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**From Sociology to
Marxism**

One

The Demise of Industrial Sociology

An account of the demise of industrial sociology must examine trends in sociology and their relationship to changes in capitalism. The rise of "the end of ideology" through the 1950s led Daniel Bell, Clark Kerr, Seymour Martin Lipset, Talcott Parsons, Edward Shils, and others to claim that the major problems of capitalism had been overcome. All that remained was to perfect modern society. Among the accomplishments of United States capitalism they counted the incorporation of industrial workers and the institutionalization of industrial conflict. Strikes were "withering away," and those that continued to break out affected the marginal sectors of the labor force—those not yet integrated into the wider society.¹ The industrial worker was no more an agent of revolution than the burgeoning middle classes. Rather, workers were portrayed as "authoritarian" rather than radical; "capitalist" rather than "socialist."² A kind of euphoria had descended on the cold-war sociologists. In particular, blue-collar workers were no longer perceived as a "potential problem," and so they receded from the sociological focus.³

The shift of interest away from the industrial laborer was

accompanied by mounting criticism of the early studies of industrial behavior for their supposed myopia. These commentaries frequently took the seminal Western Electric studies of "restriction of output" as a point of departure. Plant sociology, as Clark Kerr and Lloyd Fisher referred to it, paid little attention to the environment. It ignored the constraints of technology and paid too much attention to "human relations." It ignored external orientations to work. It tended to downplay the economic rationality of the worker. It ignored class conflict and presented only managerial perspectives.⁴ Without doubt, the various critiques were long overdue and provided important correctives. Yet they also overlooked the real if partial truths embedded in the early studies. In this work I shall try to rescue the rational kernel of plant sociology by thematizing these partial truths within a Marxist framework. Thus, rather than highlight the absurdity of isolating the factory from its environment, I shall try to pin down the precise nature of its isolation or relative autonomy—an autonomy that allowed the early researchers to make so many contributions to the understanding of industrial organizations. Rather than argue that conflict between management and worker is endemic or "structural," I shall show how both conflict and consent are organized on the shop floor. Rather than continually harp on the manipulateness and inefficacy of the human-relations attempt to elicit greater cooperation from workers, I shall stress its essential truth, namely, that activities on the shop floor cannot be understood outside the political and ideological realms of the organization of production. While the view that workers are somehow irrational in their responses to work is an untenable position, the notion that they lean toward economic rationality is equally unsatisfactory. In this study I shall show how rationality is a product of the specific organization of production and is part and parcel of the factory "culture." In short, rather than dismiss the findings of industrial sociology, I shall move beyond them by placing and sometimes incorporating them into a broader perspective.

The Emergence of Organization Theory

The new studies that emerged to replace plant sociology shifted the focus of investigation to organizations in general—to hospitals,

voluntary associations, trade unions, political parties, and so on. General theories, conceptual schemes, and focal problems were constructed to encompass behavior in all types of organizations. Three themes appeared to dominate the literature. First, there were the studies of bureaucracy—the functions and dysfunctions of rules.⁵ These sprang from Max Weber's speculations on the relationship between bureaucracy and efficiency. A second set of studies developed a behavioralist framework that looked at organizations from the point of view of the individual as a decision-maker.⁶ The psychological emphasis of these theorists can be seen as deriving from the human-relations perspectives on industrial work. Finally, a number of students began to develop frameworks for understanding the relationship between organizations and their environment. Some concentrated on the influence of socialization, community, etc., on industrial behavior, while others dwelt on the dependence of the organization on environments characterized by different degrees of uncertainty. Still others began to combine these two approaches in an attempt to understand the conditions of industrial development.⁷

Whatever their shortcomings, about which I shall have more to say below, all these developments represented important departures from the earlier studies. The questions they raise, as well the questions from which they arise, appear and reappear throughout the body of this work. The importance of rules will be central to my interpretation of shop-floor politics, although their implications will be understood in terms of domination rather than efficiency. The fact that even the most oppressed worker is faced with making decisions that appear to be significant is something no study of work can avoid. However, the importance of these choices for the production of consent, and the link between such "indeterminacy" at the individual or micro level and the more limited variation at the macro level, will be the focus of my discussion. Finally, I shall spell out the relationship between the organization and its environment in terms of both markets and the processes of socialization, and in the appendix I shall address these issues in terms of industrial development in Zambia. As in earlier industrial-sociology studies, advances made by organization theory will be incorporated into a Marxist framework.

With the subsumption of industrial sociology under organization theory, the distinctiveness of the profit-seeking capitalist enterprise

is lost. At the same time, the development of conceptual schemes and theories to encompass all forms of organizations and associations expresses a very real truth, namely, the penetration of bureaucratic patterns and commodity relations into all areas of society. However, being unreflective about its roots in capitalist society, organization analysis loses this truth by projecting it into general theories that conceal the historically specific features of capitalist and, in particular, advanced capitalist society. Thompson's concern with an organization's ability to control or contain uncertainty in its environment reflects the emergence of large corporations or government agencies that possess resources to engage in buffering, leveling, forecasting, rationing, and so forth. As I hope to suggest, later in this study, restoring Thompson's insights to their political and economic context sheds much light on changes occurring in contemporary society. In the same vein, criticisms of studies like the Western Electric experiments are often based on observations made in organizations in a different period, without due regard to changes in the historical context—a context that the studies themselves deemphasize. Would the bank wiring room look the same today as it did in 1932? What differences might one observe, and how might we explain them? These are the sorts of questions a theory sensitive to historical change might pose.

There have, of course, been attempts to explain change in organizations; the point is that these attempts have been of an ahistorical nature. Descriptions of changes are elevated into spurious explanations of change through the constitution of natural laws of development—the ineluctable processes of rationalization, bureaucratization, the pursuit of efficiency, and so on.⁸ Others, with less grand visions, substitute the empiricism of shopping lists for the development of explanations.⁹ Where explanations are attempted, they tend to preserve the isolation of the organization from its environment, except in moments of transition. These are the theories of organizational persistence, which highlight efficiency, traditionalizing forces, vested interests, absence of competition, and so on.¹⁰ But organizations do not simply “persist.” Like any other enduring patterns of social relations, they have to be continually produced—that is, reproduced. While one of the unique features of the capitalist enterprise is its apparent ability to reproduce its own

relations, it must be stressed that this autonomy is *only* apparent (relative). Theories of organizational persistence take for granted the conditions of persistence and ignore the tendencies toward the erosion of these conditions by the very reproduction of relations.

Once the question of reproduction is posed, one must go beyond the organization and examine the interrelationship of the different parts of society that guarantee its reproduction. But this involves, first, examining *what* different organizations produce and, second, recognizing not only that they produce useful things or “services” but that, directly or indirectly, they also produce profit. It involves the construction of a concrete totality that represents capitalist or advanced capitalist society—in fact, the construction of a theory of advanced capitalism. Not only would it go beyond organization theory; it would deny the latter its right to exist as a distinctive enterprise. It would restore the timeless generalities of organization theory to their specific historical context. And, by the same token, it would unmask appearances, link the part to the whole, the past to the future, and thereby shatter the appearance of naturalness and inevitability in the present order of things.

The Paradox of Organization Theory

In the development of its general and abstract concepts, organization theory has missed the particular and concrete products of organizations. It has substituted formal rationality for substantive rationality and has underplayed the essential feature of the capitalist labor process—the transformation of nature or raw materials into useful things, on the one hand, and into profit, on the other. Instead, the ahistorical formulations are upheld by dwelling on universal aspects of social relations and by thrusting aside concrete action, practices, the doing and making of things. And it is precisely out of this one-sided picture that a fundamental paradox emerges. These studies, both the early and the late ones, rest on one or the other, or on some combination, of two divergent premises, namely, *the assumption of underlying harmony* and *the necessity of social control*. Taken together, these premises appear contradictory; for if there is underlying harmony and consensus is not problematical,

then why is social control important or necessary? And, conversely, if social control is so important, then how can we take consensus as given?

The paradox has remained latent in part because the two themes have in general been developed separately, by authors drawing on the different sociological traditions originating with Emile Durkheim, on the one hand, and Max Weber, on the other. In this way the contradictory assumptions have been kept apart. Moreover, writers in the two traditions have not always pursued the implications of their respective positions. Thus, where social control has been a focal concern, no theory of conflict has been developed to establish the necessity of social control. When the emphasis has been on harmony, harmony is assumed rather than explained, and conflict is looked on as pathological or even accidental. I will deal with each theme in turn.

The assumptions of the social-control literature have been formulated by Arnold Tannenbaum:

Organization implies control. A social organization is an ordered arrangement of individual human interactions. Control processes help circumscribe idiosyncratic behaviors and keep them conformant to the rational plan of organization. Organizations require a certain amount of conformity as well as integration of diverse activities. It is the function of control to bring about conformance to organizational requirements and achievement of the ultimate purposes of the organization. The coordination and order created out of the diverse interests and potentially diffuse behaviors of members is largely a function of control.¹¹

But what are these "idiosyncratic" behaviors, "diverse" interests, etc., that have to be controlled? Can one study control in organizations without a theory of what is to be controlled? Tannenbaum manages to do so by asking general questions of the type, "In general how much say or influence does the manager of your station have on what the following groups do in the company?"¹² So, without reference to the activities being controlled or to the resources wielded to exercise that control, let alone to the "deviant" tendencies against which control is directed, Tannenbaum is able to characterize organizations by their total amount of control and its

distribution. This purely formal mode of measuring control (is he in fact measuring control at all?) enables him to compare very different types of organizations and to construct typologies of "control." But what "control" is all about—why it is there in the first place and the possibility that it has to be understood, at least in part, in terms of its function—is totally lost from sight.

Amitai Etzioni's synthesis does recognize that the underlying impetus to social control cannot be ignored.¹³ Etzioni stands in the Weberian tradition of organization theory and creates typologies based on the type of power (resources) mobilized to elicit conformity (compliance) and the types of "involvement" of participants. Although he acknowledges that conflict is endemic in organizations, Etzioni fails to present a basis or source for particular patterns of conflict. While he does advance beyond Weber in positing different orientations of participants, he provides no theory to account for these orientations or to explain how they generate conflict. At best he provides ad hoc hypotheses, which tend to lose historical specificity under the pressure to develop more general formulations.

In the other tradition, which postulates an underlying harmony among members of the industrial organization, the focal concern is the very presence of conflict. Those who have been concerned with efficiency and productivity have frequently located the source of conflict in workers' adherence to a "lower social code" and their failure to comprehend the "economic logic" of management.¹⁴ From a different perspective, the same observations signify an embryonic form of class consciousness.

Others have suggested that conflict stems from the lack of integration of worker and organization. New patterns of management, including employee-centered supervision and granting greater responsibility to the work group, are proposed for reintegrating individual and organization.¹⁵ Another perspective attributes lack of cooperation to the agencies of industrial work and suggests minor restructuring of the organization of production. "Job enlargement," "job enrichment," "job rotation," and so on, are part of the everyday vernacular of management consultants. Less concerned with social engineering, Robert Blauner has tried to establish a curvilinear relationship between the level of "alienation" and the type of "technology," suggesting that automation will usher in a less

oppressive regime of labor.¹⁶ The approach of the sociotechnical systems associated with the Tavistock Institute emphasize a lack of congruence between the technical and social systems as the source of inefficiency and conflict.¹⁷

In combating the literature on "restriction of output," which portrays workers as compulsive soldierers, a number of studies document the ways in which management is responsible for lapses in the translation of effort into output. In other words, the responsibility for "restriction of output" is placed at the feet of management.¹⁸ A related analysis attributes conflict to uncertainty in the process of production or in the environment.¹⁹ Here, as in all the above cases, it is implied that, in principle, the source of conflict can be removed. That is, conflict is not inherent or inevitable but reflects some irrationality—human, technical, or environmental—that is not a necessary feature of capitalism.

Finally, mention must be made of those who, while retaining the assumption of an underlying harmony of interests, nevertheless regard conflict as endemic to the industrial organization. The "unitary" framework of industrial relations is replaced by a "pluralist" framework, which conceives of the workplace as an arena for a number of competing groups.²⁰ The pluralism of the factory is a sibling of the pluralism of the political realm, in which groups compete for "values" through a shared framework of norms and rules. Undoubtedly, I am doing some injustice to these studies by forcing them into the mold of the "harmony" or "social-control" perspectives. Undoubtedly, many of them combine features of both perspectives. But none of them resolves the paradox, because they all miss the specifically capitalist aspects of the labor process—the very features that provide the focus of my study.

A False Resolution of the Paradox

It is necessary to consider one possible resolution of the paradox that has gained some currency. It emerges from what is sometimes referred to as "the conflict" perspective. An underlying, ever-present, and structured conflict is postulated, so that, to the extent that harmony prevails, social control must also be ubiquitous and

systematic. Moreover, the outbreak of conflict signifies not some irrationality but rather a lapse of, or inadequate, social control. I shall take as representative of this rather diffuse school of thought the important work of William Baldamus, who views "the entire system of industrial production... as a system of administrative controls which regulate quantity, quality and distribution of human effort."²¹

We shall assume from the start that employer-employee relations present a structure of differentiated power that reflects unequally distributed advantages and disadvantages. Consequently the emphasis will be on the causes of conflict and disorganization. This will have the advantage of obtaining a more consistent explanation of the relevant observations than has so far been possible. But some unexpected difficulties will also arise. Once the assumption of a harmonious and self-regulating system is removed, we are faced with the vastly complicated jungle of industrial administration that would seem to be without any system at all. If conflict is basic and unavoidable, how do we account for the apparent stability of employer-employee relations when there are no strikes, no grievances, no dissatisfactions? In other words, it is now the ordinary pursuit of work, the daily run of routine activities, that has to be explained.²²

But this framework is never coherently elaborated, because, as with the social-control literature, we are still not treated to a systematic analysis of the patterns of underlying conflict, of the "structure of differentiated power that reflects unequally distributed advantages and disadvantages."

Baldamus successfully sidesteps the issue by arguing that the day-to-day expenditure of labor on the shop floor is governed by a normative relationship between effort and reward. That Baldamus is not able to make a convincing argument for the existence of a norm rather than an average is less significant than his location of the source of the norm, the content of a "fair day's work," in socialization processes outside the factory.²³ In this way the application of effort is detached from the postulated underlying conflict, which then becomes irrelevant in Baldamus's framework. What has to be explained—the normative relationship between reward and

effort, and the underlying conflict—is taken as given. Why should reward be based on effort in the first place? Why do workers act as though this is a principle that regulates their lives when capitalism blatantly refutes its validity every moment of its existence? These are questions a framework that takes capitalism for granted cannot even pose, let alone answer.

Conclusion

All these theories are unsatisfactory. Insofar as they stress social control, they tend at best to introduce some typologies but miss their historical roots. Moreover, if such theories acknowledge the existence of some underlying conflict, they fail to pin down its form and origin. The harmony theories, on the other hand, have difficulty, as we have seen, in accounting for the outbreak of conflict and the empirical existence of punitive or coercive controls. Industrial sociology and organization theory proceed from the facts of consensus or social control. They do not explain them. It is necessary, therefore, to break with the transhistorical generalities and partial perspectives of industrial sociology and organization theory and to dispense with metaphysical assumptions about underlying conflict or harmony. Conflict and consent are neither latent nor underlying but refer to directly observable activities that must be grasped in terms of the organization of the labor process under capitalism. Conflict and consent are not primordial conditions but products of the particular organization of work. We must avoid being trapped in the various debates between “consensus theory” and “conflict theory” and move the discourse onto an entirely different terrain. To do this we must restore historical context to the discussion. Our first task, therefore, is to comprehend the specificity of the capitalist labor process as one that is distinct from both precapitalist and postcapitalist labor processes.

Two

Toward a Theory of the Capitalist Labor Process

The political implications of sociology stem from the adoption of a particular philosophy of history in which the future is the perfection of the present, and the present is the inevitable culmination of the past. From this all else follows. By taking the particular experiences of capitalist society and shaping them into universal experiences, sociology becomes incapable of conceiving of a fundamentally different type of society in the future; history is endowed with a teleology whose realization is the present. The sociological imagination is riveted in the present. What exists is natural, inevitable, and unavoidable.

In order to conceive of, to anticipate, something “new,” one must begin with different premises, which regard history as discontinuous and capitalist societies as fundamentally different from precapitalist and postcapitalist societies. But differences can be grasped only in relationship to one another. A basis for comparison is necessary—a set of general concepts of universal applicability. But, their applicability must rest on their “particularization.” General concepts can be specified in order to develop theories of

particular societies. There are no general theories, only *general concepts and particular theories*. History is received neither as a succession of "facts" nor as the teleological emergence of the present; rather, it is constituted as a discontinuous succession of particular societies. A distinction is drawn between history as the dynamics of a given society, which is nothing less than a theory of that society, and history as the transition from one society to another. Only this dual conception of history can comprehend a future at odds with the present without being utopian.¹

In this chapter I will present some general concepts—mode of production, relations of production, labor process, relations in production, reproduction, politics, ideology, interests, and so on—and will then indicate how they can be particularized to enable us to understand different societies. I shall outline the rudiments of a theory of feudalism and a theory of capitalism in order to grasp the specificity of the capitalist labor process.

Premises and Concepts

We must begin at the beginning

by stating the first premise of all human existence, and therefore, of all history, the premise, namely, that men must be in a position to live in order to be able to "make history." But life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself.²

In order to make history, men and women must survive, and, in order to survive, they must transform nature into useful things. Such activities we call economic activities. A society comes into being when men and women enter into social relations with one another as they transform nature. The particular relations so produced and reproduced define the character of economic activities, that is, the manner or *mode of production*. History is constituted out of different modes of production, that is, different patterns of social relations into which men and women enter as they transform nature. In other words, history is periodized into a succession of dominant modes of production.

The defining set of social relations in a class society is between those who produce the necessities of life and those who live off the product of others; between those who produce surplus and those who expropriate surplus; between those who are exploited and those who exploit; between peasant and lord; between worker and capitalist. Class societies can be distinguished from one another by the particular manner in which surplus labor is expropriated from the direct or immediate producers, that is, by the *relations of production*.

A mode of production is not simply a set of relations that define a particular way of distributing and appropriating labor time and its product. It is also a particular manner of appropriating nature, or producing useful things.³ Thus, the relations of production are always combined with a corresponding set of relations into which men and women enter as they confront nature, as they transform raw materials into objects of their imagination. This is the *labor process*. It has two analytically distinct but concretely inseparable components—a relational and a practical aspect.⁴ I refer to the relational aspect of the labor process as the *relations in production* or *production relations*. They are, for example, the relations of the shop floor into which workers enter, both with one another and with management. In its practical aspect the labor process is a set of activities that transform raw materials into useful objects or fractions of useful objects with the assistance of instruments of production. This involves labor, the expenditure of effort, the translation of the capacity to work into actual work, of labor power into labor. It is in this practical activity that the human species exhibits its potential for creativity, while the relational aspect expresses the potential for an ethical community of freely associated producers. The relations of production shape the form and development of the labor process, and the labor process in turn sets limits on the transformation of the mode of production.

The particular mode of expropriation of surplus labor defines a set of conditions that must be met if the mode of production is to persist, that is, if its characteristic social relations of production are to be *reproduced*. In other words, as a condition for the existence of a given mode of production, there must be a set of mechanisms that guarantee the reproduction of the relations of production. By

definition, these mechanisms are *political* structures. Political activities concern the reproduction (or transformation) of social relations.⁵ A particular mode of production, therefore, defines a corresponding mode of politics:

The specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of direct producers, determines the relationship of rulers to ruled, as it grows directly out of production itself and, in turn, reacts upon it as a determining element. Upon this, however, is founded the entire formation of the economic community which grows up out of the production relations themselves, thereby simultaneously its specific political form. It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the means of production to the direct producers—a relation always naturally corresponding to a definite stage in the development of the methods of labour and thereby its social productivity—which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure, and with it the political form of the relation of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding specific form of state.⁶

It is in this sense that we can speak of “determination in the last instance by the economic”; that is, we can say that the social structure as a whole is to be understood in terms of the conditions of existence of the economic, of the reproduction of the relations of production. When we turn to specific modes of production, we shall see how this works itself out concretely.

The production of things is simultaneously not only the production and reproduction of social relations but also the production of an *experience* of those relations. As men and women engage in production, they generate a world of appearances, “. . . not the relation between them and their conditions of existence, but *the way they live the relation between them and their conditions of existence: this presupposes both a real relation and an ‘imaginary,’ ‘lived’ relation.*”⁷ Thus, in his discussion of the fetishism of commodities, Marx writes, “it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things.”⁸ That is, in a commodity-producing society, the social nature of production is expressed only through the market, in which “isolated” producers or groups of producers exchange their goods.

It is there that they discover that the value of their goods is determined by the embodied labor. What they can exchange for their own goods is determined by the labor embodied in the produce of others, something beyond their control. That is, relations among producers appear as a relationship among things. In this way the social nature of labor is stamped on things, which turn on their producers like an alien power over them. As a lived experience, the “commodification” of social relations (and, the opposite side of the coin, the personification of things) detaches itself from the conditions that produced it; it thus assumes an autonomy of its own and appears to be natural and inevitable.

No amount of *knowledge* (theory, science, etc.) of the inseparable connection between the structure of the relations of production and the lived experience of those relations can alter that experience, just as no amount of science can affect the fact that the sun appears to move around the earth or that a stick appears to bend when it is placed in water. “The recent discovery, that the products of labour, so far as they are values, are but material expressions of the human labour spent in their production . . . by no means dissipates the mist through which the social character of labour appears to us to be an objective character of the products themselves.”⁹ Lived experience presents what is socially produced as “natural” and beyond human control. It is unaffected by knowledge and the consciousness individuals carry. It makes no difference whether the occupant of a place in production be Karl Marx, John Rockefeller, or Joe Hill, the fetishism of commodities will be equally real to all.

What is the relationship between this world of appearances and *ideology*? Within Marxist literature there is tension over the autonomy of ideology with respect to lived experience, a tension to be found in Marx’s own writings.¹⁰ Clearly, this relationship is historically determined, but here I will lean toward emphasizing lived experience and the constraints it imposes on ideology. Ideology is, therefore, not something manipulated at will by agencies of socialization—schools, family, church, and so on—in the interests of a dominant class. On the contrary, these institutions elaborate and systematize lived experience and only in this way become centers of ideological dissemination.¹¹ Moreover, dominant classes are shaped by ideology more than they shape it. To the extent that they engage

in active deception, they disseminate propaganda, not ideology. As a first approximation, it is lived experience that produces ideology, not the other way around. Ideology is rooted in and expresses the activities out of which it emerges. As Althusser writes, citing Pascal, "Kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe."¹²

People do not carry ideologies around in their heads. They carry theories, knowledge, attitudes in the form of consciousness. These become an ideology, "a material force once it has gripped the masses."¹³ Ideology is neither "a cold utopia" nor "learned theorizing" but a "creation of concrete phantasy which acts on the dispersed and shattered people to arouse and organize its collective will."¹⁴ Ideology acts as a cement for social relations; it binds individuals to one another; it connects immediate experiences to each other, to the past, and to the future. Thus, Marxism as a theory of how capitalism works *can* become an ideology—a political force—during certain periods or among certain sectors of the working class. It *may* be more likely to grip people outside the workplace in political activities rather than in the workplace, where it has traditionally been thought to have "made most sense." During periods of crisis or struggle, when the "naturalness" of lived experience is shaken, a wider range of theories can become a political force. At such times competition between ideologies may be more important. But it is clear that teaching theories in school is not the same as producing an ideology. Making Marxism the official "thought" of a country does not necessarily affect the way people behave at work.

What is the significance of ideology? In what sense is it a material force? Since ideology expresses the way people experience relations, so is it through ideology that "men become conscious of . . . conflict and fight it out."¹⁵ Eugene Genovese shows how struggles between slaves and slave-owners were shaped by paternalism—an ideology that expressed the "humanity" of slaves in the context of a mode of production that did not recognize slaves as other than objects.¹⁶ When slaves rejected slavery, they embraced or rejected paternalism according to the form of religious ideology. According to Genovese, religion was a critical factor in the accommodation of slaves to paternalism in the South and in their rebellions elsewhere. When struggle takes place on the terrain of ideology, the consequences of struggle must be understood through an examination of the actual

relations behind ideology. To take a relatively clear example, in South Africa struggles among classes take place on the terrain of racism, but the consequences can be grasped only by analyzing the reproduction of the relations that both shape racism and are obscured by racism.

But what are these struggles if they are not struggles over the realization of *interests*? And where do interests come from? From what has been said so far, they clearly emerge out of ideology. However, this is not the most generally accepted view. As we saw in chapter 1, much of sociology takes interests as given. It is here that we encounter the problem of rationality and irrationality, logical and nonlogical behavior, and interests real and false, short- and long-term, immediate and fundamental, arising out of some discrepancy between actual and postulated behavior. Where interests are taken as given, ideology becomes a resource that people manipulate to advance their "interests" or a cement that contains conflict or minimizes strain.¹⁷ On the other hand, where interests are not imputed, they are empirically discovered or constructed in a tautological fashion after the event. A particular group voted thus because its interests are so and so. Why are its interests so and so? Because it voted thus. But why, for example, do workers sometimes fight for their racial interests and sometimes for their class interests? The problem is to explain interests in any given situation, not to describe them empirically. Rather than postulate interests either metaphysically or empirically, we must develop a theory of interests, a theory of how they are constituted out of ideology.

It is clear that, as we have defined them, interests cannot be understood outside the particular spontaneous consciousness of social relations, that is, outside a theory of those relations themselves. The interests in material gain, in quantity rather than quality, in competition in a commodity-producing society, are inscribed in the "fetishism of commodities" analyzed by Marx as the consequence of a particular form of production. This is the same as the problem of rationality.

. . . we can see the rationality of the economic behaviour of individuals as one aspect of a wider, social rationality, based upon the internal relationship between economic and non-economic structures in the different types of society. . . . It can then be

understood that, without a scientific knowledge of the internal relations of the social structures, the economist cannot acquire more than a statistical knowledge of individual preferences, which necessarily appear to him as matters of taste, in relation to which the question of rationality does not arise.¹⁸

But if interests are wholly of, and born in, a given society, how do we talk about struggles leading beyond that society? How do we conceive of a society with an alternative "rationality," a society in which history is made consciously and collectively, not unwittingly, a society in which there is no discrepancy between appearances and reality, between experience and the object of appearance—in short, a society in which there is no ideology and in which there are therefore no "interests"? Indeed, as Agnes Heller has persuasively argued, the very concept of interest reflects the standpoint of capitalist society, in which individuals become slaves to motives beyond their control. The concept of interest expresses the reduction of needs to greed. Instead of "fundamental interests" or "class interests" she speaks of "*radical needs*." "'Class interest' cannot be the motive of a class struggle that goes beyond capitalist society: the true motive, free from fetishism, is represented by the 'radical needs' of the working class."¹⁹ But does capitalism tolerate such radical needs? Does it generate them, as Marx asserted, as a condition for its own development? If so, then how, where, and why? And under what conditions might such radical needs be realized in a new society? What circumstances might become the basis for turning a potentiality into an actuality?

From Feudalism to Capitalism

Having developed some general concepts, we can now particularize them to illuminate the capitalist labor process. But in order to highlight the features of the capitalist labor process and establish its distinctiveness, it is necessary to compare it with a noncapitalist labor process. What comparison should we adopt? It is tempting to use socialism, in order simultaneously to engage in a critique of capitalism. However, there is little indication that the labor process in so-called socialist countries is all that different, and the comparison would therefore shed little light on the capitalist labor process. Alternatively, we could construct an ideal type of socialist

labor process; but such idealizations are normally constructed through an inversion of selected features of capitalism and therefore presuppose an understanding of the capitalist labor process. A contrast with precapitalist modes of production is more appropriate. It is possible to draw a contrast between capitalism and *all* precapitalist modes of production based on the "extraeconomic" elements necessary for the appropriation of surplus labor in the latter and absent in the former. But the variation among precapitalist modes of production is so great and what they share is so minimal that a comparison of this kind promises limited dividends. I shall therefore pick one precapitalist mode of production—feudalism—about which a great deal has been written and which has existed historically in forms untouched by capitalism.

Within the Marxist literature there have been numerous debates over the nature of feudalism, usually in connection with the transition to capitalism.²⁰ However, we are not directly concerned here with the nature of feudalism itself or with the transition to capitalism; we are using it only as a contrast to capitalism. Therefore, it is not necessary to enter into the controversies over the nature of the feudal dynamic, the dissolution of feudalism, the role of class struggle in this dissolution and in the genesis of capitalism, the relationship between town and country, the role of the market in all of these, and so forth. Rather, our conceptualization of feudalism will be directed to throwing the form of its labor process into relief. Moreover, our conceptualization does not correspond to any historically concrete feudalism, for this would present a more complex and variegated picture than the one I am about to offer. In fact, I am going to confine myself to a discussion of one particular form of feudalism, the one that Jairus Banaji refers to as its pure, classical, or crystallized form, namely, the one based on labor services.²¹ Ultimately, the proof of this feudal pudding rests in what it will reveal about capitalism.

A defining characteristic of feudal relations of production is appropriation of surplus labor in the form of rent. Serfs, in order to maintain themselves on the land they hold at the will of the lord, are compelled to render a rent in kind, money, labor services, or, more commonly, in some combination of these. I shall restrict myself here to rent in the form of labor services that serfs perform

on the land of their lord—the lord's demesne. The cycle of production in its simplest form is then as follows: serfs work on the lord's demesne for so many days each week, and during the remaining days they cultivate their "own" land for the means of survival. The former is fixed and surplus labor; the latter is necessary labor.

Five features of this pure form of feudalism should be stressed. First, necessary and surplus labor are separated in both time and place. Serfs work on the demesne in "exchange" for the right to cultivate a plot or strip of land, to gain access to common fields, and so on. Second, the serfs are in immediate possession of the means of their subsistence, that is, they consume the crops that they themselves grow. Third, serfs are able to set the instruments of production in motion independently of the lord. To be sure, they cooperate in ploughing, harvesting, and so forth, particularly under an open-field system of crop rotation, but they possess their own tools and can use these without the intervention of the lord.²² Fourth, although serfs organize the labor process on their own land largely independently of the lord, production on the demesne is supervised and coordinated by his agents—the reeve or bailiff. Actual work obligations are laid down in minute detail in the manorial customs and enforced in the manorial courts by representatives of the lord.²³ That is, the productive activities that constitute surplus labor are specified and secured through political-legal institutions. Finally, the lord's right to exclude serfs from the land they cultivate for their own use, a right protected by regional apparatuses of the state, renders labor services inescapable. At the same time, ideologies of fair exchange and military protection present the system of exploitation as natural and inevitable.

Under the feudal mode of production, surplus labor is transparent. It is produced neither automatically nor simultaneously with subsistence production. Rather, serfs can produce the means of existence independently of working for the lord, and surplus labor therefore has to be extracted through extraeconomic means. In short, because surplus labor is separated from necessary labor, the appropriation of surplus is directly intertwined with the political, legal, and ideological realms. Is this true for capitalism? Do direct producers spend a certain amount of time working for capitalists and a certain amount for themselves? Are workers in possession of the means of subsistence as a product of their own activities? Are

workers able to set the instruments of production into motion themselves, independently of the capitalist? Does the appropriation of surplus labor depend on the intervention of extraeconomic means in the cycle of production? The answer to all these questions is no.

Under capitalism workers cannot by themselves transform nature and autonomously provide their own livelihood. They are dispossessed of access to their own means of production—raw materials as well as instruments of production. In order to survive, direct producers have no alternative but to sell their capacity to labor—their labor power—to the capitalist in return for a wage, which they then turn into the means of existence. In working for a capitalist, they turn their labor power into labor; their wage appears as compensation for the entire period they are at work. In reality they are paid only the equivalent, in monetary terms, of the value they produce in part of the working day, say five out of eight hours. The five hours constitute necessary labor (necessary for the reproduction of labor power), while the remaining three hours constitute surplus or unpaid labor. Just as workers are dependent on a market for selling their labor power for a wage, so capitalists are dependent on a market for selling their commodities. Surplus labor produces not only useful things but commodities that can be bought and sold, that is, things with exchange value. In other words, under capitalism, surplus labor takes the form of *surplus value*, which is realized as profit in the market.

Five points of contrast with feudalism should be stressed. First, there is no separation in either time or space between necessary and surplus labor. This distinction, upon which a Marxist theory of the labor process rests, does not appear as such at the phenomenal level. The entire product of labor is appropriated by the capitalist. In normal times necessary and surplus labor are experienced only through their effects: the daily appearance of the worker at the factory gates or office doors and, on the other side, the continued existence of the capitalist and his agents, who keep the gates and doors open, replace worn-out machines, pay out wages, and realize a profit in the market. Only in crisis situations is it possible for the workings of capitalism to be laid bare and for the existence of necessary and surplus labor to assume an unmediated force of its own.

Second, workers cannot live off what they produce on the shop

floor. Serfs can live off the land, but laborers cannot live off pins, let alone pin heads. The only way that laborers gain access to the means of existence (except, of course, through poor relief, unemployment compensation, etc.) is through the market—through the sale of their labor power in return for a wage, which is then converted into consumption goods. Equally, capitalists, if they are to remain capitalists, are dependent on selling their products and purchasing labor power and other necessities in a market. The existence of a market as a *necessary* feature of capitalism, upon which all agents of production depend, sets capitalism apart from feudalism. Although markets are by no means incompatible with feudalism, they are not necessary to it.

Third, workers neither possess the means of production nor can they set them in motion by themselves. They are subordinate to, rather than in control of, the labor process through their subjugation to the agents of capital—the managers who direct the labor process. At the same time, and this is the fourth point, this direction of the labor process is very different from the supervision and coordination exercised by the agents of the lord in demesne production. Under feudalism, productive activities are largely fixed outside the labor process, in the manorial courts. The functions of controlling and coordinating the labor process are separated in time and place. Under capitalism, the direct producers render labor power, not labor services. There is no prior specification of the productive activities; instead, management attempts to extract as much labor from workers as possible. That is, management exists not merely to coordinate, as under demesne production, but also to control. The functions of control and coordination, separate under feudalism, become two aspects of the same process under capitalism.²⁴ Accordingly, struggles over productive activities take place on the shop floor, whereas struggles over labor services take place outside the labor process in the political-legal arena of the manorial courts.²⁵

Finally, just as extraeconomic elements shape the expenditure of labor in the feudal labor process but not in the capitalist labor process, so the same contrast carries over into the reproduction of the relations of production. The relationship between lord and serf is guaranteed through the lord's right to exclude the serf from the

land, a right defined and protected in political and legal institutions, whereas the relationship between worker and capitalist is based on their *economic* interdependence. Under capitalism, the production of commodities is simultaneously the production of the laborer on the one side (through necessary labor—the wage equivalent) and of the capitalist on the other side (through surplus labor and its realization in the form of profit); that is, the production of commodities is, simultaneously, the reproduction of the relations of production, whereas, under feudalism, production for the lord is connected to production for the serf through political and legal mechanisms.

The political, legal, and ideological institutions of capitalism guarantee the external conditions of production. In contrast, their feudal counterparts directly intervened in the cycle of production to ensure its continuity and to determine its content, that is, to reproduce the relations of production and the relations in production. Therefore, the political, legal, and ideological institutions of feudalism recognized agents of production for what they were—villeins, cotters, franklins, reeves, lords, and so on—whereas, under capitalism, these institutions mystify the productive status of workers, capitalists, managers, etc. Thus, the political, legal, and ideological apparatuses of the capitalist state transform relations among agents of production into relations among citizens, sexes, races, and so on. Moreover, the capitalist state, because it is relatively independent of the economic in a way that the feudal state is not, can assume a variety of forms—dictatorship, fascism, parliamentary democracy, apartheid, etc. Even such a cursory examination of feudalism and capitalism suggests how the conditions of existence (reproduction) of a mode of production shape a corresponding set of political and ideological structures.

The Essence of the Capitalist Labor Process

Having established certain distinctive features of the capitalist mode of production by contrasting it with a particular idealized variant of the feudal mode of production, we can focus more closely on the generic character of the capitalist labor process. A worker is em-

ployed by a capitalist—a firm. At the end of the week the worker is paid a wage, based on either an hourly rate or a piece rate that is fixed before the worker enters the factory gates, that is, before the expenditure of effort. Furthermore, the worker receives the wage long before the capitalist has had the opportunity to realize the value of the product of that labor. How is it, then, that, per unit of product, a capitalist can commit himself to a wage that will be no higher than what he can obtain for that unit of product and no lower than what is necessary to attract workers and to maintain their families? More specifically, how is the labor process organized so as to guarantee the production of surplus value?

To claim that capitalism would collapse if there were no surplus value is not to explain its existence. If class struggles can force the price of labor power (the wage) above its value, that is, above the labor time socially necessary for its reproduction, then what places a limit on the rising wage level? How can the capitalist know beforehand at what level the wage per unit of product will exceed the price it can fetch? In talking about the tendency for the rate of profit to fall, Marx assumed, among other things, that workers continue to produce surplus value in ever increasing amounts but that the number of workers (variable capital) and therefore total surplus value shrink relative to the expansion of total capital. That is, Marx's analysis of the demise of capitalism is premised on workers producing more than their wage.

We can see why the production of surplus value is a problem when we compare the position of the capitalist to that of the lord. Under feudalism it is surplus labor in the form of rent that is fixed ahead of time, whereas under capitalism it is the wage that is predetermined. Just as serfs have to fend for themselves in the time remaining for their own production, so capitalists or their managerial agents have to organize the labor process so as to ensure the extraction of unpaid labor.

Marx, of course, had a great deal to say about the mechanisms of securing surplus value in the labor process. Thus, he described how, prior to the Factory Acts in England, capitalists could prolong the working day. When restrictions on working hours were legislated, capitalists resorted to intensification of the labor process through speedups, introduction of piece wages, and mechanization. But

these gave only temporary competitive advantages to individual capitalists, since, eventually, the pace of work was stepped up by their competitors. Reducing the amount of necessary labor (that is, cheapening the costs) in the reproduction of labor power by increasing productivity in the subsistence-goods sector was the only lasting way to increase the rate of surplus value.

All these mechanisms, and Marx's analysis of the labor process in general, rest on the assumption that the expenditure of effort is decided by coercion. For their economic survival, workers are presumed to be totally at the mercy of the capitalist or his agent, the overseer, who can arbitrarily intensify the work, provided that his demands are compatible with the reappearance of the worker the next day (and sometimes not even then) and that they remain within certain broad and often unenforced legal limits. In other words, Marx had no place in his theory of the labor process for the organization of consent, for the necessity to elicit a willingness to cooperate in the translation of labor power into labor. The omission, if not legitimate, is perhaps understandable in the context of nineteenth-century capitalism, where the arena of consent was small. With the passage of time, as the result of working-class struggles, the wage becomes increasingly independent of the individual expenditure of effort. Accordingly, coercion must be supplemented by the organization of consent. Unlike legitimacy, which is a subjective state of mind that individuals carry around with them, consent is expressed through, and is the result of, the organization of activities. It is to be distinguished from the specific consciousness or subjective attributes of the individual who engages in those activities. Within the labor process the basis of consent lies in the organization of activities as though they presented the worker with real choices, however narrowly confined those choices might be. It is participation in choosing that generates consent. As long as the application of force is restricted to transgressions of the narrow but specific and recognized limits of choice, it too can become the object of consent.²⁶ The securing of surplus value must therefore be understood as the result of different combinations of force and consent.

But *securing* unpaid labor is not the same as *realizing* surplus value, and it is their separation that presents further problems for the capitalist. Under feudalism, not only is surplus labor fixed but it

also assumes a directly visible and usually directly consumable form. Under capitalism, surplus labor is neither visible nor consumable. The origins of profit in unpaid labor are therefore concealed in a number of ways. First, capitalists commonly increase profits most by introducing new techniques and, in particular, new machinery—that is, through capital investment. Thus, capital appears as a power unto itself—the power to generate profit. From the point of view of the capitalist, varying the intensity of labor contributes only to variations in the rate of profit around some average profit. That is, from the standpoint of those who direct the process of production, the source of profit is capital, not labor.

Second, surplus value is realized in the form of profit only through the sale of commodities in the market. The price fetched by a particular commodity is usually beyond the control of the individual capitalist. The size of the profit therefore appears to be determined by the market forces of supply and demand, not by the amount of embodied unpaid labor time. Although there is a relationship between price and the labor time embodied in a commodity, it is complicated and obscure to the individual capitalist. Therefore, profit is not only realized in the market; it also appears to originate there. In short, the defining dilemma of the capitalist lies in securing surplus value that is also invisible.²⁷

The obscuring of surplus value presents itself as a problem of securing and realizing surplus value for the capitalist, but it is at the same time a necessary feature of capitalism as far as subordination of the workers is concerned. If the existence of unpaid labor becomes transparent, we find ourselves in the realm of a precapitalist mode of production, requiring the intervention of extraeconomic elements for the renewal of the production cycle. How, then, is unpaid labor mystified to the worker under capitalism? We have already seen that necessary and surplus labor time are not distinguished within the labor process and also how the wage conceals such a distinction. Workers have no sense of producing the wage equivalent or the means of subsistence, since what they produce is but a fraction of a useful object that they may never even see. Nevertheless, the process of production appears to workers as a labor process, that is, as the production of things—use value—rather than the production of exchange value. This is enhanced by

the institutional separation of ownership and control—that is, by the separation of the relations of production from the relations in production. In the labor process, workers experience managers as agents of domination, to be sure, but also as sellers of labor power who, by virtue of their training and expertise, receive greater compensation than the workers themselves. That managers also receive part of the surplus value is not apparent in the labor process.

Although surplus value is mystified to both worker and capitalist, Marx claimed that there were tendencies immanent in capitalism that would reveal to workers the movement behind appearances. Through the emergence of the collective worker, through the development of interdependence and the homogenization of work, and, above all, through class struggle, the proletariat would come to recognize the antagonism between its interests and those of capital, which are rooted in the appropriation of unpaid labor. History has shown that Marx's prognosis was inadequate. In general, workers do not attribute to their own labor the difference between what they produce and what they receive.²⁸ The notions of exploitation and unpaid labor are even more removed from everyday life on the shop floor today than they were in Marx's time.

If workers do not regard their own labor as the source of profit, to what theories of profit do they subscribe? The most frequently held view that I encountered on the shop floor was that profit is some form of earned reward for past sacrifices or for the risk of capital investment. Others argued that profit is generated in the market, particularly as a result of the manipulation of prices. This convergence of worker and capitalist theories of profit reflects a convergence rather than divergence of interests as these are organized under advanced capitalism. To the degree that workers come to regard their future livelihood as contingent on the survival and expansion of their capitalist employer, they will also come to accept theories of profit that reflect the experiences of the capitalist seeking profit through the sale of commodities.²⁹

How is it that surplus value continues to be obscure to workers? How is it that the evolution of the labor process and class struggle has not demystified the source of profit? How is it that workers do not constitute themselves as a class whose interests are irreconcilable with those of capital? Twentieth-century Marxism offers many