1 The Discovery of the New Middle Classes*

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Few topics in political sociology have received as much attention as the nature and politics of the new middle class. Among Marxists the class position of salaried mental workers has been an issue of controversy for nearly a century. Concern with this question can be traced back at least as far as the revisionism debate of the 1890s. It was a major focus in Marxist analyses of fascism in the 1930s and today remains one of the most hotly debated issues within the Western socialist and communist parties. In non-Marxist circles the rise of the new middle class has inspired no less fascination. From the technocratic prophesies of Thorstein Veblen and James Burnham to the "new little man" of C. Wright Mills's *White Collar* to the post-industrial theories of Daniel Bell and Alvin Gouldner, each generation of social theorists has based its vision of the emerging social order on the rediscovery or reinterpretation of this class. In the words of one recent commentator, "an entire history of political sociology could be written on the theme of the new middle classes. Whether in the guise of the 'managerial revolution,' 'white collar,' the 'new working class,' or the 'new petite bourgeoisie,' the emergence of intermediate strata in advanced industrial societies has been rediscovered more often than the wheel."[1]

The reasons for this preoccupation with the new middle class are not hard to identify. As salaried professionals, most social theorists are themselves members of the new middle class. Their concern with this group is thus motivated by an interest in self-understanding, if not by an inflated sense of their own importance. Apart from this are reasons that derive from the distinctive characteristics of the new middle class.

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Because of its heterogeneous composition, the new middle class poses the most difficult problems for the classification of persons according to their place within the social relations of capitalist production. Disagreements over the nature of the class structure have therefore focused on this stratum. On account of its intermediate location the new middle class is often the pivotal class in the formation of political alliances. It has therefore occupied an important place in the investigation of patterns of political alignment and cleavage. Finally, because of its increasing size relative to other classes, the new middle class lends itself to speculation about the transformation of the class structure. Critiques of earlier theories of class and projections of the future of class society have therefore placed the new middle class at the center of the analysis.

As is common in sociology, different theories of the new middle class have often served to bolster different political viewpoints. Social democrats in Weimar Germany cited the supposed lack of proletarian consciousness among white-collar employees as a justification for their reformism. In the United States during the same period, social critics like Veblen used the purported frustrations of salaried technicians to advance a populist attack on big business. From the 1930s onward Marxist explanations of fascism as a panic reaction of the lower middle class served to deflect attention from the strategic failures of working-class parties. Mainstream sociologists used similar theories to absolve capitalists of any responsibility for fascism. Theories of "managerial revolution," developed during and after the Second World War, reflected different political reactions to the expansion of large-scale state and corporate bureaucracies. Conservatives depicted the rise of a new managerial class as a totalitarian threat from which capitalism must be saved; liberals welcomed it as the initiator of a new era of class harmony and corporate responsibility. In American sociology of the 1950s the growth of an affluent new middle class was celebrated as a sign of the "end of ideology" and an assurance of the permanent stability of capitalist institutions. New Left theorists of the 1960s reinterpreted these intermediate strata as a "new working class" in order to account for (and further) the unanticipated revival of political radicalism. Since the 1970s

the efforts of European socialist and communist parties to establish new forms of political alliance have prompted renewed debates among Marxists in which opposing views of political strategy have been expressed as disagreements over the proper conceptualization of these intermediate classes.[2]

In this article I examine some of the earliest theories of the new middle class – namely, those that originated in Germany prior to 1933 and were transplanted to the United States following the rise of fascism. These early writings on the new middle class are interesting today for several reasons. By their sheer volume they constitute one of the most extensive bodies of literature on social class yet produced. As the first studies in this area, they have also been influential in establishing the basic directions later theorists would follow. Indeed, Mills's statement in 1951 that "the range of theory had been fairly well laid out by the middle 'twenties, and nothing really new has since been added" is almost as true today as it was thirty years ago.[3] Finally, because of their origins during a period of crisis and their close connection to strategic debates taking place within the German Social Democratic Party, these early writings provide a clearer focus on the political implications of the new middle class than many subsequent accounts.

This political dimension of class theory provides the main focus for the present article. In the pages that follow I seek to do three things. First, I attempt to clarify the historical circumstances in which various theories of the new middle class originated. Second, I aim to evaluate these theories on the basis of the most recent empirical evidence. Third, and most important, I seek to elucidate the political motives and interests that have shaped (and sometimes distorted) the development of theory in this area.

As the range of theories covered is rather broad, it is helpful to begin with a brief summary of the different theories to be examined and the general nature of my argument. Because most of the early theories of the new middle class were intended as revisions or refutations of Marxism, I begin with a short discussion of Marx's views on intermediate classes. This is followed by a discussion of the pre-1933 German debates over the class position of salaried employees. The main protagonists in these debates were the "orthodox"

Marxists, who viewed all white-collar employees as proletarian and therefore potentially revolutionary, and the "revisionists," who viewed all white-collar employees as middle class and therefore resistant to revolutionary appeals. Reviewing the empirical evidence, I conclude that neither of these theories provided a very accurate account of class alignments in Weimar Germany. As a group, white-collar employees were sharply divided in their relation to the proletarian movement, casting doubt on the assumption that all such employees should be considered members of a single class or class fraction. Examining the political context of these debates, I speculate as to the factors that prevented either side from developing a more differentiated analysis. In the following sections I discuss the theories of the new middle class that were prompted by the rise of fascism – in particular, theories that identified lower white-collar employees as a leading force in fascist movements. Reviewing the available evidence, I conclude that these theories were also largely unsubstantiated. While fascist movements drew considerable support from certain intermediate strata, the lower ranks of white-collar employees were not among these. Here again I speculate as to the political factors that encouraged the acceptance of such theories despite their lack of empirical support. In the concluding section I examine the continuing influence of these classical theories of the new middle class and discuss the implications of my analysis for contemporary debates over the nature of the class structure.

MARX AND THE NEW MIDDLE CLASS

The most common reading of Marx attributes to him a simplistic theory of class polarization in which the disappearance of the old middle class (the petty bourgeoisie) prepares the way for a direct and final confrontation between the two remaining classes: the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. According to this interpretation, Marx totally ignored the emergence of a salaried or new middle class.

Despite the frequency with which these views are attributed to Marx, it is doubtful whether he ever held such a conception of the class structure. As evidence for the simple polar-

ization thesis, commentators typically point to selected passages in the *Communist Manifesto* in which Marx and Engels speak of the increasing division of bourgeois society into "two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing one another: bourgeoisie and proletariat." The specific passage that seems to provide the strongest support for this view comes where Marx and Engels describe the decline of the petty bourgeoisie.

> The previously existing small intermediate strata – the small industrials, merchants and rentiers, the artisans and peasants – all these classes sink down into the proletariat, partly because their small capital does not suffice for the carrying on of large-scale industry and succumbs in competition with the larger capitalists, partly because their skill is rendered worthless by new methods of production. Thus the proletariat is recruited from all classes of the population.[4]

Just a few pages later, however, Marx and Engels acknowledge not only a counter-tendency toward the continual renewal of small-property ownership, but also the replacement of petty-bourgeois intermediaries by intermediate groups of another kind: the growing number of salaried managers, overseers, and other capitalist functionaries.

> In the countries where modern civilization developed, a new petty bourgeoisie was formed, which hovers between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie and continually renews itself as a supplementary part of bourgeois society. The members of this class, however, are being constantly hurled down into the proletariat by the action of competition; indeed, with the development of large-scale industry they even see a time approaching when they will be replaced, in commerce, manufacturing and agriculture, by labor overseers and stewards.[5]

The historical growth of these salaried intermediaries is discussed at greater length in Marx's later writings – leading some to argue that Marx was actually an advocate, if not the originator, of the concept of a "new middle class."[6] This interpretation, while closer to the truth, is also something of an oversimplification. Admittedly there are passages in which Marx used the term "class" or "middle class" when

speaking of salaried intermediate groups. In *Theories of Surplus Value*, for example, Marx argued that the displacement of workers by machinery not only opened new areas for productive employment in other branches of industry (as Ricardo had maintained), but also enabled capitalists to hire increased numbers of unproductive employees, which Marx referred to as "middle classes."

> What he [Ricardo] forgets to emphasize is the constantly growing number of the middle classes, those who stand between the workman on the one hand and the capitalist on the other. The middle classes maintain themselves to an ever increasing extent directly out of revenue; they are a burden weighing heavily on the working base and increase the social security and power of the upper ten thousand.[7]

Marx included in this "middle class" category "the horde of flunkeys, the soldiers, sailors, police, lower officials and so on, mistresses, grooms, clowns and jugglers," as well as "ill-paid artists, musicians, lawyers, physicians, scholars, schoolmasters, inventors, etc."[8] That Marx addressed these disparate groups as "middle classes," however, should not be taken to mean that he attributed to them the same economic and political significance that he ordinarily implied by the term "class." Despite his obvious awareness of these sectors, and his belief in their likely expansion, at no place in his writings did Marx attempt to incorporate them within his general model of capitalist society as a class on a par with the proletariat or the bourgeoisie.

Marx's reasoning on this point would no doubt have been clarified in the famous unfinished chapter on "Classes" that concluded the third volume of *Capital*. It was precisely this problem, in fact, that Marx was beginning to address at the point where the manuscript breaks off. Marx noted that even in England, where capitalism achieved its highest state of development, "the stratification of classes does not appear in its pure form. Middle and intermediate strata even here obliterate lines of demarcation everywhere."[9] Nevertheless Marx affirmed that there were three distinct groups – wage-laborers, capitalists, and landlords – that constituted the three major classes in capitalist society. "What constitutes a class?"

Marx then asked. "What makes wage-laborers, capitalists and landlords the three great social classes?"

> At first glance – the identity of revenues and sources of revenue. There are three great social groups whose members, the individuals forming them, live on wages, profit and ground-rent respectively, on the realization of their labor-power, their capital, and their landed property. However, from this standpoint, physicians and officials, e.g., would also constitute two classes, for they belong to two distinct social groups, the members of each of these groups receiving their revenue from one and the same source. The same would also be true of the infinite fragmentation of interest and rank into which the division of social labor splits laborers as well as capitalists and landlords – the latter, e.g., into owners of vineyards, farm owners, mine owners and owners of fisheries.[10]

Here the manuscript ends without Marx explaining why physicians and officials – or, more generally, professionals, civil servants, and similar groups – should not be considered as an intermediate "class" between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. From the arguments of preceding chapters, however, we can surmise the general line of Marx's reasoning. In the previous chapter Marx distinguishes between production relations and distribution relations and argues that it is the former that uniquely determine the character of a given society. In bourgeois society, the capitalist and the wage-laborer are the "personification" of the dominant production relations. It is for this reason, according to Marx, that they embody objective contradictions that drive capitalist society forward.[11] As a tool for historical analysis, classes are therefore defined from the standpoint of their position within the social relations of production of a given mode of production. This was the criterion, presumably, by which Marx rejected the concept of a salaried middle "class." As categories of unproductive laborers, such groups as professionals and civil servants are alike only in the limited sense that they are all supported out of capitalist revenue – a relation of distribution rather than one of production. From the standpoint of the mode of production they have no common place or function. In Marx's view, therefore, they

are not compelled by systemic forces to organize around distinctive economic interests; they lack the objective basis for solidarity and social unity. For these reasons they do not constitute a "class" in the strict sense of the term, but merely a heterogeneous grouping of intermediate strata.

Exactly which wage and salary employees Marx would have classified as belonging to such an intermediate stratum and which he would have classified as part of the working class is a question he never adequately addressed. As a first approximation, Marx identified the proletariat with productive labor – i.e., with labor hired by capitalists for a wage and producing surplus value in the process of commodity production. There are numerous passages, however, where Marx admitted that a strict application of the productive/unproductive distinction was inadequate to define the boundaries of the proletariat. On the one hand, not all unproductive workers are necessarily excluded from the working class. Commercial employees, for example, although unproductive, were considered by Marx to occupy positions equivalent in all important respects to those of other wage-laborers.

> The commercial worker produces no surplus value directly. But the price of his labor is determined by the value of his labor-power, hence by its costs of production, while the application of this labor-power, its exertion, expenditure of energy, and wear and tear, is as in the case of every other wage-laborer by no means limited by its value . . . He creates no direct surplus-value, but he adds to the capitalist's income by helping him to reduce the cost of realizing surplus-value, inasmuch as he performs partly unpaid labor. The commercial worker, in the strict sense of the term, belongs to the better-paid class of wage-workers.[12]

On the other hand, not all productive workers are unambiguously members of the proletariat. Marx interpreted the category of productive labor broadly to include "all those who contribute in one way or another to the production of the commodity, from the actual operative to the manager or engineer."[13] The latter, however, stand in an uncertain relation to the majority of wage-laborers. The labor of supervision, for example, is both productive and unproductive. In *Capital* Marx distinguished between two aspects of super-

vision: that "made necessary by the cooperative character of the labor process" and "the different work of control, necessitated by the capitalist character of that process and the antagonism of interests between the capitalist and laborer."[14] Salaried managers and supervisors, insofar as they perform coordinating functions of the first type, are simply "a special kind of wage-laborer." However, to the degree that they also enforce the expropriation of surplus-value, they stand in an antagonistic relation to other workers as the direct agents of capitalist domination over the labor process.

The same ambiguity applies to engineers. Marx noted that not only the relations of cooperation, but the forces of science and technology are "capitalized," i.e., they appear as a form of development of capital and thus as a means for the exploitation of labor. The labor of science, once it is separated from the skill and knowledge of the immediate producers and incorporated in the capitalist, his machinery, and his "intellectual understrappers," confronts the workers "as something *alien* . . . existing without their intervention, and frequently hostile to them."[15] Engineers are thus, at one and the same time, both productive workers and the bearers of capitalist relations of domination. They are part worker and part capitalist. Like salaried managers, they appear to occupy an intermediate position between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, although nowhere does Marx provide a detailed analysis of the precise nature or significance of this intermediate location.

Marx had little to say about the politics of salaried intermediate strata; however, his occasional comments regarding these groups suggests that he attributed to them a pattern of contradictory political tendencies similar to that of the petty bourgeoisie. As propertyless employees they experience conditions of economic dependency not unlike those confronting the working class. For this reason they can be expected to identify with certain aspects of proletarian ideology. On the other hand, as servants of the bourgeoisie, they are inclined to identify with their masters and look down upon the working class. The fact that they are paid out of capitalist revenue, and therefore dependent for their livelihood on the existence of a high level of profits, may also lead them to side with the bourgeoisie.[16] Like the traditional petty

bourgeoisie, they are thus pulled in contradictory directions. Nothing definitive can be inferred about their political orientation other than it is likely to be varied and changeable.

THE SALARIED EMPLOYEE IN WEIMAR GERMANY

If Marx avoided any rigid definition of class boundaries or iron-clad pronouncements about the politics of intermediate strata, his immediate followers were inclined toward more categorical formulations. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, two alternative interpretations of Marxist theory competed for authority – each of which presented a more sharply defined view of class relations. The first, which was already prevalent in Marx's time, identified *industrial* wage-earners as the exclusive base of the socialist movement. Relative to this industrial proletariat, all other classes and strata were viewed as "a single reactionary mass." In his *Critique of the Gotha Program* Marx rejected this formula as being either a prescription for defeat (because it unduly restricted the potential base for socialism) or a license for opportunism (because it made no distinction between the more progressive and more reactionary of potential allies).[17] These views were nevertheless incorporated in the 1875 program of the German Social Democratic Party, because they corresponded to the organizational needs of a fledgling movement that based its initial appeal more on its proletarian form than on its socialist content.

The second interpretation proposed a much broader conception of the working class. As socialist parties moved toward a more exclusive reliance on electoral tactics, the doctrine of socialism as a movement by and for a narrowly defined industrial proletariat became an increasing liability. Rather than abandoning their proletarian identification, the more orthodox parties sought to correct this problem by simply expanding their definition of the proletariat. The 1891 Erfurt Program of the German SPD provides the classic illustration of this tendency. It is here, rather than in the writings of Marx, that we first encounter the simple polarization view of class structure. The proletariat, defined as all who work

for a wage or salary, is described as the overwhelming majority of society. "In all countries the mass of the population has sunk to the level of the proletariat . . . The condition of the proletariat [tends] to become more and more that of the whole population."[18] The few remaining small-business owners and farmers are dismissed as a "disappearing middle class" whose "days of independent production are numbered."[19] Over against the proletariat we find only "a small group of property holders – capitalists and landlords" – the last remaining defenders of the established economic order. These formulations allowed the SPD to retain a rhetorical identification with the proletariat while presenting itself as the legitimate representative of all but a small minority of the population. By combining this expanded definition of the proletariat with a deterministic conception of the "laws" of capitalist development, the party affirmed the inevitable polarization of class society and the imminent victory of socialism.

The concept of a "new middle class" originated in opposition to the official Marxist theories of this period. The term was first popularized by anti-Marxist theorists of the 1890s as a designation for the increasing number of civil servants, technical employees, supervisors, and office and sales personnel. Gustav Schmoller, the founder of German academic socialism (*Kathedersozialismus*), was one of the first to designate these salaried employees as a "new middle class." Standing Marxism on its head, Schmoller saw this new middle class, rather than the downtrodden proletariat, as the embryo of a future ruling class that would embody the general interests of society.[20] Other theorists held more modest expectations for the new middle class. Although it might not rise to independent power, the new middle class would become an important stabilizing force in the overall balance of social classes. In opposition to Marxism, the advocates of this view preferred to see society as an organism in equilibrium in which the new middle class, together with the old middle class (the petty bourgeoisie), played the role of mediator between the opposing interests of capital and labor. The rise of the new middle class, by compensating for the decline of the old, was to put an end to the instability of capitalist society.

Social-democratic leaders were divided in their response

to these theories. The dominant tendency within the party vigorously opposed the concept of a "new middle class." Reaffirming the orthodox Marxist viewpoint, they continued to speak of salaried employees as part of the proletariat, often referring to them as a "stiff-collar proletariat" (*Stehkragenproletariat*). Pointing to the increasing oversupply of educated labor and the progressive rationalization of commercial and clerical occupations, Karl Kautsky predicted that "the time is near when the bulk of these proletarians will be distinguished from the others only by their pretensions."[21] He did not fail to notice that the class awareness of these "proletarians" often lagged behind their objective condition. "Most of them still imagine that they are something better than proletarians. They fancy they belong to the bourgeoisie, just as the lackey identifies himself with the class of his master."[22] Nevertheless, because their material situation was becoming more homogeneous with that of the proletariat, their eventual union with the proletarian movement would follow as a matter of course.

> As much as they cling to bourgeois appearances, the time will come for every one of the proletarianized strata of the white-collar groups at which they discover their proletarian heart. Then they will take an interest in the proletarian class struggle and finally they will participate in it actively.[23]

A second group within the party was more receptive to the concept of a new middle class. The advocates of this "revisionist" view had never accepted the orthodox theory of class polarization or the proletarian strategy that was based on that theory. They denied that the middle class was disappearing and maintained that socialism could succeed only if it abandoned its identification with the proletariat and redefined itself as a multi-class movement appealing to universal ethical principles. Eduard Bernstein, the leader of the revisionists, was one of the most outspoken critics of the theory of class polarization. According to Bernstein:

> Far from society being simplified as to its divisions compared with earlier times, it has been further gradated and differentiated both in respect of incomes and of economic

> activities. . . . If the collapse of modern society depends on the disappearance of the middle ranks between the apex and the base of the social pyramid, if it is dependent upon the absorption of these middle classes by the extremes above and below them, then its realization is no nearer . . . today than at any earlier time in the nineteenth century.[24]

In modern capitalism, Bernstein argued, the petty bourgeoisie was not a disappearing class, but one that "increased both relatively and absolutely."[25] As for salaried employees, Bernstein stopped short of labeling these groups as a separate "new middle class," but he also denied that they were being reduced to a common level with other wage-earners. In Bernstein's view, the increasing number and variety of white-collar employees reflected a more general tendency toward the internal differentiation and economic improvement of the working class as a whole.[26] From this he concluded the unlikelihood of class polarization leading to a revolutionary rupture and therefore advocated a gradualist strategy of social reform.

Other revisionists went beyond Bernstein by explicitly excluding salaried employees from the ranks of the proletariat. One of the first social-democratic theorists to argue for the non-proletarian status of salaried employees was Emil Lederer, editor of the influential *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*. In a work published in 1912, Lederer argued that the orthodox Marxist interpretation "oversimplifies the stratification of the classes. The formula 'capitalist-proletarian' blurs all contrasts within the economic order and thus obscures all distinctions outside of and within the process of production."[27] According to Lederer, salaried employees – specifically, salaried technicians and commercial employees – should be classified as occupying "a middle position between the two classes." This intermediate position was defined less by any specific economic or technical characteristic than by its distinctive social *status*.

> The grouping of . . . technical and commercial employees under the heading of "salaried employees" is traceable to the analogous social positions which at least the great majority of each group occupies. In neither of these groups

> is social esteem, which determines their peculiar position, based upon the nature of their technical or economic work; on the contrary, their social valuation is chiefly decided by their relationship to the important classes, the employers and laborers. This middle position between the two classes – a negative characteristic – rather than definite technical functions, is the social mark of the salaried employees and establishes their social character in their own consciousness and in the estimation of the community.[28]

Lederer documented the important changes taking place in the German class structure. Contrary to Bernstein's expectations, he showed a continuing decline in the proportion of independent entrepreneurs: from 28 percent of the economically active population in 1882 to less than 20 percent in 1907. The proportion of manual wage-earners increased only slightly during this period. Thus the decline in the old middle class was compensated primarily by an increase in the number of salaried employees. From 1.8 percent of the workforce in 1882, their ranks increased to 6.7 percent in 1907. In Lederer's opinion, similarities of economic interest inclined these employees toward some form of alliance with the working class; however, their distinctive social status precluded any identification with proletarian ideology. The implicit political message was clear: the socialist movement could appeal to these employees only if it played down its proletarian character.

The economic impact of the First World War gave additional impetus to the growth of the new middle class. The war economy accentuated tendencies toward economic concentration and bureaucratization, expanding the ranks of salaried employees. By 1925, the year of the first postwar census, the number of salaried employees had increased to about 10.9 percent of the employed population.[29] The same conditions that brought into being increasing numbers of salaried employees, however, also tended to lower their standing on the social and economic scale. The widespread unemployment at the beginning of the war brought home to salaried employees the insecurity of their market situation. The temporary economic stagnation that followed the outbreak of war also led to salary cuts for many employees.

Salaries increased once again during the course of the war, but far less than the rise in wages and prices. By the end of the war many salaried employees were earning considerably less than skilled workers.[30]

The economic decline of salaried employees during and after the First World War caused Lederer to reverse his earlier position. In an article on "The New Middle Class," written in 1926 with Jacob Marschak, he rejected the possibility of an intermediate position "between the classes."

> The great majority of salaried employees have come to recognize the fundamental incompatibility between capital and labor, between employer and employee, but they are in no position to bridge this gap; they cannot stand between the two warring classes, and must therefore choose that side which best serves their interests.[31]

Postwar changes in the organizational and political behavior of salaried employees seemed to confirm the orthodox Marxist predictions. Membership in white-collar unions increased fourfold between 1917 and 1923. Collective bargaining, previously rejected by employees as inappropriate to their standing, became the norm after the war. White-collar employees engaged for the first time in strikes and participated in workers' councils alongside manual workers. The adoption by salaried employees of the aims and methods of organized labor convinced Lederer and Marschak that "a single stratum of all gainfully employed (if not a single organization) was in the process of formation."[32]

By the time Lederer and Marschak's article appeared, however, the pendulum had already begun to swing in the other direction. The defeats suffered by the socialist movement during the crisis of 1923 marked the turning point in the development of a unified working class. Although the economic position of salaried employees continued to decline throughout the 1920s, the anticipated fusion of wage and salary workers did not materialize. With the "return to normalcy," salaried employees who had joined socialist trade unions after the war began to shift their allegiance to the more conservative employee associations. The socialist *Allgemeine freie Angestelltenbund*, the largest employee federation in 1923, lost almost 30 per cent of its members by the end

of the decade, while the conservative *Gesamtverband Deutscher Angestelltengewerkschaften* grew to become the largest and most powerful white-collar association.[33]

This rightward shift in the politics of salaried employees gave new credence to the concept of a "new middle class." By the mid-1920s few theorists thought that such a concept could be defended on the basis of the economic condition of salaried employees. Instead, following Lederer's original formulation, they sought to conceptualize the distinctiveness of white-collar employees in terms of their peculiar social *status*. Otto Suhr documented the distinctive "life-style" of salaried employees – exemplified in their white-collar mode of dress and unique consumer habits.[34] Fritz Croner described the powerful hold of occupational ideologies that were based less on the objective position of salaried employees than on romantic analogies with the similar tasks once performed by independent enterprisers.[35] Hans Speier pointed to the special status salaried employees derived from their greater contact with employers and the conservatizing effects of their physical isolation from other workers.[36] In one of the most insightful studies of the conditions of white-collar employment, Carl Dreyfuss emphasized the status consciousness created in salaried employees by the artificial differentiation of the rank order in bureaucratic enterprises.

> Employees in various occupations and in different social positions, such as bank clerk, salesgirl, traveling salesman, stenographer and manager, seem at first glance to have authority and responsibility in the artificial economic pyramid. All are swayed by a great many false conceptions as to their positions and functions in the process of distribution and by illusions as to the importance of their particular work and their social status in general. We have seen how little these employees differ from laborers in their economic and social position and in their activities, but what greater possibilities their occupation offers for the formation of ideologies, and to what extent this situation is taken advantage of by the employer in the exercise of ideological influences. Although the various grades of the business setup are sham and only a few occupations are unaffected by the extensive process of mechan-

> ization and standardization, nevertheless, in the consciousness of the majority of employees, their activity and position, in other words their occupation, appears to differentiate them fundamentally from the worker.[37]

In this manner there developed the notion that white-collar employees occupied conflicting positions on two different dimensions of social stratification. In economic terms they were indistinguishable from the proletariat. In terms of social status they formed a separate group. The question of whether salaried employees belonged to the proletariat or the middle class thus came to be understood as a question of the relative importance of economic relations versus status relations in the determination of political consciousness.[38]

During the last years of the Weimar Republic a fierce debate raged in socialist circles on this issue. Revisionist theorists viewed the status preferences of salaried employees as unalterable and proposed to modify the party program. The party should accept the non-proletarian aspirations of these workers and commit itself to the defense of their special interests. Orthodox theorists continued to regard the status preferences of salaried employees as a transitory phenomenon. Sooner or later material interests would prevail over ideology; class consciousness would replace status consciousness as the basis for political action. The party, they argued, should encourage this "inevitable" process by holding firm to its proletarian line.

These debates were given a special urgency by the economic crash of 1929 and the rise of National Socialism. Between 1928 and 1930 Nazis increased their vote from 2.6 percent to 18.3 percent of the electorate, making them the largest political party after the Social Democrats. Theodore Geiger, who by the early 1930s was one of the leading advocates of the revisionist position, interpreted the rise of fascism as a panic reaction of the economically endangered middle strata – including the lower levels of salaried employees. In an influential article on "Panic in the Middle Class," he argued that the proletarianization of the middle strata, rather than leading to their alliance with workers, was having just the opposite effect.[39] The more the socioeconomic differences between themselves and manual workers

diminished, the more actively white-collar employees struggled to preserve their status differences. Fearful of the loss of status, but incapable of organizing economically to defend their interests, these middle strata were especially susceptible to the appeals of fascism. The success of the Nazis, Geiger maintained, was in part the result of the failure of the Social Democrats to reformulate their ideology and political style.[40] Appealing to salaried employees to acknowledge their proletarianization only heightened their status anxiety. Greater moderation was called for in order to avoid driving the middle strata into the arms of reaction.

SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AND CLASS THEORY

Two opposing theories of class structure thus emerged out of the debates of the Weimar period. According to orthodox Marxists, the proletariat consisted of all (or nearly all) of those who worked for a wage or salary. According to the revisionists, the proletariat was restricted to manual wage-earners, while white-collar employees at all levels belonged to the middle class. Although the evidence is sketchy, it does not appear that either of these theories provided a very accurate account of class alignments in Weimar Germany. Orthodox theorists were probably correct to classify at least the lower levels of salaried employees as members of the working class, but their reasons for this classification and the conclusions they derived from it were highly misleading. By positing nonownership of the means of production as a sufficient criterion of proletarian status, orthodox theorists eschewed any attempt to develop a more detailed analysis of the social relations of capitalist production. In a typically economistic fashion, orthodox Marxists also assumed an automatic correspondence between membership in the proletariat as an economic category and the adoption of a class-conscious proletarian politics. Their analysis denied any independent role for political and ideological struggle in the process of class formation.[41] Most importantly, the theory and ideology of the SPD leadership were totally at odds with the nature of their political practice. While posing as representatives of the common interests of all workers in the

establishment of socialism, the party actually functioned as an interest group *within capitalism* for the relative advancement of a particular sector of the proletariat: unionized industrial workers.[42] In the pronouncements of socialist leaders, white-collar employees were as often a target of derision as the object of appeals to proletarian unity.[43] Given the SPD's indifference (if not hostility) to the immediate interests of white-collar workers and the declining credibility of their commitment to a socialist alternative, it is not surprising that, once the revolutionary hopes of the immediate post-war period began to fade, salaried employees also sought to organize themselves on an interest-group basis for the defense of their relative economic standing. The fact that many white-collar workers joined non-socialist employee associations is probably less an indication of their opposition to socialism than a reflection of the greater militancy with which these associations defended the immediate economic interests of white-collar employees.[44]

Revisionist theorists presented a more sophisticated analysis of the social position of salaried employees. Their innovative studies of authority structures, occupational ideologies, and cultural patterns constituted a definite advance over the crude assertions of orthodox Marxists. Nevertheless, the basic thesis of the revisionists – that status distinctions prevented white-collar employees from identifying with the proletariat – was as much of an oversimplification as the orthodox assertion that the lack of property ownership insured the development of proletarian consciousness. While orthodox theorists exaggerated and oversimplified the influence of economic factors, revisionists were too quick to reify the ideological differences between manual and non-manual employees into a fixed and qualitative class division. In fact, the status differentials from which they deduced the greater conservatism of salaried employees – consumption patterns, position within the bureaucratic rank order, paternalistic contact with employers, isolation from other workers – cut across the basic manual/non-manual division as much as they were aligned with it. By these criteria, the higher ranks of salaried employees were at least as different from the lower ranks of white-collar workers as the latter were from the average manual worker. The political conclusions that

revisionists derived from their theories were also inconsistent with the actual pattern of political events in Weimar Germany. The militant posture of the socialist movement in the years between 1918 and 1923 did not drive salaried employees into the arms of reaction. On the contrary, it polarized large numbers of them toward the side of the working class.[45] It was only with the defeat of the German Revolution, the break-up of the workers' councils and the adoption of a more defensive posture on the part of the SPD that salaried employees began to drift away from the socialist movement.

What was obscured by both the orthodox and revisionist theories was the significant cleavage within the ranks of salaried employees. Judging from the available evidence, salaried employees as a group did not identify with either the proletariat or the bourgeoisie, but divided down the middle. The higher level of salaried employees (professionals, managers, engineers, higher civil servants) generally opposed the goals of social democracy. It is significant that during the heightened polarization of the early 1920s these strata moved rapidly to the right while other salaried employees moved to the left.[46] The politics of routine white-collar employees were much closer to those of manual workers, even though they were separated from the latter by a combination of status pretensions and organizational antagonisms. These divisions were not sufficient to prevent routine white-collar workers from identifying with the proletariat during periods of political polarization. Between 1918 and 1923 over 40 percent of white-collar employees (at all levels) were organized into socialist trade unions.[47] Approximately 40 percent of urban white-collar employees continued to vote for socialist or communist parties until the end of the decade.[48] During less revolutionary periods, however, the weakening of the socialist movement, together with the revival of interest-group competition, served to heighten sectional differences within the proletariat, including the division between manual and non-manual workers.

Orthodox theorists thus exaggerated the size of the proletariat and underestimated its political and ideological divisions, while revisionist theorists minimized the size of the proletariat by reinterpreting status differences as class div-

isions. Although opposite from one another, these two tendencies derived from a common source: the internal tension within social democracy between its revolutionary theory and its reformist practice. Both subordinated questions of class struggle so as to redefine socialism as a *national* rather than a *class* movement. Orthodox theorists did this surrepetitiously by expanding the category of the proletariat to include virtually the whole of society. There are places where Kautsky even goes so far as to include within the proletariat "the majority of the farmers, small producers and traders" on the grounds that "the little property they still possess today is but a thin veil, calculated rather to conceal than to prevent their dependence and exploitation."[49] While the commitment to class struggle was retained in theory, the meaning of this commitment was obscured when upwards of 99 percent of the population was defined as proletarians. Recognizing the inconsistency of this position, revisionists called for a more open break with the theory of class struggle. They responded to the logic of the orthodox argument by seeking to demonstrate the minority status of the proletariat. Their inflated conceptions of the new middle class were motivated by their desire to show that social democracy could succeed only if it renounced its identification with the working class.

FASCISM AND THE LOWER MIDDLE CLASS

On 30 January 1933, Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of the German Reich. A month later the Reichstag fire provided the excuse for the invocation of emergency powers. By the summer of the following year the German parliament had been abolished, opposing political parties dissolved, trade unions and other democratic organizations smashed, and power firmly concentrated in a totalitarian one-party state. The rise of fascism in Germany had an important influence on the development of sociological conceptions of the new middle class. Geiger's article on "Panic in the Middle Class" anticipated what would become one of the most popular theories of fascism. According to this view, it was the middle class – particularly the "marginal" or "lower" middle class –

that constituted the social base of fascism. In this interpretation, fascism represented a reactionary protest of intermediate strata that were threatened by the expansion of capitalist industry on the one side and the rising power of the working class on the other. Combining a populist attack on big business with a hostility to organized labor, fascism presented itself as a third alternative to capitalism or socialism, which promised to protect the position of the middle classes through the establishment of an all-powerful corporatist state.

This interpretation of fascism was actually first suggested in the Italian case by Luigi Salvatorelli in the early 1920s. "Fascism," Salvatorelli asserted, "reflected the class struggle of the petty bourgeoisie that was wedged between capital and the proletariat as a third combatant between two others."[50] In the early 1930s, social democratic theorists like Geiger adapted this theory to account for German fascism. National Socialism, they argued, was an autonomous movement of the old and the new middle classes. These constituted an independent "third force," opposed to both capital and labor. After 1933 this became the accepted social-democratic theory of Nazism and laid the basis for the interpretation of fascism in power as the "dictatorship of the petty bourgeoisie."[51]

Communist theorists of the Third International also stressed the middle-class nature of fascist movements, although they rejected any suggestion that the petty bourgeoisie was capable of acting as an autonomous political force – much less of exercising a dictatorship over the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. According to the official Comintern theory, expounded by Georgi Dimitrov at the Seventh Congress in 1935, fascism in power represented "the most reactionary, most chauvinist and most imperialist elements of finance capital."[52] The middle classes, although they provided the primary recruitment base of fascist movements, were viewed as little more than the paid mercenaries of the bourgeoisie and the large landowners. Individual communist theorists, however, attributed a greater significance to the middle classes in the rise of fascism. Antonio Gramsci and Clara Zetkin both argued that fascism originated as a partly autonomous mass movement of the petty bourgeoisie and cautioned against

the Comintern's propensity to reduce fascism to a simple capitalist conspiracy.[53] Leon Trotsky also emphasized the decisive role of the petty bourgeoisie in the genesis of fascism, although he granted that fascist movements came into power only through the support of the bourgeoisie and, once in power, represented the dictatorship of monopoly capital rather than that of the middle classes.[54]

Perhaps the best-known Marxist account of the rise of fascism was that presented by the French Trotskyist, Daniel Guerin, in his 1936 study, *Fascism and Big Business.* Guerin placed the major blame for fascism on the treachery of the bourgeoisie; however, he also argued that fascism would have been impossible if it had not had a genuine base of support among the discontented middle classes. Guerin explicitly included white-collar employees as part of the social base of fascism.

> The "white-collar proletarian," whose employer has imbued him with "a false feeling of bourgeois respectability," is likewise hostile to the industrial workers. He envies them for earning more than he, and tries at the same time to differentiate himself from them by every means. He does not understand why proletarian socialism speaks of destroying classes; he trembles for his illusory class privileges. Wishing to escape at any price from the proletarianization that lies in wait for him, he has scarcely any sympathy for a socialist regime which, according to him, would complete his proletarianization. He is ready, on the other hand, to listen to those who promise to save him from that fate.[55]

According to Guerin, these salaried employees, together with the urban and the rural petty bourgeoisie, provided "the backbone of the fascist troops."

The thesis of an intrinsic relation between fascism and the middle classes was introduced into American social science by Harold Lasswell in 1933. In an influential essay on "The Psychology of Hitlerism," Lasswell defined National Socialism as a "desperation reaction of the lower middle classes," who were increasingly overshadowed by both the workers and the upper bourgeoisie and who sought to gain revenge. According to Lasswell, nationalism and anti-semitism were peculiarly suited to the emotional insecurities of the

petty bourgeoisie. "Rebuffed by a world which accorded them diminished deference, limited in the opportunities afforded by economic reality, the members of this class needed new objects of devotion and new targets of aggression."[56] Anti-semitism provided a rationalization for ethnic competition within the petty bourgeoisie and also enabled the middle class to discharge their hatred toward both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The prominence of Jews within the socialist movement allowed the petty bourgeoisie to rationalize their animosity toward the wage-earning class as opposition to the "Jewish doctrine" of Marxism, while the historical role of Jews as the money-lenders of tradition allowed them to work off their hostility toward the bourgeoisie as hatred of "Jewish capitalism."

Two years later, the historian David Saposs advanced a similar thesis in an essay that emphasized the continuity between fascism and earlier forms of middle-class radicalism. Saposs argued that the basic ideology of the middle class was populism.

> Their ideal was an independent small-property-owning class consisting of merchants, mechanics and farmers . . . From its very inception it opposed "big business," or what has come to be known as capitalism . . . Their slogan has been "Bust the trusts" and tax the rich, so as to keep the wealth distributed.[57]

Although anti-capitalist in its demands, populism was also opposed to socialism – the basic ideology of the working class. Whereas socialism accepted the concentration of economic life and proposed to socialize large scale industry, populism opposed the trend toward economic concentration and wished to regulate, rather than abolish, the system of private property and profit. In Saposs's interpretation, fascism represented "the extreme expression of middle-classism or populism" in the same sense that communism represented the extreme expression of socialism.

> Just as the strained conditions and economic chaos have given birth to communism as an extreme expression of socialism, so have these same conditions brought forth fascism as the extreme expression of populism . . . In the

desperate attempt to cope with the present chaotic social situation, one represents the proletariat and the other the petite bourgeoisie.[58]

Frankfurt School emigrés Erich Fromm and Franz Neumann were also influential in promoting the middle-class theory of fascism. In *Escape from Freedom*, written during the late 1930s, Fromm echoed many of the themes of Lasswell's essay. "The Nazi ideology," he argued, "was ardently greeted by the lower strata of the middle class, composed of small shopkeepers, artisans, and white-collar workers."[59] The reasons for this were two-fold. In economic terms, the middle class, squeezed between the workers and the bourgeoisie, was the most defenseless group in society and the hardest hit by both the inflation and the depression. In psychological terms, their situation was aggravated by the destruction of "primary bonds" that tied the individual to society. The defeat in war and the downfall of the monarchy struck down the traditional symbols of authority upon which, psychologically speaking, the petty bourgeoisie had built their existence. The monetary inflation undermined the principle of thrift as well as the authority of the state. The greater prestige of organized labor meant that there was no longer anyone for the middle class to look down upon. Rapid social change weakened the authority of parents and shattered the family as the last stronghold of middle-class security. As a result, Fromm argued, the lower middle class "moved into a state of panic and was filled with a craving for submission to as well as for domination over those who were powerless."[60] Hitler, who "combined the characteristics of a resentful, hating petty bourgeois, with whom the lower middle class could identify . . . with those of an opportunist who was ready to serve the interests of the German industrialists and Junkers" was able to mobilize this panic and direct it in the service of German imperialism.[61]

Franz Neumann agreed with Fromm that the Nazi movement was essentially "a middle-class and lower-middle-class movement." Sketching what would later be known as a theory of status inconsistency, he emphasized the contradictory situation of white-collar employees as a contributing factor in their support for fascism.

> It is a well known fact that in every industrial society the new middle classes increase much faster than the industrial workers. It is equally known . . . that the material compensations of the huge bulk of this group are below those of the industrial workers . . . Thus, we have a stratum, growing in numbers, economically below the skilled industrial worker, but whose social aspirations are diametrically opposed to its economic status. It is this dichotomy between economic status and social prestige that provided the soil for Nazism.[62]

Following the Second World War, the interpretation of fascism as an essentially middle-class movement was popularized in American sociology by mainstream theorists like Talcott Parsons, William Kornhauser, and Seymour Martin Lipset.[63] Of the modern versions of this theory, probably the best known is that outlined by Lipset in *Political Man.* Expanding on Saposs's typology, Lipset divided political ideologies into three types – left, right, and center – representing the class interests of the working, upper, and middle classes respectively. Depending upon the political and historical circumstances, each of these classes could espouse an ideology that was either moderate or extremist. Social democracy and communism were the moderate and extremist ideologies of the working class; conservatism and right-wing radicalism were the corresponding ideologies of the upper class; liberalism and fascism were the ideological variants of the middle class. Fascism was thus designated by Lipset as "extremism of the center." Fascism was "basically a middle-class movement representing a protest against both capitalism *and* socialism, big business *and* big unions."[64] Taking German National Socialism as the ideal-typical fascist movement, Lipset marshalled three types of evidence to corroborate his thesis. First, shifts in the electoral statistics between 1928 and 1932 were interpreted to show that the Nazis increased their vote mainly at the expense of the non-Catholic liberal parties of the middle class. Second, ecological studies were cited that showed a correlation between the proportion of Nazi voters in particular regions and the percentage of intermediate strata. Third, he noted that the membership and elite of the Nazi party were disproportionately drawn from

the urban middle classes. In opposition to Marxist theorists, Lipset maintained that the German bourgeoisie played a relatively minor role in the rise of National Socialism.

On the basis of this interpretation of fascism, there developed in American sociology of the 1950s a broad consensus affirming the reactionary potential of the "lower middle class." Theories of lower-middle-class "status panic" were applied to explain a variety of right-wing political movements from the Know-Nothings to the Ku Klux Klan, and were also central to liberal interpretations of McCarthyism.[65] In these theories the term "lower middle class" acquired a new and distinctive meaning. In its original Marxist usage, the "lower middle class" was merely another term for the petty bourgeoisie. In this schema, the term "upper middle class" referred to the bourgeoisie proper, while the term "upper class" was reserved for the landed aristocracy. Proponents of the lower middle class theory of fascism broadened the meaning of the term to include elements of the new as well as the old middle class. The terms "lower" and "upper" were also modified so that they came to be understood as representing two distinct levels or strata between the bourgeoisie (now designated as "upper class") and the proletariat. Top managers, professionals, and government officials were classified as "upper" middle class, while small-business owners and lower-level white-collar employees were defined as "lower" middle class. In American sociology of the 1950s, reactionary tendencies were attributed primarily to the latter group, while the more educated and affluent members of the upper middle class were portrayed as the champions of political tolerance and democracy.

PLACING THE BLAME FOR FASCISM

From the efforts to provide an explanation of fascism there thus came a third theory of the new middle class, distinct from both of the dominant theories of the Weimar period. White-collar employees were neither an ally of the proletariat nor a mediating force between the classes, but an inherently reactionary class. Like the Weimar theories, however, this middle-class theory of fascism was as much a product

of political rationalization as it was the result of solid empirical research. The chief weakness of this theory is its inability to explain why *lower* white-collar employees, in particular, should have supported a movement that was explicitly anti-labor and anti-socialist. In the case of the old middle class, it is easy to identify the material interests that might produce a hostility toward labor and socialism. These include their attachment to the rights of private property, their fear of unionization that increases the wage costs of small employers, and their opposition to taxation for the support of employment and social insurance programs from which the self-employed receive little benefit. The higher ranks of salaried employees – salaried managers and professionals – might also have reason to oppose the egalitarian aims of labor out of an interest in preserving their considerable power and privilege. But such factors would seem to be of limited applicability to the routine white-collar employees who are the focus of most middle-class theories of fascism.

Two reasons are usually given to account for the fascist leanings of white-collar employees. The first posits a rapid decline in the economic standing of salaried employees relative to manual workers. This decline, it is argued, produces a "status panic" among white-collar employees, which is directed against those whose economic position is improving relative to theirs. The problem with this explanation is that its initial premise is empirically false. Generally speaking, the ratio of salaries to wages declines in periods of economic expansion, while the *relative* standing of salaried employees typically improves in periods of recession – the periods in which fascism arises. In Germany, for example, the real incomes of salaried employees increased by an average of 13 percent between 1929 and 1932, while those of manual workers declined by 7 percent.[66] Between 1927 and 1932 the rate of unemployment among salaried employees increased from 2.4 percent to 13.6 percent, while unemployment among manual wage-earners increased from 4.5 percent to 38.4 percent.[67] Relative to manual workers, the economic position of salaried employees deteriorated much more during the First World War and the postwar inflation. It was during this period, however, that white-collar workers were

polarized most sharply toward support for social democracy and organized labor.

A second explanation attributes the fascist leanings of white-collar employees to certain psychological traits: their "authoritarian personality," ideological confusion, emotional insecurity, etc. Such factors may indeed be important in explaining why some individuals are attracted to fascism. It is doubtful, however, whether such traits are unique to salaried employees and other members of the "lower middle class." In the classic empirical work on the subject, Theodore Adorno and his colleagues report little in the way of a consistent relation between class background and such "pre-fascist" character traits as authoritarianism, ethnocentrism, and anti-semitism.[68] More recent studies of the class correlates of authoritarianism, racial prejudice, and political intolerance yield similarly inconclusive results.[69]

An examination of the empirical evidence on the support for National Socialism raises considerable doubts as to the validity of theories that view white-collar employees as uniquely susceptible to the appeals of fascism. In the German case, studies have produced considerable evidence of Nazi support within the old middle class, but have failed to document a comparable level of support among white-collar employees. Analyses of Nazi membership lists by Hans Gerth and Karl Bracher showed independent proprietors to be the most overrepresented of all occupational groups.[70] Charles Loomis and J. Allan Beegle reported high correlations between the support for the NSDAP and the proportion of independent producers in rural areas.[71] Samuel Pratt reported similar correlations with the proportion of independent proprietors in urban areas, but found less consistent evidence of Nazi voting among the salaried sectors of the middle class.[72] The strong inverse correlation between the National Socialist vote and the size of community also contradicts the assumption of high levels of Nazi support among white-collar employees, because the majority of these employees were concentrated in the larger urban centers.[73] In the most recent and comprehensive ecological study of Nazi voting, Thomas Childers found a much stronger pattern of support for the Nazi Party within the old middle class than among the ranks of salaried employees. According to Childers, "while

a hard core of support for the NSDAP persisted throughout the [1924–1932] period within the old middle class, Nazi electoral sympathies within the white-collar labor force were marginal before 1930 and surprisingly weak thereafter."[74]

Outside the old middle class, the support for National Socialism appears to have come less from the lower ranks of salaried employees than from groups much closer to the top of the social hierarchy. Contrary to Lipset, historical research provides extensive evidence of capitalist support for Hitler and his party.[75] Studies more refined than Lipset's have also shown that the Nazi electoral upsurge in 1930, which made it the largest non-Marxist party, was based primarily on the defection of supporters of the ultra-conservative Nationalist Party – the traditional party of the bourgeoisie – together with the influx of new voters.[76] Richard Hamilton, in a detailed study of Nazi voting in fourteen large German cities, found that the highest levels of support for the National Socialists came from the residential districts of the upper and upper middle class, while working-class and lower-middle-class districts showed no pronounced pattern of fascist voting.[77] Daniel Lerner's study of the Nazi elite corroborates the relatively high class standing of Nazi supporters. Lerner found that 73.6 percent of Nazi leaders consisted of university-trained civil servants, business managers, and members of the liberal professions.[78]

In the face of such evidence, it is remarkable how many social theorists continue to view lower white-collar workers as a leading force in the rise of fascism. To understand the reasons for this belief, in the absence of supporting evidence, it is necessary to examine the political and ideological functions these theories have come to serve. For different reasons, various groups have found in the lower-middle-class interpretation of fascism a convenient vehicle for advancing their own political views or for avoiding the need to reexamine their most cherished political beliefs. Reformist social democrats have cited the supposed "status panic" of white-collar employees in order to accuse those to their left of adventurism and as proof of the correctness of their appeals for political moderation. Left-wing socialists and communists have interpreted the same theories as confirmation of their *ouvrierist* prejudice in favor of industrial workers and as a demonstra-

tion of the folly of attempting to woo the reactionary middle classes. Both sides have been absolved from having to confront their own political and theoretical errors, while the working class (minus its white-collar elements) has been given a clean bill of health. Conservative apologists, on the other hand, have utilized similar theories to shift the responsibility for fascism from capitalists onto the middle class. Distinctions between "upper" (good) and "lower" (bad) middle class have been added so as to exonerate the more privileged professional and managerial strata as well. The "lower middle class" has thus served as a common scapegoat for both the left and the right.

The real causes for the rise of fascism are too complex to deal with adequately here.[79] It appears clear that fascism originated as a largely autonomous movement with deep roots in the traditional petty bourgeoisie (especially its rural, Protestant fraction). Certain groups of salaried employees were also strongly attracted to fascism, although these were mostly concentrated among the upper levels of professionals, managers, and civil servants, rather than among the lower levels of white-collar workers. By itself, however, this initial base of middle-class support is insufficient to account for the success of fascism. Two additional conditions were necessary. First was the hostility of the German ruling classes to the democratic institutions of the Weimar Republic. While the majority of German industrialists probably preferred the Nationalist Party to the Nazis as late as 1932, their intense fear of social democracy made them only too willing to embrace Hitler's installation as Chancellor if that was necessary to block the spread of social democratic influence. And once the anti-socialist intentions of the new Chancellor became clear, capitalist support for Hitler and his party increased dramatically, thereby insuring his consolidation of power.[80] Second was the disunity and weakness of the working-class movement, which invited such an anti-socialist offensive. Part of the blame for the success of fascism must be placed on the intense sectarianism of the German socialist and communist parties. On more than one occasion, Social Democrats in Germany allied themselves with reactionary forces in order to bloodily suppress the uprisings of revolutionary workers. The German Communist Party, for its part, grossly underestimated the

seriousness of the fascist threat and devoted most of its effort toward attacking the SPD. It is in such factors, and not in the "status panic" of white-collar employees, that an explanation for the rise of fascism is to be found.

CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON THE NEW MIDDLE CLASS

The theories examined in this article have continued to influence the direction of sociological thinking on the new middle class. Because they reflect the strategic dilemmas of social democracy, the debates of the Weimar period have been re-enacted, at one time or another, in virtually every Western social democratic party. In the wake of the Nazi defeat, the controversy over the class position of salaried employees resurfaced within the German SPD. This time, however, the revisionist position prevailed, resulting in the adoption of the so-called *Mittelklasse Strategie* under the leadership of party chairman Kurt Schumacher.[81] In the British Labour Party during the mid-1950s, similar debates were waged between the left-wing supporters of Aneurin Bevan and the revisionist "Gaitskellites." New Fabian theorists like Anthony Crosland made the non-proletarian status of white-collar employees a central theme in their critique of Marxism and their argument of the need for a reformulation of Labour Party strategy.[82] With the election of Hugh Gaitskell as party chairman in 1955, these theories provided the justification for downplaying the rhetoric of class struggle, abandoning the commitment to public ownership, and redefining the goals of socialism in terms of income redistribution and the expansion of the welfare state. Similar debates have also taken place within the social democratic parties of Norway, Sweden, and other European countries.[83]

To the present day, orthodox Marxists (and many who are not so orthodox) continue to insist that non-ownership of the means of production is a sufficient criterion for membership in the working class. By this criterion, Charles Loren estimates that the United States' population is "approximately 90 percent working class, eight percent petty producers, and two percent capitalists." Analyzing historical trends in the

U.S. class structure, he concludes that the middle class "has practically shrunk to nothing, leaving the working class and the capitalist class face to face."[84] Francesca Freedman agrees that the working class "has grown to include the overwhelming majority of the United States' population." With an optimism reminiscent of Kautsky, she maintains that:

> The objective unity of the [working] class – that is, the unity of its wage-relation to capital – creates the potential for a broad-based mass socialist movement. A socialist revolution in the United States would not face the problem of a multiplicity of classes that characterize many third-world countries.[85]

On the other hand, revisionist theories that define the new middle class as consisting of the entire range of white-collar employees have found a prominent place in academic sociology – particularly in the United States.[86] Applied to modern American society, these theories have been used to predict the disappearance not of the middle class (as the orthodox Marxists predicted) but of the working class. Daniel Bell, for example, writes:

> The classical proletariat consisted of factory workers whose class consciousness was created by the conditions of their work. But even at its most comprehensive definition, the blue-collar group is an increasing minority in advanced or post industrial society . . . For the paradoxical fact is that as one goes along the trajectory of industrialization – the increasing replacement of men by machines – one comes logically to the erosion of the industrial worker himself . . . The manual and unskilled worker class is shrinking in the society, while at the other end of the continuum the class of knowledge workers is becoming predominant.[87]

Bell concludes, with obvious satisfaction, "not only are we a white-collar society, we're quite definitely a *middle-class* society."[88]

Theories of lower-middle-class "status panic" are still one of the favorite sociological explanations of reactionary right-wing movements. In his recent book on Reaganism and the "New Right," for example, Alan Crawford interprets the rightward shift in American politics as a neopopulist "revolt of

the lower middle class."[89] Like earlier sociological accounts of fascism, Crawford is careful to distinguish between the irrational extremism of the lower middle class and the "responsible conservatism" of the upper and upper middle classes.

This is not the place to present a fully developed alternative to the theories examined above.[90] Nevertheless, the preceding analysis yields several conclusions that are relevant to such a task. In the first place, I would argue that an adequate model of the class structure of contemporary capitalist society must come to terms with the fact that the major political cleavage in such societies is one that cuts through the middle of the white-collar ranks. There are any number of possible class models consistent with this finding: lower white-collar employees might be classified as working class and upper white-collars as middle class; both might be classified as an heterogeneous intermediate stratum, while recognizing the propensity for political polarization within this group. What is not consistent with the empirical evidence is any theory that treats *all* white-collar employees as members of a *single cohesive class* – whether as part of the working class or a separate new middle class.[91] Second, the evidence is equally clear that, however one conceptualizes the cleavage within the ranks of salaried employees, it is the lower segment of white-collar employees that has historically been most supportive of a democratic, egalitarian, or socialist politics, and the upper segment that has been most easily mobilized in opposition to these political goals. This is not to say that the concept of "status panic" is entirely without merit or that there are not circumstances in which those of moderate privilege sometimes resist more fiercely the advancement of those beneath them than do those of even greater privilege. But generalizing from these concepts to the conclusion that lower white-collar employees constitute an inherently reactionary class is a form of sociological reasoning that deserves to be relegated to the dustbin of history.

In addition to these substantive points, the preceding analysis yields several conclusions of a more general kind. One of the aims of this article has been to highlight the ideological distortions that have plagued the discussion of the new middle class from the very beginning. Two such distor-

tions have been especially pronounced. First is the tendency for arguments about the composition and relative size of the proletariat and the middle class to serve as a substitute for the concrete analysis of political trends and strategies, as if the assignment of persons into classes were sufficient to determine the nature and outcome of political struggle. In this manner, class analysis has been reduced to a mere rationalization of the political hopes and preferences of different theorists. Second is the tendency for boundaries between classes to be created and adjusted in an effort to neatly isolate any undesirable political traits from whatever class with which one holds an ideological identification. Inherent in both of these tendencies is a kind of "class reductionism" that ignores the complex political and ideological differentiation *within* classes and the contingency of the political and ideological practices through which classes are organized, or fail to be organized, behind specific political agendas. Contemporary social theorists would be wise to reflect on the influence of these tendencies on their own conceptions of the new middle class.

Notes

1. George Ross, "Marxism and the New Middle Class," *Theory and Society*, 5 (1978): 163.
2. For a survey of some of the more recent Marxist debates on this topic, see Alan Hunt, ed., *Class and Class Structure* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977), and Pat Walker, ed., *Between Labor and Capital* (Boston: South End Press, 1979).
3. C. Wright Mills, *White Collar* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), 290.
4. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, translated from the original 1848 text by Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution, Volume II: The Politics of Social Classes* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978), 616. The choice of translations is not without consequence. As Draper shows, much of the evidence for attributing the simple polarization view of class structure to Marx comes from revisions made in the English translation of the *Manifesto* in 1888 – five years after Marx's death.
5. Ibid., 618.
6. Martin Nicolaus, "Proletariat and Middle Class in Marx," in James Weinstein and David Eakins, eds., *For a New America* (New York: Random House, 1970).

7. Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, Part 2 (Moscow: Progress, 1968), 573.
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43. Richard Hamilton, *Restraining Myths* (Beverly Hills, Ca.: Sage Publications, 1975), 136.
44. Richard Hamilton, *Who Voted for Hitler?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 58–59.
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46. Lederer and Marschak, *The New Middle Class*, 41.
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53. Martin Kitchen, *Fascism* (London: Macmillan, 1976), 1–11; John M. Cammett, "Communist Theories of Fascism: 1920–1935," *Science and Society* 31 (1976): 149–163.
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Fascism, Populism, Communism, Socialism," in *Economic Essays in Honor of Wesley Claire Mitchell* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), 397.

58. Ibid., 395–401.
59. Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Avon Books, 1941), 235.
60. Ibid., 244.
61. Ibid., 244.
62. Franz Neumann, "Introduction," to Daniel Lerner, *The Nazi Elite* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1951), vi.
63. Talcott Parsons, *Essays in Sociological Theory* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1954), 124–141; William Kornhauser, *The Politics of Mass Society* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1959), pp. 194–211; Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man* (New York: Anchor Books, 1960), 127–179.
64. Lipset, *Political Man*, 131.
65. Daniel Bell, ed., *The Radical Right* (New York: Anchor Books, 1963); Martin Trow, "Small Businessmen, Political Tolerance, and Support for McCarthy," *American Journal of Sociology* 64 (1958): 270–281; Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, *The Politics of Unreason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).
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69. See Hamilton, *Restraining Myths*; Nevitt Sanford, "Authoritarian Personality in Contemporary Perspective," in Jeanne N. Knutson, ed., *Handbook of Political Psychology* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1973); G. J. Selznick and S. Steinberg, *The Tenacity of Prejudice: Anti-Semitism in Contemporary America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969); John L. Sullivan, James Piereson, and George E. Marcus, *Political Tolerance and American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).
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72. Samuel Pratt, *The Social Basis of Nazism and Communism in Urban Germany* (M.A. Thesis, Michigan State University, 1948), 148.
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74. Thomas Childers, "The Social Bases of the National Socialist Vote," *Journal of Contemporary History* 11 (1976): 30.
75. For one of the best summaries of this evidence, albeit one that seeks to downplay its significance, see Henry A. Turner, "Big Business and the Rise of Hitler," *American Historical Review* 75 (1969): 56–70. Turner shows that "Hitler received considerable support from small- and middle-sized business" (69). With a few notable exceptions, big business leaders were more reluctant to support Hitler, primarily because of

their fear that the National Socialists might eventually live up to their name by turning out to be socialists of some kind. Once Hitler became Chancellor, however, he demonstrated that he was, as he had always reassured them, not a socialist. From that point onward, Turner reports, Hitler "had no difficulty in extracting large sums from big business" that aided him significantly in the consolidation of his power (68). For further evidence on this point, see Arthur Schweitzer, *Big Business in the Third Reich* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1964), 89–109; David Abraham, *The Collapse of the Weimar Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 281–327; Guerin, *Fascism and Big Business*, 33–40.

76. Karl O'Lessker, "Who Voted for Hitler? A New Look at the Class Basis of Nazism," *American Journal of Sociology* 74 (1968): 63–69.
77. Hamilton, *Who Voted for Hitler?* 219.
78. Lerner, *The Nazi Elite*, 7.
79. Among the best recent treatments of this question are Hamilton, *Who Voted for Hitler?*; Abraham, *The Collapse of the Weimar Republic*; Kitchen, *Fascism*; and Pierre Aycoberry, *The Nazi Question* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).
80. Turner, "Big Business and the Rise of Hitler," 68.
81. William E. Paterson, "The German Social Democratic Party," in W. E. Paterson and A. H. Thomas, eds, *Social Democratic Parties in Western Europe* (London: Croom Helm, 1977).
82. Anthony Crosland, *The Future of Socialism* (London: Cape, 1956); Richard Crossman, ed., *New Fabian Essays* (London: Turnsteil, 1952). For an orthodox Marxist rejoinder, see Andrew Grant, *Socialism and the Middle Classes* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1958).
83. Adam Przeworski, "Social Democracy as a Historical Phenomenon," *New Left Review* 122 (1980): 36–44.
84. Charles Loren, *Classes in the United States* (Davis, Ca.: Cardinal Publishers, 1977).
85. Francesca Freedman, "The Internal Structure of the American Proletariat," *Socialist Revolution* 26 (1975): 76.
86. During the late 1930s, the New York State Department of Social Welfare, together with the Department of Social Science at Columbia University, jointly sponsored a WPA project of translations of foreign social science monographs. Among the works translated and deposited at Columbia University were many of the revisionist writings on the salaried employee, including the major essays of Emil Lederer, Fritz Croner, Carl Dreyfuss, Hans Speier, Erich Engelhard, and Hans Tobias. From here the ideas of the Weimar revisionists found their way into he writings of Columbia sociologists like C. Wright Mills, Seymour Martin Lipset, and Daniel Bell.
87. Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (New York, 1973), 125, 148, 343.
88. Daniel Bell, "The Coming of Post-Industrial Society," *TWA Ambassador* (January 1976): 38.
89. Alan Crawford, *Thunder on the Right* (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 290–310.

90. For my own views on the new middle class and its place in the contemporary class structure, see Val Burris, "Capital Accumulation and the Rise of the New Middle Class," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 12 (1980): 17–34; and Val Burris, "Class Structure and Political Ideology," paper presented at the meeting of Pacific Sociological Association, March 1981.
91. For further evidence on this point, see Robert O'Brien and Val Burris, "Comparing Models of Class Structure," *Social Science Quarterly* 64 (1983): 445–459; Reeve Vanneman, "The Occupational Composition of American Classes," *American Journal of Sociology* 82 (1977): 783–807; and Hamilton, *Restraining Myths*, 99–146.