly working class organizations, allowing them their right to self-management, just as we now recognize the necessity and right of people of color, woman-identified, queers, and other oppressed groups to do so. Finally, we need to actively combat classism within our movements and address it head on.

Class and Students / 5 Young Adults



USING A THREE CLASS ANALYSIS, WE can also better understand where college students and young adults fall on the whole class map—something that will be important to grasp with the growing student movement and the need for working class students to have a self-managed role within them. Classism definitely exists within student and young adult movements, but if some are not workers and some are obviously not capitalists, or children of capitalist, then what are they? The class identity of a college student largely depends on their family background and their expected job placement once they get out. If a student is working class by upbringing and working class by job or likely job, then they should still be considered and will most likely identify with the working class. If a student is coordinator class by upbringing and coordinator class by job or likely job, then they are still part of the coordinator class. The student or young adult, graduate or not, will stay in that class slot until their own circumstances overcome it. Let me give two examples.

First, say there is a coordinator class student working a low-wage service job while in school. They would not all of the sudden be lumped into the working class. They still have the familial ties and experiences, culture and psychology, of a coordinator class upbringing that will greatly distinguish them from a working class student, whether that student has a job at the moment or not.

Second, say there is a coordinator class student who has recently graduated but has been completely been cut off from their parents, either by choice or not, and is forced to get a working class job. Again, it does not make them working class because they do not lose their background; however, over time, if they continue to be in a working class slot, they may come to identify, rightfully, as working class—but not immediately or in the near future.

As a result of this analysis, I hope that students will rightfully identify as working class when appropriate and create forums where they can discuss

concerns with others who have the same prior experiences, life situations, and probable futures, based on their class, such as we have done in SDS through caucuses; and I hope that coordinator class students will not wrongfully take up space in these forums because they lack a class analysis that fails to understand that not all wage laborers are working class; and conversely, that many students are working class.

Coordinator Class and Organizing 7



I BELIEVE THAT THE FAILURE FOR MOST activists and organizers, especially those that would consider themselves revolutionaries, to embrace the concept of the coordinator class is highly detrimental and will hurt in the long run if not remedied. We see already in the major anti-war coalitions—you know who they are—that a coordinator class has taken control of them, whether intentionally or not. Even though they all claim to be fighting to end a war and to having internal democracy, nothing could be further from the truth. The fact that groups on the “Left” suffer from this problem comes to no surprise to anyone that understands the dynamics of the coordinator class. Moreover, even proclaimed “anti-authoritarian” groups and collectives have fallen victim to coordinator class control. Besides the fact that some organizations’ structure is even somewhat top down on paper and that others are supposedly not, let me give an example of how a class of ruling elites could rise in a situation where voting was done by one person, one vote—even in an or-

ganization dedicated to participatory democracy like SDS.

Say there are ten people who are part of an SDS chapter, anywhere in the country, and each person is guaranteed an equal vote on all the issues concerning them. However, at the same time, only three people were doing empowering work like taking care of the chapter’s finances, writing all of the press releases, and speaking at all of the events. The other seven just hand out flyers, attend events, paint banners, etc. When it comes time to vote on issues, the seven people not doing the empowering work technically have the ability to out vote the three doing the empowering work, on paper at least. However, ninety-nine percent of the time this will never happen because the seven people won’t know enough about what the hell is going on to make an informed decision, or not feel confident enough to speak definitively and challenge the word of the other three; and even more likely, they might be too worn out from doing rote and onerous tasks