

## The American Ruling Class

This two-part article was published in the May and June 1951 issues of *Monthly Review*.

### I

ONE *Monthly Review* reader, a graduate student of sociology at one of our larger universities, writes to the editors that "in the December and January issues your editorials used the term 'ruling class' no less than eighteen times." He thinks that "by using this term so repetitiously you lay yourselves open to the serious accusation of surface-scratching analysis only." Don't we, he asks, owe MR readers "a probing analysis of a concept that is so complex and crucial"?

It would be easy to answer that the concept of the ruling class is well established in Marxian theory and that we are merely trying to apply the ideas and methods of Marxism to the analysis of the current American scene. But our correspondent would probably not be satisfied. He would hardly deny the relevance of Marxian theory, but he might say that, after all, Marx wrote a century ago, that he never made a special study of the American ruling class even of his own day, and that in any case the free and easy use of theoretical abstractions can be very dangerous. Wouldn't it be better to drop the appeal to authority and tell MR readers what we mean by the "ruling class" in terms that will permit them to judge for themselves whether our usage is justified?

The challenge seems an eminently fair one, and in this article I shall attempt to meet it.

First, however, let me enter a disclaimer. I couldn't give complete answers even if I wanted to. "The American ruling class" is a big subject. An exhaustive study of it would involve a full-dress analysis of the past and present of American society as a whole. That is a job not for an individual or even a small group of individuals; it is a job for all American social scientists working together and over a long period of time. But unfortunately American social scientists, with but few exceptions, are not interested in studying the ruling class; on the contrary, this is a "sensitive" subject which they avoid like the plague. The result is that relatively little valuable work has been done on the ruling class. Some day the American Left will no doubt make good this deficiency, but in the meanwhile there's no use pretending it doesn't exist. In the course of writing this article, I have become even more acutely conscious of it than I was at the outset.

This doesn't mean that American social scientists have done no work at all on the subject of class. The founders of American sociology — men like Lester Ward and William Graham Sumner — were very much interested in classes and their role in American society and wrote a surprisingly large amount on the subject. And in recent years, sociologists and social anthropologists have made a considerable number of field studies of American communities, studies in which problems of social stratification have played a prominent part.

These field studies (of which the Lynds' *Middletown* was one of the first and also one of the best examples) contain a great deal of useful information, but they all suffer from one fatal defect from our present point of view: they are confined to single communities and have almost nothing to say about social classes on a nation-wide scale. Contemporary sociologists and social anthropologists seem, almost as if by common agreement, to have decided that national social classes are not a proper subject of investigation.

The American Left, of course, does not share this view;

in fact, it has long been very much alive to the existence and importance of a national ruling class. And left-wing writers have contributed many studies which throw valuable light on the subject — such works as Harvey O'Connor's *Mellon's Millions* and *The Guggenheims*, Anna Rochester's *Rulers of America*, and Ferdinand Lundberg's *America's Sixty Families*. But these left-wing works have been for the most part factual studies of particular aspects or elements of the ruling class. Generalizations about the ruling class as a whole have tended to run in terms of an oversimplified theory of Wall Street control of the country. This theory has many merits, especially for mass propaganda purposes, but it can hardly be considered an adequate substitute for a scientific analysis of the structure of the American ruling class.

#### GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIAL CLASSES

As an initial step it will be valuable to review the general characteristics of social classes, or in other words to establish the main outlines of a usable theory of social class.

The first thing to be stressed is that social classes are real living social entities; they are not artificial creations of the social scientist. This can best be explained by an illustration. Suppose a social scientist is analyzing a given population. He can divide it into "classes" by dozens of different criteria: for example, by height, by weight, and by color of hair. Each system of classification will yield different results. One person in the six-foot class will be in the 200-pound class and in the brown-hair class; another will be in the 150-pound class and the blond-hair class. By choosing his criteria appropriately the social scientist can thus divide the population up in all sorts of different ways, and any given division is his own artificial creation which may not matter at all to the people themselves. It is not so with social classes. The members of the population are keenly aware of the existence of social classes, of their belonging to one, of their desires to belong (or to avoid belonging) to another. If the social scientist

wants to investigate social classes he has to take these facts as his starting point, and any attempt to impose artificial criteria of class membership will result only in confusion and failure. In other words, social classes are obstinate facts and not mere logical categories.

Recognition of this is the beginning of any attempt to deal seriously with social classes. In the past, American social scientists have been all too ready to deny the reality of social classes, to assume that they exist only in the mind of the observer. Fortunately, however, this is becoming less and less frequent. One great merit of recent sociological field work is that it has shown conclusively that America is a class society and that the American people know it is a class society. In this connection, the best-known work is that of Lloyd Warner and his various associates. It is conveniently summarized in Warner, Meeker, and Eells, *Social Class in America* (1949), Chapter 1. (The reader should be warned, however, that this book does not live up to its title: it is about social classes in individual communities and has only a limited usefulness from the point of view of the problems analyzed in this article.)

The fundamental unit of class membership is the family and not the individual. The proof of this is simply that everyone is born into a certain class, the class to which his family belongs. The basic test of whether two families belong to the same class or not is the freedom with which they intermarry (either actually or potentially).

Families and their mutual relations are thus the stuff of a class system. But this does not exclude individuals from a crucially important role in the functioning of the system. Generally speaking, it is the activity (or lack of activity) of an individual which is responsible for the rise or fall of a family in the class pyramid. The familiar American success story illustrates the process: the lower-class lad who marries at his own social level, then achieves wealth and by so doing establishes his children in the upper reaches of the social hier-



archy. But the process works both ways; there is also the man who loses his fortune and thereby plunges his family to the bottom of the social ladder. It should be noted that in nearly all cases the individual himself does not succeed in making a complete shift from one class to the other. The *nouveau riche* is never fully accepted in his new social environment; and the man who loses his position never fully accepts his new environment. It is only the families that in each case, and in the course of time, make the adjustment.

A social class, then, is made up of freely intermarrying families. But what is it that determines how many classes there are and where the dividing lines are drawn? Generally speaking, the answer is obvious (and is borne out by all empirical investigations): the property system plays this key role. The upper classes are the property-owning classes; the lower classes are the propertyless classes. This statement is purposely general in its formulation. The number of classes and their relations to each other differ in different systems. For example, there may be several upper classes based on different kinds as well as on different amounts of property. We shall have to examine the American case more specifically below.

But before we do this, we must note other things which hold pretty generally for all classes and class systems.

It would be a mistake to think of a class as perfectly homogeneous internally and sharply marked off from other classes. Actually, there is variety within the class; and one class sometimes shades off very gradually and almost imperceptibly into another. We must therefore think of a class as being made up of a core surrounded by fringes which are in varying degrees attached to the core. A fringe may be more or less stable and have a well-defined function in relation to the class as a whole, or it may be temporary and accidental. Moreover, we must not think of all the class members (in either the family or the individual sense) as playing the same role in the class. Some are active, some passive; some leaders,

some followers; and so on. Here we touch upon all the complex questions of class organization, cohesion, effectiveness, and the like. And finally, we must not imagine that all members of a class think and behave exactly alike. There are differences here too, though clearly the values and behavior norms of the class set fairly definite limits to the extent of these differences. A person who deviates too far from what the class considers acceptable is, so to speak, expelled from the class and is thenceforth treated as a renegade or deserter (the common use of the expression "traitor to his class" is symptomatic — and significant — in this connection).

In all these respects, of course, there is wide variation between different classes and class systems. Some classes are relatively homogeneous, well defined, effectively organized, and to a high degree class-conscious. Others are loosely knit, amorphous, lacking in organization, and hardly at all class-conscious. Further, some classes in the course of their life histories pass through different stages, in the course of which all these variables undergo more or less thorough changes. These are all problems to be investigated in the particular case; there are no general answers valid for all times and places.

One more point has to be noted before we turn to the American case. There is no such thing as a completely closed class system. All systems of which we have historical record display interclass mobility, both upwards and downwards. In some systems, however, mobility is difficult and slow; in others it is easy and rapid. A social class can be compared to a hotel which always has guests, some of whom are permanent residents and some transients. In a relatively static system, the average sojourn is long; arrivals and departures are infrequent, and the proportion of permanent residents is high. In a dynamic system, guests come and go all the time; the hotel is always full but always with new people who have only recently arrived and, except in a few cases, will soon depart.

## THE AMERICAN CLASS SYSTEM

The United States is a capitalist society, the purest capitalist society that ever existed. It has no feudal hangovers to complicate the class system. Independent producers (working with their own means of production but without hired labor) there are, but both economically and socially they constitute a relatively unimportant feature of the American system. What do we expect the class structure of such a pure capitalist society to be?

Clearly, the two decisive classes are defined by the very nature of capitalism: the owners of the means of production (the capitalist class), and the wage laborers who set the means of production in motion (the working class). There is no doubt about the existence or importance of these two classes in America. Taken together they can be said to constitute the foundation of the American class system.

The foundation of a building, however, is not the whole building; nor does the American economic system contain only capitalists and workers. For one thing, as we have already noted, there are independent producers (artisans and small farmers), and to these we should add small shopkeepers and providers of services (for example, the proprietors of local gas stations). These people make up the lower middle class, or *petite bourgeoisie*, in the original sense of the term. For another thing, there are a variety of types which stand somewhere between the capitalists and the workers and cannot easily be classified with either: government and business bureaucrats, professionals, teachers, journalists, advertising men, and so on. These are often, and not inappropriately, called the new middle classes — “new” because of their spectacular growth, both absolutely and relatively to other classes, in the last seventy-five years or so. Finally, there are what are usually called declassed elements — bums, gamblers, thugs, prostitutes, and the like — who are not recognized in the official statistics but who nevertheless play an

important role in capitalist society, especially in its political life.

Viewing the matter from a primarily economic angle, then, we could say that the American class structure consists of capitalists, lower middle class in the classical sense, new middle classes, workers, and declassed elements. There is no doubt, however, that this is not a strictly accurate description of the actual living social classes which we observe about us. If we apply the criterion of intermarriageability as a test of social class membership, we shall often find that people who from an economic standpoint belong to the new middle classes are actually on the same social level as the larger capitalists; that smaller capitalists are socially indistinguishable from a large proportion of the new middle classes; and that the working class includes without very much social distinction those who perform certain generally comparable kinds of labor, whether it be with their own means of production or with means of production belonging to others.

These considerations lead us to the following conclusion: the social classes which we observe about us are not *identical* with the economic classes of capitalist society. They are rather *modifications* of the latter. This is, I believe, an important point. If we keep it firmly in mind we shall be able to appreciate the decisive role of the economic factor in the structure and behavior of social classes while at the same time avoiding an overmechanical (and hence false) economic determinism.

How shall we describe the actual social-class structure of America? This is partly a matter of fact and partly a matter of convention, and on neither score is there anything that could be called general agreement among students of American society. Warner and his associates, for example, say that in a typical American community there are exactly six classes, to which they give the names upper-upper, lower-upper, upper-middle, lower-middle, upper-lower, and lower-lower.

There are a number of objections to this scheme, however. It is based on studies of small cities; the dividing lines are largely arbitrary; and the labels suggest that the only important thing about classes is their position in relation to other classes. Warner and his associates admit that there are some communities which lack one or more of the six classes they believe they found in "Jonesville" and "Yankee City"; and one hesitates to speculate on how many classes they might plausibly claim to find, by using essentially the same methods, in a really big city. Their scheme, in other words, while representing a serious attempt to cope with the problem, is unsatisfactory. Its inadequacy is particularly obvious when we attempt to pass beyond the individual community and deal with social classes on a national scale.

What we need is a scheme which both highlights the fundamental economic conditioning of the social-class system and at the same time is flexible enough to encompass the anomalies and irregularities which actually characterize it.

The starting point must surely be the recognition that two social classes, at bottom shaped by the very nature of capitalism, determine the form and content of the system as a whole. I prefer to call these classes the ruling class and the working class. The core of the ruling class is made up of big capitalists (or, more generally, big property owners, though the distinction is not very important since most large aggregates of property have the form of capital in this country today). There are numerous fringes to the ruling class, including smaller property owners, government and business executives (in so far as they are not big owners in their own right), professionals, and so on: we shall have more to say on this subject later. The core of the working class is made up of wage laborers who have no productive property of their own. Here again there are fringes, including, especially, independent craftsmen and petty traders.

The fringes of the ruling class do not reach to the fringes of the working class. Between the two there is a wide social

space which is occupied by what we can hardly avoid calling the middle class. We should not forget, however, that the middle class is much more heterogeneous than either the ruling class or the working class. It has no solid core, and it shades off irregularly (and differently in different localities) into the fringes of the class above it and the class below it. Indeed we might say that the middle class consists of a collection of fringes, and that its social cohesion is largely due to the existence in all of its elements of a desire to be in the ruling class above it and to avoid being in the working class below it.

This generalized description of the social-class structure seems to me to have many merits and no fatal defects. The terminology calls attention to the chief functions of the basic classes and indicates clearly enough the relative positions of the three classes in the social hierarchy. More important, the use of the fringe concept enables us to face frankly the *fact* that the dividing lines in American society are not sharply drawn, and that even the borderlands are irregular and unstable. This fact is often seized upon to "prove" that there are *no* classes in America. It cannot be banished or hidden by the use of an elaborate multiclass scheme like that of Warner and his associates, for the simple reason that such a scheme, however well it may seem to apply to some situations, breaks down when applied to others. What we must have is a scheme which takes full account of the fact in question without at the same time obscuring the fundamental outlines and character of the class system itself.

I shall next try to show that, at least as concerns the ruling class, the scheme proposed above does satisfy these requirements.

## II

Every community study shows clearly the existence of an upper social crust which is based on wealth. The nucleus is always the "old families" which have transmitted and usually

augmented their fortunes from one generation to the next. Around this nucleus are grouped the *nouveaux riches*, the solidly established lawyers and doctors, the more successful of the social climbers and sycophants, and people whose family connections are better than their bank accounts. Taken all together, these are the people who comprise what is called "society." Except in very large cities, the whole community is aware of their existence and knows that they constitute a more or less well-defined "upper class."

So much is obvious. Certain other things, however, are not so obvious. It is not obvious, for example, that these local "upper classes" are in fact merely sections of a national upper class, nor that this national upper class is in fact the national ruling class. What we shall have to concentrate on therefore are two points: first, the structure of the national ruling class; and second, how the ruling class rules.

#### THE STRUCTURE OF THE NATIONAL RULING CLASS

That the local upper crusts are merely sections of a national class (also of an international class, but that is beyond the scope of the present article) follows from the way they freely mix and intermarry. The facts in this regard are well known to any reasonably attentive observer of American life, and no attempt at documentation is called for here. I merely suggest that those sociologists who believe that only field work can yield reliable data could provide valuable light on the mixing of the local upper crusts by a careful field study of a typical summer or winter resort.

The national ruling class, however, is not merely a collection of interrelated local upper crusts, all on a par with each other. It is rather a hierarchy of upper crusts which has a fairly definite organizational structure, including lines of authority from leaders to followers. It is here that serious study of the ruling class is most obviously lacking, and also most urgently needed. I shall confine myself to a few hints

and suggestions, some of which may turn out on closer investigation to be mistaken or at any rate out of proportion.

Generally speaking, the sections of the national ruling class are hierarchically organized with hundreds of towns at the bottom of the pyramid and a handful of very large cities at the top. Very small communities can be counted out: normally the wealth and standing of their leading citizens is no more than enough to gain them entry into the middle class when they go to the city. Even towns as large as five or ten thousand may have only a few representatives in good standing in the national ruling class. You can always tell such a representative. Typically, he is a man "of independent means"; he went to a good college; he has connections and spends considerable time in the state capital and/or the nearest big city; he takes his family for part of the year to a resort where it can enjoy the company of its social equals. And, most important of all, he is a person of unquestioned prestige and authority in his own community: he is, so to speak, a local lieutenant of the ruling class.

Cities, of course, have more — I should also judge proportionately more — national ruling-class members. And as a rule those who live in smaller cities look up to and seek guidance from and actually follow those who live in larger cities. Certain of these larger cities have in turn acquired the position of what we might call regional capitals (San Francisco, Chicago, Cleveland, Boston, and so on): the lines of authority in the given region run to and end in the capital. The relation which exists among these regional capitals is a very important subject which deserves careful study. There was a time in our national history when it would probably have been true to say that the sections of the ruling class in the regional capitals looked up to and sought guidance from and actually followed the New York section, and to a considerable extent this may still be the case. At any rate this is the kernel of truth in the Wall Street theory. My own guess, for what it is worth, is that economic and political changes



in the last thirty years (especially changes in the structure and functions of the banking system and the expansion of the economic role of the state) have reduced the relative importance of New York to a marked degree, and that today it is more accurate to describe New York as *primus inter pares* rather than as the undisputed leader of all the rest.

The ruling-class hierarchy is not based solely on personal or family relations among the members of the ruling class. On the contrary, it is bulwarked and buttressed by a massive network of institutional relations. Of paramount importance in this connection are the corporate giants with divisions, branches, and subsidiaries reaching out to all corners of the country. The American Telephone and Telegraph Company, with headquarters in New York and regional subsidiaries covering forty-eight states, is in itself a powerful force welding the unity of the American ruling class; and it is merely the best-developed example of its kind. Formerly, a very large proportion of these business empires were centered in New York, and it was this more than anything else that gave that city a unique position. Today that proportion is much reduced, and cities like Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, and San Francisco play a relatively more prominent part than they used to. In addition to corporations, an integrating role in the ruling class is performed by businessmen's organizations like the National Association of Manufacturers, the Chambers of Commerce, the Rotary and other so-called service clubs; by colleges and their alumni associations; by churches and women's clubs; by scores of fashionable winter and summer resorts (not all located in this country); and by a myriad other institutions too numerous even to attempt to list. (It will be noted that I have not mentioned the two great political parties in this connection. The reason is not that they don't to some extent play the part of an integrator of the ruling class: they do, and in a variety of ways. But their main function is quite different, namely, to provide the channels through which the ruling class manipulates and

controls the lower classes. Compared to this function, their role *within* the ruling class is of quite secondary significance.)

Finally, we should note the key part played by the press in unifying and organizing the ruling class. To be sure, not all organs of the press figure here: the great majority, like the political parties, are instruments for controlling the lower classes. But the more solid kind of newspaper (of which the *New York Times* is, of course, the prototype), the so-called quality magazines, the business and technical journals, the high-priced newsletters and dopesheets — all of these are designed primarily for the ruling class and are tremendously important in guiding and shaping its thinking. This does not mean that they in some way make up or determine the *content* of ruling-class ideas — this content is basically determined by what I may call the class situation (about which more will be said presently) — but it does mean that they standardize and propagate the ideas in such a way that the entire ruling class lives on a nearly uniform intellectual diet.

All of the formal and informal, the personal and institutional, ties that bind the ruling class together have a twofold character: on the one hand they are transmission belts and channels of communication; and on the other hand they are themselves molders of ideas and values and behavior norms — let us say for short, of ruling-class ideology. And here we have to note another mechanism of the greatest importance, the mechanism by which the class passes its ideology on from one generation to the next. The key parts of this mechanism are the family and the educational system. Ruling-class families are jealous protectors and indoctrinators of ruling-class ideology; the public school system faithfully reflects it and even, contrary to popular beliefs, fosters class distinctions; and private preparatory schools and colleges finish the job of dividing the ruling-class young from their compatriots. (In this connection, we must not be confused by the fact that a considerable number of lower-class families succeed in getting their sons and daughters into the

private preparatory schools and colleges. This is merely a method by which the ruling class recruits the most capable elements of the lower classes into its service and often into its ranks. It is probably the most important such method in the United States today, having replaced the older method by which the abler lower-class young people worked their way directly up in the business world.)

### HOW THE RULING CLASS RULES

Let us now turn, very briefly, to the question of how or in what sense the ruling class can be said to rule. This is a question which can easily lead to much mystification, but I think it can also be dealt with in a perfectly simple, straightforward way.

The question has two aspects, economic and political. The ruling class rules the economy in the sense that its members either directly occupy the positions in the economy where the key decisions are made or, if they don't occupy these positions themselves, they hire and fire those who do. The ruling class rules the government (using the term as a shorthand expression for all levels of government) in the sense that its members either directly occupy the key positions (largely true in the higher judiciary and the more honorific legislative jobs, increasingly true in the higher administrative jobs), or they finance and thus indirectly control the political parties which are responsible for staffing and managing the routine business of government. In short, the ruling class rules through its members who (1) do the job themselves, (2) hire and fire those who do, or (3) pay for the upkeep of political machines to do the job for them. That this rule through the members of the class is in fact *class rule* does not require to be separately demonstrated: it follows from the nature and structure of the class as we have already analyzed them.

This analysis of the way the ruling class rules is, of course, sketchy and oversimplified. I think nevertheless that it will

stand up provided we can meet one objection, namely, that if the ruling class really ruled it would not put up with New Deals and Fair Deals and trade unions and John L. Lewises and Sidney Hillmans and all sorts of other outrages — *you* may not think them outrages, but the important thing from our present point of view is that the upper class *does* think them outrages. I have found in lectures and conversations about the ruling class that this is by far the most important and frequent objection to this analysis.

A full answer, I think, would require a careful examination of the nature and limits of political power, something which obviously cannot be undertaken here. But the main point is clearly indicated in the following passage from Lincoln Steffens's *Autobiography*. The passage concludes a chapter entitled "Wall Street Again":

It is a very common error to think of sovereignty as absolute. Rasputin, a sovereign in Russia, made that mistake; many kings have made it and so lost their power to premiers and ministers who represented the "vested interests" of powerful classes, groups, and individuals. A dictator is never absolute. Nothing is absolute. A political boss concentrates in himself and personifies a very "wise" adjustment of the grafts upon which his throne is established. He must know these, reckon their power, and bring them all to the support of his power, which is, therefore, representative and limited. Mussolini, in our day, had to "deal with" the Church of Rome. A business boss has to yield to the powerful men who support him. The Southern Pacific Railroad had to "let the city grafters get theirs." The big bankers had to let the life insurance officers and employees get theirs. J. P. Morgan should have known what he soon found out, that he could not lick Diamond Jim Brady. Under a dictatorship nobody is free, not even the dictator; sovereign power is as representative as a democracy. It's all a matter of what is represented by His Majesty on the throne. In short, what I got out of my second period in Wall Street was this perception that everything I looked into in organized society was really a dictatorship, in this sense, that it was an organization of the privileged for the control

of privileges, of the sources of privilege and of the thoughts and acts of the unprivileged; and that neither the privileged nor the unprivileged, neither the bosses nor the bossed, understood this or meant it.

There is, I think, more sound political science packed into that one paragraph than you will find in the whole of an average textbook. And it clearly contains the fundamental answer to the contention that the upper class doesn't rule because it has to put up with many things it doesn't like. Obviously the ruling class has to make concessions and compromises to keep the people, and especially the working class, in a condition of sufficient ignorance and contentment to accept the system as a whole. In other words, the ruling class operates within a definite framework, more or less restricted according to circumstances, which it can ignore only at the peril of losing its power altogether — and, along with its power, its wealth and privileges.

We must next consider the problem of "class position," which determines the basic content of ruling-class ideology. Here I can do no more than indicate what is meant by the expression. This, however, is not so serious a deficiency as at first sight it might appear to be; for once the nature of class position is understood it will be seen to be the very stuff of contemporary history, the constant preoccupation of anyone who attempts to interpret the world from a socialist standpoint.

Class position has two aspects: the relation of the class to its own national social system, and the relation of the national social system to the world at large. For purposes of analyzing the position of the American ruling class we can identify it with the body of American capitalists: in respect to basic ideology, the fringes of the ruling class have no independence whatever. The problem therefore can be reduced to the state of American capitalism on the one hand, and the place of American capitalism in the world on the other. American capitalism has now reached the stage in

which it is dominated by a strong tendency to chronic depression; while world capitalism, of which America is by far the most important component, is faced by a young, vigorous, and rapidly expanding international socialist system. These are the conditions and trends which determine the basic content of ruling-class ideology.

One final problem remains, that of divisions and conflicts within the ruling class. We are now in a position to see this problem in its proper setting and proportions. Aside from more or less accidental rivalries and feuds, the divisions within the ruling class are of several kinds: regional (based on economic differences and buttressed by historical traditions and memories — the North-South division is the clearest example of this kind); industrial (for example, coal capitalists vs. oil capitalists); corporate (for example, General Motors vs. Ford); dynastic (for example Du Ponts vs. Mellons); political (Republicans vs. Democrats); and ideological (reactionaries vs. liberals). These divisions cut across and mutually condition one another, and the dividing lines are irregular and shifting. These factors introduce elements of indeterminacy and instability into the behavior of the ruling class and make of capitalist politics something more than a mere puppet show staged for the benefit (and obfuscation) of the man in the street. But we must not exaggerate the depth of the divisions inside the ruling class: capitalists can and do fight among themselves to further individual or group interests, and they differ over the best way of coping with the problems which arise from the class position; but overshadowing all these divisions is their common interest in preserving and strengthening a system which guarantees their wealth and privileges. In the event of a real threat to the system, there are no longer class differences — only class traitors, and they are few and far between.

In conclusion, let me say that I have tried to cover a great deal of ground in this essay on the American ruling class. I recognize that this procedure necessarily results in many gaps

and omissions, but I hope that it also has compensating advantages. In particular, I hope that a bare outline of the whole subject may serve most effectively to bring into sharp relief the essential problems. I hope also that it will convince the reader not only that *Monthly Review* is justified in talking about the ruling class but that it would be impossible to discuss intelligently the current situation in this country and in the world at large without doing so.