TRENDS IN THE AMERICAN CLASS STRUCTURE

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THE DECLINING IMPORTANCE of the blue-collar working class in modern capitalist society has been much discussed in recent years. The changing character of monopoly capitalist society, it is argued, is generating more and more "white collar" workers and fewer and fewer "blue collar" workers. As a result of this process, a revolutionary movement based on "the working class" is said to be further undermined with each passing year, as the "working class" continually shrinks as a proportion of the entire population. Some, accepting the argument that blue-collar workers can no longer be the main base of a revolutionary movement, have developed the idea of a "new working class." These theorists argue that the rapidly expanding strata of highly educated labor—engineers, teachers, nurses, social

workers, skilled technicians of all kinds—are undergoing a process of proletarianization and are emerging as the new crucial sector of the social structure both in terms of their powerful central role in the economy and their potential for radicalization.[1] This paper will examine the claims that the blue-collar working class is decreasing in numerical strength, and partially treat the argument that the "new working class" is becoming more and more like the "old working class."

In this paper I rely exclusively on data collected and published by the United States government, mostly by the Bureau of the Census. I will not develop the various theoretical arguments alluded to, nor examine either qualitative evidence of the actual job conditions of the various classes, or evidence of their actual economic, social, or political behavior. This is not an attempt at complete treatment of the issues raised here. In looking only at statistical data on structural factors, we can obtain only a partial, though nevertheless suggestive, picture of the actual trends in the American class system, since most of our data deals only with the size of the various segments of the working class. Yet in discussing this we are treating an important variable in a long-term strategy for socialist revolution. The size of a class or stratum relative to other classes or strata is both in itself a determinant of its potential power, and a contributing factor to other important variables that influence both potential power and the likelihood of radicalization, such as the possibilities for individual mobility, homogeneity, communication, conditions of labor, and even centrality. Of course, the relative importance of these factors is itself a function of the way in which we think a revolution will be made. Whether one sees socialism coming about through electoral campaigns, a general strike in key industries, a coup d'état supported by Third World armies, guerrilla warfare and civil war, or mass struggle, has a major bearing on how important the variable of numbers will be. The implicit assumption of our analysis is that socialism will come about through a multifaceted mass struggle and hence that the number of people

1. The two best-known presentations of the "new working class" theory are to be found in André Gorz, *Strategy for Labor* (Boston, 1967), and Serge Mallet, *La Nouvelle Classe Ouvrière* (Paris 1969).

involved in that struggle, regardless of where they are located in the economy, will be one of the most important factors.

Increasing Proletarianization

OF ALL KARL MARX'S PREDICTIONS about the trends in Western capitalism, the one that has most clearly been verified is that the proletariat—workers who do not themselves own their own tools of production, but rather are forced to sell their labor to someone else who then appropriates their labor—would become an ever-increasing percentage of the total population. The independent middle class of professionals, artisans, shopkeepers and farmers dwindles every year, its members further feeding the growing class of employees. In 1940, 75.1 per cent of the labor force were wage and salary earners and 21.6 per cent were self-employed. By 1969, 89.5 per cent of the labor force had become wage and salary earners while now only 9.1 per cent were self-employed. The rate of growth of the proletariat with respect to the self-employed increased from the 1950s to the 1960s and shows no sign of letting up.

TABLE I: CLASS OF THE EMPLOYED AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE LABOR FORCE

	Wage and Salary Workers A	Self-Employed B	Unpaid Family Workers	Ratio of A/B
1940	75.1	21.6	3.2	3.5
1947	77.5	19.0	3.2	4.1
1950	79.6	17.3	3.1	4.6
1955	81.9	15.2	2.9	5.3
1960	83.7	13.7	2.5	6.1
1965	86.3	11.8	2.0	7.3
1969	89.5	9.1	1.4	9.8

U.S. Census, 1940, Special Reports: The Labor Force
Sources: Table A11, p. 228, Manpower Report of the President, 1970.
Table 19, p. 36-37

Agricultural Decline

THE PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL labor force in agriculture has been decreasing rapidly. Since 1920, this decrease has been absolute as well as relative. From 36.8 per cent of the labor force in 1900, the labor force in agriculture has decreased to 4.5 per cent of the total in 1970. Moreover, the United States government predicts this percentage will decline to 2.7 in

TABLE 2: LABOR FORCE IN AGRICULTURE

	Total Labor Force	Labor Force in Agriculture	Percentage	Farm Laborers as a percentage of Agriculturally Employed
1	29,070,000	10,710,000	36.8	48.0
1920	41,610,000	11,120,000	26.0	44.0
1940	55,640,000	9,540,000	17.1	40.9
1950	63,099,000	7,507,000	11.9	36.2
1960	66,681,000	5,723,000	8.6	36.0
1970	68,408,000	3,531,000	4.5	40.0
1980	95,100,000	2,600,000	2.7	48.1

Sources: The U.S. Economy in 1980, p. 49, Table A-16, Statistical Abstract of the U.S., 1970, p. 225, Historical Statistics of the U.S., p. 72

1980. The percentage decline during the 1960s was the greatest in the history of this country and reflected the rising rate of productivity in agriculture in the United States. The percentage of all agriculturally employed persons who are farm laborers (rather than farm owners and managers) declined from forty-eight in 1900 to around thirty-six in the 1950s. However, in the 1960s this figure rose to forty per cent. Thus only in recent years do we see a tendency for an increasing proletarianization of agriculture as a whole.

Until recently a potentially successful radical movement such as the Populists, Farmer-Labor parties, or IWW, or even the Socialist and Communist parties, had of necessity to attempt to build support in both urban and rural areas. With the small percentage of the population now in agriculture, radical movements in the United States will focus primarily on urban concerns. In a few years over ninety-seven per cent of the total labor force will be working at non-agricultural jobs.

Occupational Groups

TAKING THE WORK FORCE as a whole the proportion classified as manual workers increased until 1950 when it stood at an all-time high of 41.1 per cent.[2] Since 1950, this percentage

2. Throughout this paper I use the categories of the United States Bureau of the Census. This is not done out of choice, but because this is the only form in which the data are available. It must be noted that these categories are often unclear and more mystifying than helpful. I use the terms "blue collar" workers and "manual" workers interchangeably. This category includes "skilled" workers and foremen; operatives or "semi-skilled" workers who operate some kind of machine; and non-farm laborers or "unskilled" workers—those workers doing physical labor without the aid of machines. In practice, however, as the work process has changed the

has declined significantly to 34.9. The proportion of the labor force classified as "operatives," that is, semi-skilled operators of machines of one kind or another, likewise increased to 20.4 per cent of the total to 1950, and then declined to 17.6 per cent in 1970. A more uniform trend is observed for "unskilled" non-farm laborers, who since 1900 have steadily decreased as a percentage of the labor force, to the point where they now represent only 4.6 per cent of the total. Meanwhile the proportion of craftsmen and foremen in the labor force has been more or less steady at around thirteen per cent since 1920. The number of manual workers as a whole grew constantly until 1950, but has been decreasing during the last twenty years.

OVERALL FIGURES on occupational trends are deceptive. While they do reflect the changing requirements of industrial capitalism, they do not necessarily reflect changes in the class structure. Social class, as distinct from occupational categories, defines the whole way a family lives, thinks, and relates to people, which is generally determined by the relationship of the head of the family to the means of production.[3] It is generally the occupation of the man of the family that determines a family's social class and concomitant consciousness. The woman's job, at least among manual workers, is generally marginal to the overall family situation. Women tend to work irregularly, change jobs more often than men, define themselves less in terms of their jobs, join unions less frequently, and carry over job experiences to their non-working time less than men. The average job tenure of women workers is only 2.8 years compared with 5.2 years for men.[4] Only 42 per cent of women workers compared with 70 per cent of male workers

accuracy of the various distinctions and categories has become even less clear than when originally made. Nevertheless, both because these are the only data available for the work force as a whole, and because they have a partial validity, I have used the categories given. The reader should keep these problems in mind in evaluating the results. A satisfactory critique of the census data is too lengthy and involved to make here.

3. Paul Sweezy defines social class in terms of freely intermarrying families, a definition very close to the one used here.

4. U.S. Department of Labor, *1969 Handbook of Women Workers*, p. 78.

who worked at all in 1967 worked full-time the year around.[5] One in seven women workers compared with one in four male workers belongs to a union.[6] These factors together with the dominant position of the man in the family mean that the woman's job plays a relatively small role in affecting the class situation of her family. It is the occupation of the husband or father that is the indicator of social class.[7]

Until recently the majority of women workers have been single, widowed, divorced, or separated, i.e., heads of households. But in recent years great numbers of married women have been entering the labor force. In 1940, 69.7 per cent of all women workers were single, widowed, divorced, or separated; in 1967 only 42.2 per cent were in these categories.[8] In 1940 only 16.7 per cent of married women were working, while in 1967 this had increased to 37.8 per cent.[9] In 1967, in 34 per cent of all married couples both partners were working.[10] Thus, we see a very marked tendency in recent years for married women to work.

When we examine the occupational structure for men we see a quite different pattern from that of both sexes together. In 1970, 46.8 per cent of the total male work force, a higher percentage than in any census year except 1950, were classified as manual workers. This represented an actual increase during the course of the 1960s. Since 1950 the tendency for "operatives" to decline is still seen but is now significantly less than before. There is now a more or less constant tendency for the percentage of craftsmen and foremen to rise. In summary,

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5. Ibid., p. 55.

6. Ibid., p. 82.

7. The present predominant role of the man's occupation in determining the social class of blue-collar families is of course not immutable, but rather a byproduct of the subjugation of women in capitalist society. Once women liberate themselves and establish genuine equality with men this process would no longer operate. However, it appears likely that the liberation of working-class women, because of the imperatives of the capitalist system, will not occur before a general liberation of the working class as a whole.

8. U.S. Department of Labor, *1969 Handbook of Women Workers*, p. 23.

9. Ibid., p. 26.

10. Ibid., p. 32.

the manual working class is virtually as numerous as it ever was in the United States and moreover is in recent years showing a slight tendency to get even larger.

When we look at female manual workers separately we see a very clear trend away from factory work. In 1900, 27.8 per cent of all employed women were classified as manual workers; in 1970, this has shrunk to 15.7 per cent. Most women factory workers have always been "operatives." The percentage in this category declined from 23.8 in 1900 to 14.3 in 1970.

The occupational group that has been growing the most rapidly by far for both sexes, together as well as separately, is the so-called "new working class," that is, the professional and technical workers (excluding the independent professionals). This group has increased from 3.1 per cent of the labor force in 1900 to 12.9 per cent in 1970. In 1900, members of this group were only 8 per cent as many as the manual workers; in 1970, they were 37 per cent as many. Considering male workers only, professional and technical workers increased from 4.6

TABLE 3: OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS: BOTH SEXES

	1900	1920	1940	1950	1960	1970
Managers, Officials, Proprietors, Farm Owners, and Managers	7,460 25.6%	9,245 21.9%	9,132 17.7%	9,530 16.1%	10,400 15.5%	9,998 12.7%
Professional and Technical	1,234 4.3%	2,283 5.4%	3,879 7.5%	5,081 8.6%	7,475 11.1%	11,322 14.4%
Independent Professional and Technical	320 1.1%	420 1.0%	570 1.1%	654 1.1%	873 1.3%	1,200 1.5%
Professional and Technical Workers	910 3.1%	1,860 4.4%	3,310 6.4%	4,427 7.5%	6,602 9.9%	10,100 12.9%
Clerical and Sales Workers	2,184 7.5%	5,443 12.9%	8,432 16.3%	11,365 19.3%	14,184 21.2%	18,548 23.6%
Service Workers	2,626 9.1%	3,313 7.9%	6,069 11.8%	6,180 10.5%	8,349 12.5%	9,724 12.4%
Manual Workers	10,401 35.8%	16,974 40.2%	20,597 39.8%	24,266 41.1%	24,211 36.1%	27,452 34.9%
Craftsmen and Foremen	3,062 10.5%	5,482 13.0%	6,203 12.0%	8,350 14.2%	8,560 12.8%	10,027 12.8%
Operatives	3,720 12.8%	6,587 15.6%	9,518 18.4%	12,030 20.4%	11,986 17.9%	13,811 17.6%
Non-Farm Laborers	3,620 12.5%	4,905 11.6%	4,875 9.4%	3,885 6.6%	3,665 5.5%	3,614 4.6%
Farm Workers	5,125 17.7%	4,948 11.7%	3,632 7.0%	2,578 4.3%	2,057 3.1%	1,400 1.8%
Total	29,030	42,206	51,742	58,999	66,681	78,408

Sources: Historical Statistics of the United States, p. 74. The Statistical Abstract of the U.S. 1970, p.225. The U.S. Economy in 1980, Table A-24, p. 57.

per cent of the total labor force in 1920, to 12.4 per cent in 1970. In this latter year they were 27 per cent as many as blue-collar workers. But, since professional women are more likely to work as a career and to have more equal relationships at home, they are also more likely to influence the social class of their families. Thus the figure of 37 per cent is more indicative of the relative strength of the two groups than the 27 per cent figure. In summary, the "new working class" is rapidly growing in numerical strength in the society and certainly has become a major sector of the proletariat to be reckoned with by any future socialist movement to transform American society. When professional and technical workers were but a small portion of the working class they were highly privileged vis-à-vis manual workers, but as their numbers have grown rapidly with respect to manual workers some of their conditions of labor have become more like those of blue-collar workers. The evidence on the rising skill levels of manual workers together with the rapid expansion of these "new

TABLE 4: OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS: MALES ONLY

	1900	1920	1940	1950	1960	1970
Managers, Officials, Proprietors, Farm Owners, and Managers	7,074 29.7%	8,777 26.0%	8,561 22.2%	8,711 20.4%	8,830 19.7%	8,388 17.2%
Professional and Technical	800 3.4%	1,275 3.8%	2,271 5.8%	3,074 7.2%	4,768 10.5%	6,890 14.1%
Independent Professional and Technical	--- ---	--- ---	459 1.2%	544 1.3%	727 1.6%	880 1.8%
Professional and Technical Workers	--- ---	--- ---	1,812 4.6%	2,530 5.9%	4.041 9.1%	6,020 12.4%
Clerical and Sales Workers	1,746 7.4%	3,289 9.8%	4,807 12.3%	5,445 12.8%	5,861 13.2%	6,221 12.8%
Service Workers	740 3.1%	1,250 3.7%	2,370 6.0%	2,647 6.2%	2,918 6.6%	3,212 6.6%
Manual Workers	8,924 37.8%	14,923 44.5%	17,877 45.5%	20,581 48.3%	20,573 46.3%	22,775 46.8%
Craftsmen and Foremen	2,985 12.6%	5,377 16.0%	6,069 15.5%	8,098 19.0%	8,338 18.8%	9,737 20.1%
Operatives	2,456 10.4%	4,839 14.4%	7,067 18.1%	8,743 20.5%	8,652 19.5%	9,539 19.6%
Non-Farm Laborers	3,482 14.7%	4,707 14.0%	4,742 12.1%	3,740 8.8%	3,583 8.1%	3,499 7.2%
Farm Workers	4,429 18.7%	4,056 12.1%	3,282 8.4%	2,097 4.9%	1,520 3.4%	1,200 2.5%
Total	23,711	33,569	39,168	32,554	44,485	48,686

Sources: **Historical Statistics of the United States, page 74. Statistical Abstract of the U.S., 1970,** page 225.

working class" jobs suggests a convergence between the nature of work and control over the work process of these two strata of the working class. This in turn suggests the possibility of a common political perspective on the basis of growing similarities between these two groups. In the past, professional and technical jobs have been considered by others as well as by the holders of them to be elite positions of special privilege. This is less and less likely to be true in the future.

On one side the convergence of the "new working class" with the manual workers is a product of the increasing proletarianization of professional and technical jobs. On the other it is caused by the changing nature of blue-collar jobs. Higher and higher educational and perhaps skill levels are required of blue-collar workers as the nature of their work becomes more complex. There thus appears to be a growing similarity in the nature of the jobs performed by these two groups. In 1900, 29.4 per cent of all blue-collar jobs were classified as skilled. In 1970, this had grown to 36.6 per cent. Meanwhile, the

TABLE 5: OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS: FEMALES ONLY

	1900	1920	1940	1950	1960	1970
Managers, Officials, Proprietors, Farm Owners, and Managers	386 7.3%	468 5.4%	571 4.5%	819 5.0%	1,570 7.1%	1,610 5.4%
Professional and Technical	434 8.1%	1,008 11.7%	1,608 12.8%	2,007 12.3%	2,707 12.2%	4,332 14.6%
Independent Professional and Technical	— —	— —	111 .8%	110 .7%	146 .7%	320 1.1%
Professional and Technical Workers	— —	— —	1,498 11.9%	1,897 11.5%	2,561 11.5%	4,080 13.7%
Clerical and Sales Workers	438 8.2%	2,154 24.9%	3,625 28.8%	5,920 35.9%	8,323 37.4%	12,327 41.5%
Service Workers	1,886 35.5%	2,063 23.9%	3,699 29.4%	3,533 21.4%	5,431 24.4%	6,512 21.9%
Manual Workers	1,477 27.8%	2,051 23.8%	2,720 21.6%	3,685 22.4%	3,636 16.3%	4,677 15.7%
Craftsmen and Foremen	77 1.5%	105 1.2%	134 1.1%	252 1.5%	222 1.0%	290 1.0%
Operatives	1,264 23.8%	1,748 20.2%	2,451 19.5%	3,287 20.0%	3,334 15.0%	4,272 14.3%
Non-Farm Laborers	138 2.6%	198 2.3%	133 1.1%	145 .9%	82 .4%	115 .4%
Farm Workers	696 13.1%	892 10.3%	350 2.8%	481 2.9%	537 2.4%	200 .7%
Total	5,319	8,637	12,574	16,445	22,195	29,722

Sources: **Historical Statistics of the United States, page 74. Statistical Abstract of the U.S., 1970, p. 225.**

only 18.5 per cent of the work force was women, but in 1970, this had grown to 37.9 per cent.

Women likewise now dominate, as they always have, service jobs (mainly as domestics, waitresses, laundry workers, etc.) and also compose a large percentage of the "new working class." However, the percentage of all professional and technical jobs held by women has decreased from 45.3 in 1940 to 40.4 in 1970, as males in large numbers have been recruited into this rapidly growing sector of the working class. It should be noted that almost all blue-collar women workers are "operatives"—very few are classified either as skilled or as laborers. Because of this, in 1970, 30.9 per cent of all semi-skilled jobs were held by women. The tendency for women to increase as a percentage both of all "operatives" and of all manual workers, suggests their growing centrality to a radicalization process of this sector.

In summary, the trend seen in the overall statistics on blue-collar occupations is a result of the rapidly rising percentage of women in the labor force. It does not indicate changes in the social class composition of the country. The blue-collar working class is as large as at any time in the United States. The need of the corporations for a changing composition of their labor force has clearly been producing more white-collar workers relative to blue-collar workers; however, this has had

TABLE 8: LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES

	Males			Females		
	16 & over	20-24	25-34	16 & over	20-24	25-34
1960	82.4%	88.9%	96.4%	37.1%	46.1%	35.5%
1965	80.1%	86.2%	96.0%	38.8%	49.7%	38.5%
1969	79.1%	85.3%	95.4%	42.2%	56.5%	43.5%
1975	79.2%	83.4%	96.0%	42.5%	56.9%	44.4%
1980	79.6%	83.0%	96.0%	42.0%	57.6%	45.7%

Source: Table 317, p. 214, Statistical Abstract of the U.S. 1970

TABLE 9: SKILL LEVEL OF MANUAL WORKERS

	1900	1920	1940	1950	1960	1970
	(Both sexes)					
Skilled	29.4%	32.2%	30.0%	34.2%	35.5%	36.6%
Unskilled	34.9%	28.9%	23.6%	16.0%	15.1%	13.1%
	(Males only)					
Skilled	33.5%	35.9%	34.0%	39.3%	40.8%	42.6%
Unskilled	39.0%	31.5%	26.4%	18.2%	17.4%	15.4%

Source: Previous Tables.

little effect on social class composition, which is still about one-half blue collar.

The significant trends of the last seventy years have been the decrease in independent urban proprietors and the rapid decline of both agricultural laborers and independent farmers on the one hand, and the rapid increase in the "new working class" on the other. The shift has not been from manual to white collar, but from petty bourgeois and farm labor (or farmers) to the "new working class." Most important, however, is that the blue-collar working class continues to far outdistance all other groups. It would seem that the growth of a socialist movement would have to be primarily based not as in the past on an alliance between blue-collar workers and farmers or farm laborers, but on the two largest sections of the working class, the blue-collar workers and the "new working class," together with the third largest sector, the white-collar workers.

The New Working Class

THE PROPORTION OF ALL PROFESSIONAL and technical personnel that sells its labor power to others has been constantly rising since the turn of the century. In 1900, the "new working class" represented 73.4 per cent of all persons in professional and technical occupations; in 1970, it represented 89.1 per cent. Clearly the old independent professions, especially law and medicine, are now a small part of all professional jobs. These old professions have been greatly outdistanced by the rapid growth of such occupations as teaching, social work, engineering, nursing, scientific research, and various forms of technical work. Virtually all of these people must work for others. That is, they are proletarians. However great their pay, they do not control the conditions of their labor, but are subject to the will of someone else. Even if some of these people still have some amount of control over the details of their work, relative to blue- and white-collar workers, the fundamental direction and uses of their labor are not theirs to determine. In most cases, members of each "new working class" occupation have in an absolute sense little control even over the details of their work. This lack of control is by all indica-

TABLE 10: NEW WORKING CLASS OCCUPATIONS, 1960

	Males		Females	
	1000s	% of Total	1000s	% of Total
Professional, Technical and Kindred Workers (Including Self-Employed)	4,543	100.0	2,793	100.0
Accountants and Auditors	396	8.7	80	2.9
Actors, Dancers, etc.	—	—	25	,9
Architects	30	.7	—	—
Artists and Art Teachers	68	1.5	37	1.3
Authors, Editors and Reporters	86	1.9	46	1.6
Chemists	77	1.7	—	—
Clergymen	197	4.3	—	—
College Teachers	140	3.1	39	1.4
Dentists	81	1.8	—	—
Designers and Draftsmen	262	5.8	25	.9
Dieticians and Nutritionists	25	—	25	.9
Engineers	864	19.0	—	—
Lawyers and Judges	206	4.5	8	,3
Librarians	—	—	72	2.6
Musicians and Music Teachers	86	1.9	111	4.0
Natural Scientists	59	1.3	15	.5
Pharmacists	85	1.9	—	—
Physicians and Surgeons	214	4.7	16	.6
Professional Nurses	—	—	634	22.6
Social Scientists	43	.9	14	.5
Social, Welfare, and Recreation Workers	58	1.3	78	2.8
Elementary and Secondary School Teachers	478	10.5	1,206	43.2
Medical and Dental Technicians	53	1.2	88	3.1
Electrical and Electronic Technicians	89	2.0	—	—
Therapists and Healers	—	—	20	.7
Others	971	21.4	254	9.1

Source: Table 337, pp. 227–28: Statistical Abstract of the U.S., 1970.

tions increasing as a higher and higher percentage of the work force moves into these occupations. The number of jobs that can profitably be allowed the relatively wide-ranging autonomy of a research physicist or full professor is strictly limited. Most teachers, nurses, engineers, technicians and the like have their work schedules fairly well set up for them and are supervised closely.[11]

What is the composition of this "new working class"? Considering all professional and technical jobs (both "new working class" and self-employed) in 1960, we find that 19.0 per cent of all males were engineers and 10.5 per cent primary and secondary school teachers. Among women 43.2 per cent are secondary and primary school teachers and 22.6 per cent nurses.

11. For a full discussion of the alienation of labor which applies to these jobs as well as to factory labor, see Karl Marx, "Philosophical and Economic Manuscripts," in *Karl Marx, Early Writings*, translated and edited by T. B. Bottomore (New York, 1964), section on alienated labor, pp. 120–134.

There is also a significant percentage of teachers at other levels, designers and draftsmen, scientists, and various kinds of technicians. Looking over the distribution outside these major occupations there is wide disparity in the kinds of occupations included in this category. Although many of these occupations have historically been influenced by the left, others by the nature of their work appear unlikely to generate radicals. There is a very wide range of skill levels, status, job control, rewards, etc. The heterogeneity of this group would appear to be greater than that of manual workers. Although this might prove a hindrance to the development of a class consciousness, the growing similiarity of the work conditions of most of the major occupations within this group to those of manual workers, would seem nevertheless to suggest the possibility of a common class consciousness emerging that would encompass both the manual and at least most of the "new working class" together with the white-collar proletariat.

Trends in Income

FROM 1947 TO 1968, there has been a slight widening of the gap between "unskilled" and "skilled" male blue-collar workers. During the first year, skilled workers averaged 1.59 times more income than unskilled, and during the later year, 1.85 times. During the same period, the "new working class" male income decreased from 1.35 times that of skilled workers to 1.27 times as much. Thus we see that the wages of the "new working class" are only slightly greater than those of skilled blue-collar workers, and as the number of both the highly skilled "new working class" and the skilled manual workers increases, the relative financial rewards of these two groups tend to converge. In 1970, the differential between skilled and unskilled blue-collar workers was over three times greater than the differential between skilled and "new working class" workers. These data on income trends further suggest the possibility of the blue-collar and "new working class" groups joining together in common political activity.

Meanwhile the wage level of the two major male white-collar groups, clerical and sales workers, from 1947 to 1968 has shown no overall change relative to either the "new working

class" or blue-collar workers. Throughout this period the wage level of both groups generally stayed between the wage levels of skilled and semi-skilled manual workers. Their income level is closer to that of semi-skilled workers than it is to the "new working class."

Trends in Education

THERE HAS BEEN A RAPID INCREASE in the educational level of all categories of blue-collar workers since 1948. In 1948, the median year of school completed for male craftsmen and foremen was 9.7; in 1969, this had risen to 12.1. For "operatives" this statistic increased from 9.1 to 11.3, and for unskilled labor from 8.0 to 10.0 during this same period. Meanwhile the median year of school completed by all male professionals and technical personnel rose from 16.3 to 16.4, virtually no rise at all. Put in other terms, in 1948 professional people had 1.67

TABLE 11: MEDIAN INCOME OF PERSONS 14 YEARS OLD AND OVER: EMPLOYED MALES

	1947	1950	1955	1960	1965	1968
Managers and Officials	$3,673 (155)	$4,431 (159)	$5,712 (154)	$7,591 (169)	$8,991 (167)	$10,717 (173)
Non-Farm Proprietors	3,084 (130)	3,263 (117)	4,532 (122)	5,036 (112)	6,442 (120)	7,365 (119)
Farmers and Farm Managers	1,456 (61)	1,496 (53)	1,283 (35)	1,941 (43)	2,985 (55)	3,734 (60)
Independent Professional and Technical	5,472 (231)	6,188 (222)	8,338 (226)	9,545 (213)	13,423 (250)	16,356 (264)
Professional and Technical Workers	3,705 (157)	3,880 (139)	5,269 (142)	6,564 (146)	7,987 (148)	9,715 (157)
Clerical Workers	2,654 (112	3,103 (112)	3,950 (107)	5,011 (112)	5,772 (103)	7,034 (114)
Sales Workers	2,687 (114)	3,137 (112)	4,472 (121)	4,990 (110)	6,033 (112)	7,367 (118)
Craftsmen, Foremen	2,746 (116)	3,293 (118)	4,423 (120)	5,582 (124)	6,592 (122)	7,705 (124)
Operatives	2,373 (100)	2,790 (100)	3,695 (100)	4,477 (100)	5,395 (100)	6,209 (100)
Non-Farm Laborers	1,707 (72)	1,909 (68)	2,599 (70)	2,868 (64)	3,405 (63)	4,165 (67)
Service Workers, ex. Domestics	2,096	2,303	3,036	3,412	4,161	4,820
Farm Laborers and Foremen	846	854	1,309	1,103	1,411	2,073

Source: Current Population Reports, **Consumer Income: Income Growth Rates in 1939 to 1968 for Persons by Occupation and Industry Groups for the United States**, April 6, 1970, Series P-60 No. 69, Table A-3, p. 82.

TABLE 12: MEDIAN YEARS OF SCHOOL COMPLETED BY CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE 18 YEARS AND OVER: BOTH SEXES

	1948	1952	1959	1964	1969
Managers, Officials and Proprietors	12.2 (1.15)	12.2 (1.12)	12.4 (1.03)	12.5 (1.02)	12.7 (1.03)
Professional and Technical	16.1 (1.52)	16.1 (1.48)	16.2 (1.35)	16.2 (1.33)	16.3 (1.32)
Farmers and Farm Laborers	8.0 (.75)	8.3 (.76)	8.6 (.72)	8.7 (.71)	9.3 (.76)
Clerical and Sales Workers	12.4 (1.17)	12.4 (1.14)	12.5 (1.04)	12.5 (1.02)	12.6 (1.02)
Craftsmen and Foremen	9.7 (.91)	10.1 (.93)	11.0 (.92)	11.5 (.94)	12.1 (.98)
Operatives	9.1 (.86)	9.1 (.83)	9.9 (.82)	10.5 (.86)	11.1 (.90)
Non-Farm Laborers	8.0 (.75)	8.3 (.76)	8.6 (.72)	9.3 (.76)	10.0 (.81)
Total	10.6 (100)	10.9 (100)	12.0 (100)	12.2 (100)	12.3 (100)

Source: Manpower Report of the President, 1970, Table A-12, p. 229.

times more education than did skilled manual workers, but in 1969, they had only 1.36 times as much, a significant narrowing of the gap in only twenty-one years. Again we have evidence that the difference between manual workers and the "new working class" is decreasing and that therefore the possibility of joint political and social action is growing.[12]

Educated labor is now playing a greater and greater role in the economy. In 1970, in the western region of the United States, 42.8 per cent of all white males from 25 to 44 had at least one year of college. The national average for all white males was 33.8 per cent and for all males was 32.0 per cent. However, only 12.3 per cent of all male skilled workers aged 25 through 64 had at least one year of college in 1970. Although the blue-collar work force as presently constituted has had very little exposure to higher education, the rapidly rising enrollment in colleges will soon be producing a large number of college-educated blue-collar workers. Increasingly, young blue-collar workers and young "new working class" workers will be sharing experiences as students. If the present trend of rapidly rising educational levels of all sectors of the blue-collar

12. The narrowing of the education gap in terms of years in school obscures the very significant difference in quality of education received by students on the vocational and academic tracks.

TABLE 13: MEDIAN YEARS OF SCHOOL COMPLETED BY THE CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE 18 YEARS AND OVER: MALES ONLY

	1948	1952	1959	1964	1969
Managers, Officials and Proprietors	12.2 (104)	12.2 (102)	12.4 (102)	12.6 (102)	12.8 (104)
Professional and Technical	16.3 (139)	16.3 (136)	16.4 (134)	16.2 (132)	16.4 (132)
Farmers and Farm Laborers	8.2 (70)	8.4 (70)	8.6 (71)	8.7 (71)	9.0 (73)
Clerical and Sales Workers	12.4 (106)	12.4 (104)	12.5 (102)	12.6 (102)	12.7 (102)
Craftsmen and Foremen	9.7 (83)	10.1 (84)	11.0 (90)	11.5 (93)	12.1 (98)
Operatives	9.1 (78)	9.0 (75)	10.0 (82)	10.7 (87)	11.3 (91)
Non-Farm Laborers	8.0 (68)	8.3 (69)	8.5 (70)	9.3 (75)	10.0 (81)
Service Workers	9.0 (77)	--- ---	10.1 (83)	10.6 (86)	11.7 (94)
Total	11.7 (100)	12.0 (100)	12.2 (100)	12.3 (100)	12.4 (100)

Sources: **Manpower Report of the President, 1970**, Table A-12, p. 229. **Education of Adult Workers: Projections to 1985**, U.S. Department of Labor, p. 52.

TABLE 14: COLLEGE EDUCATION OF PERSONS 25-44 BY REGION, MARCH 1970

	All Males		All Females		White Males	
Years completed:	1 or more	4 or more	1 or more	4 or more	1 or more	4 or more
Northeast	32.2%	19.8%	20.5%	10.6%	33.3%	20.8%
North Central	28.9	17.3	20.9	9.1	30.2	18.1
South	28.6	16.5	20.0	9.8	30.9	17.5
West	42.3	22.1	29.4	13.0	42.8	22.2
Total	32.0	18.5	22.1	10.4	33.8	19.7

Source: Table 3, page 21, Bureau of the Census, **Population Characteristics**, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 207, Nov. 30, 1970.

TABLE 15: COLLEGE EDUCATION OF PERSONS 25-64 BY OCCUPATION, MARCH 1970

	Males Only		Females Only	
Years completed:	1 or more	4 or more	1 or more	4 or more
Professional and Technical	82.1%	65.3%	78.4%	60.0%
Clerical	32.8	9.3	18.1	3.2
Sales	54.1	24.9	14.9	2.2
Service	11.1	2.3	8.2	1.3
Craftsmen and Foremen	12.3	2.2	12.3	4.3
Operatives	7.1	1.2	2.8	.5
Non-Farm Labor	5.4	1.1	11.4	.0
Farm Labor and Foremen	1.6	.4	6.3	.0

proletariat continues, the resultant "over-education" of blue-collar workers, and the frustrated expectations that this education will create, may combine with the frustrations of people trained for but unable to find "new working class" jobs to result in a major political crisis in which the conditions for uniting both groups would exist.

Age and Class

IN 1960, AMONG MALE WORKERS, the median age of manual laborers (both farm and non-farm) was lower than that of any other occupation. Professionals and technical workers were younger than anyone else except clerical workers, averaging only .7 years more than unskilled manual laborers. From 1940 to 1960, the median age of all occupations except professional and technical has risen. The average age of operatives has risen from 34.0 to 38.4, and of unskilled blue-collar workers from 34.9 to 37.5, but the average age of professional and technical people has decreased from 38.7 to 38.2.

Although the average age of female professional and technical workers has risen rapidly with the large increase of married

TABLE 16: MEDIAN AGE AND OCCUPATION

	Males				Females			
	1940	1950	1960	1969	1940	1950	1960	1969
Professional and Technical	38.7	38.9	38.2	---	33.4	36.4	41.1	---
Farmers	46.6	45.9	49.2	---	52.1	50.4	51.7	---
Managers, Officials and Proprietors	44.5	44.6	45.3	---	44.3	44.8	47.9	---
Clerical Workers	35.2	36.2	38.0	---	29.9	29.7	36.0	---
Sales Workers	35.2	36.9	39.2	---	29.9	37.2	43.4	---
Draftsmen, Foremen	41.4	40.7	41.8	---	37.2	39.0	43.5	---
Operatives	34.0	36.0	38.4	---	31.1	36.7	41.2	---
Non-Farm Laborers	34.9	37.3	37.5	---	29.2	36.3	38.5	---
Service Workers	38.8	44.0	43.5	---	33.9	39.9	43.3	---
Farm Laborers	24.9	26.4	31.3	---	26.6	36.2	40.0	---
Total	38.3	39.6	40.6	38.4	32.2	36.4	40.4	38.0

Sources: U.S. Census, 1940, Vol. III: The Labor Force, Part 1, Table 65,
U.S. Census, 1950, Vol. IV, Part 1, Occupational Characteristics, Table 6,
U.S. Census, 1960, Vol. 7A: Occupational Characteristics, Table 6.

women re-entering the work force, the age of female operatives (that is, almost all female blue-collar workers) has increased even more rapidly. Thus in 1960, female "new working class" workers are slightly younger than female operatives.

Race and Class

NON-WHITES WERE STILL CONCENTRATED very much in their traditional occupations in 1960: 24.0 per cent of all male farm laborers, and 33.9 per cent of all female farm laborers were non-white, 21.5 per cent of all non-domestic male service workers were non-white, 54.5 per cent of all female domestic workers were non-white, 26.1 per cent of all male unskilled laborers were non-white. In general blacks and other minorities were heavily concentrated in the occupations that are rapidly declining in overall importance in the economy. The decline of these occupations has played a major role in the heightening crisis in non-white communities.

Among semi-skilled workers (both male and female), non-whites are represented in about the same proportion as they form in the population as a whole (slightly more among males, and slightly less among females). Thus, the racial composition of operatives reflects that of the society as a whole. On the other hand, among both skilled male workers and male "new working class" workers, non-whites are a very small percentage of the total. Among female skilled workers and "new working

TABLE 17: RACE AND OCCUPATION 1960 (PERCENT NON-WHITE)

	Males	Females
Professional and Technical	3.5%	7.2%
Managers, Officials, and Proprietors	2.0%	3.9%
Clerical Workers	6.8%	3.6%
Sales Workers	2.1%	2.8%
Craftsmen and Foremen	4.9%	7.3%
Operatives	11.1%	10.6%
Service Workers ex. Domestics	21.5%	19.5%
Domestics	---	54.5%
Non-Farm Laborers	26.1%	---
Farm Laborers	24.0%	33.9%
Total	9.6%	12.8%

Source: Statistical Abstract of the U.S., 1970, p. 228.

class" workers, however, non-whites are only slightly underrepresented. The most serious discrimination occurs among managers-officials-proprietors and sales workers.

Thus, although black workers, especially in the steel and auto industries as well as in unskilled occupations in general, are playing a central role in the economy, white workers are still by far the majority of the manual working class as well as the white-collar and "new working class" workers. The possibility of the blacks, in the language of the Weatherman statement, "doing it alone if necessary" would seem to be highly unlikely.

Conclusion

THIS PAPER HAS TWO major themes: (1) The relative size of the blue-collar working class has remained more or less constant for the last thirty years. But, since many women from this class have left their homes and taken jobs, the social forces acting on the blue-collar family are becoming more uniform. (2) The "new working class" is becoming more numerous and more like the blue-collar working class.

We have seen that those who argue that the "new working class" is replacing the "old working class" are wrong. The blue-collar workers are not being superseded. They continue to be a necessary base for any popular revolutionary movement. No revolutionary movement could hope to accomplish its goal without this half of the population, which because of its conditions of work is put into a position to act and to critically affect the operation of the whole society. No movement to transform society could hope for success without powerful support from this sector.

However, although we must reject the claim that the blue-collar working class is being undermined, we are forced to the conclusion that the "new working class" is nevertheless playing a more and more central role in the economy and that its conditions of labor are becoming more and more like those of blue-collar workers. Thus, any serious movement to transform society must also organize and work with this very central, rapidly growing, and increasingly proletarian sector of the

working class. Any successful revolutionary socialist movement in the United States would have to be based on an alliance of these two major sectors of the American working class. □