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Druk Taconis bv, Wolvega

Towards a Class Analysis of the International System*

by Ekkehart Krippendorff

A few years ago, Isaac Deutscher at a teach-in in California made an appeal for the 'restoration of the class struggle to its original dignity'. To some extent his call has been heard: it is not any more considered completely out of place and out of tune to use the term in serious scholarly debates and analysis. It has lost at least some of its ring of old-fashionedness or party-communist demagoguery of the 1920's. The very fact that it is possible to present a paper with the term 'class' in its title at a meeting of political scientists testifies to that change in attitudes and might be interpreted as a first step towards the restoration of dignity to this ambiguous and yet so crucial scientific concept.

It is an ambiguous concept to the extent that already Karl Marx refused to 'define' it rigidly while working with it in all its manifold and differentiated meanings.¹ In the most general terms it means nothing else than seeing social relationship in all their various manifestations as a function of the position of men within the reproduction process of society. In so far as the capitalist mode of production is characterized by the dissolution of all 'natural' — *naturwüchsige* — relationships, mainly through the destruction of agriculture which was the dominant way of reproduction for ninety percent of mankind for a good 5,000 years prior to the capitalist revolution, class becomes the dominant form of social stratification. Modern society replaces 'natural' mediations between man and nature with more complex and qualitatively new ones: the relatively simple and stable lord-peasant relationship is replaced by formations where the only thing which is certain is the inability of the majority of the human population to reproduce itself — to survive — in selfsufficiency, except for that decreasingly small sector still working on the land; yet even the peasant is becoming increasingly dependent on technologies produced elsewhere and on an anonymous market beyond his own control and/or scope of comprehension. This very fundamental insecurity of man — in the most simplistic terms: the need to find a job and the fear of losing it — characterizes modern post-agricultural society.

I do not apologize for starting with such seemingly simplistic 'obviousities' because my initially stated optimism notwithstanding, we cannot as yet take it for granted that the class concept is accepted as a key concept in social science analysis. Even less so can we assume anything like self-evidence if we use class or class struggle in connection with international relations. Yet, from the very notion of class as circumscribed here, it follows with necessity that as an analytical and practical tool for the understand-

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ding of post-agricultural socio-economic systems, class must be a crucial variable of the international system as well, and this for two intrinsically related reasons. As traditional international relationists know and tell us, we are living in an age of so-called interdependence where no one part or party of the international system can act any more autonomously or is unaffected by changes taking place elsewhere, be they seemingly marginal like a change of government in countries many thousands of kilometers apart or be they vital like the outbreak of civil unrest in a small country halfway around the globe. This interdependence, however, is but another expression on a different level of that fundamental insecurity which was defined above as the basic characteristic of modern society where similarly no one group or social unit is anymore autonomous in its own reproduction. This is one of the central and decisive consequence of the world capitalist revolution. Secondly, capitalism from its very and earliest beginnings — i.e. even in its pre-industrial forms — was and is a mode of production with a legitimate claim to exclusiveness and with the 'historical right' to destroy all pre- and non-capitalist modes of production which it encounters: I say 'legitimate' and 'historical right' because it did in fact prove itself superior over all other social formations in terms of its revolutionary capacity to liberate man's productive capacities — as Marx himself was the first one to acknowledge most enthusiastically (re-read, e.g. the text of the Communist Manifesto). The restructuring of society along class lines which in turn are based on man's position within the process of production, is, therefore at least tendentially a world-wide phenomenon from the very beginning of capitalism, manifesting itself in a large variety of forms where previously isolated societies are being incorporated into an integrated world market.

Historically, however, this was a long and contradictory process, covering the whole of our epoch. The uneven formation of classes in the various societies reflects the unevenness with which the capitalist mode of production expanded and established its dominance — first within small sectors of Western Europe, then within the various European states, then in the colonies of European settlement (notably North America), and then at still later stages in the colonized societies proper. And everywhere it produced a new variety of the same basic reproduction scheme. In order to cut short these preliminary remarks, I want to reduce this complex reality to two central questions: firstly, why did class identification, objectively the product of industrial capitalism, not become also subjectively the dominant framework of socio-political identity in the past as projected by Marx's famous statement that 'the working class has no fatherland?' And secondly, does not the very concept of underdevelopment contradict the possibility of class formations in Third World countries?

As to the first question, in itself most complex and the source of many bitterly disappointed expectations,² the answer will have to be sought from the angle of the state structure of international capitalism. In brief, it is the (nation-)state organization as the historically concrete form in which capitalism appears and maintains itself, which functions as the diametrically opposed agent of political or socio-psychological socialization and it is thus the state which appears as the conceptual counterpart or opposite to class. It is, from the point of view of the emergence of class society, the objective as well as the purposive function of the state to counterbalance if not to prevent the development of class consciousness. Class consciousness, to its fullest degree, would mean the articulation of the antagonistic quality of a class society and thus precipitate civil war, be it in manifest or latent forms of socially costly repression mechanisms. The strategies of social pacification developed to this end as well as the ideological means employed (nationalism being the most obvious one) are well enough known to require further elaboration. As far as the discipline of International Relations is concerned, it follows *per definitionem* that all those theories which have as their basic analytical unit the state or the nation or the nation state are inherently and by their very logic apologists for those whose interests are represented or protected by a given state, i.e. the dominant social strata determined to suppress at least ideologically class as a valid concept but hopefully as a political reality as well. 'Power politics' as the most distinguished school of the discipline appears thus as the very antagonist of 'class politics'. The problem is, however, more complex than that: it is to my mind indisputable that the categorical apparatus of power politics does still supply valid explanatory tools for the understanding of important aspects of international politics. Take, for example, the Sino-Soviet conflict which testifies to the actual survival of capitalist structures in the international system even where they seemed to be overcome. After all, it was for the conceptualization of nation state relationships (and this nation state being capitalist in its social content) that the power politics approach was 'invented' and thus its apparent operational validity is a reflection of the relative stability of the political structures of the international system as they emerged so long ago. But we have not yet answered the question why class politics did not prevail over state politics. I suggest a rather simple answer which should and could be qualified in a different context, and that is the recurrent defeat and/or political crippling of the lower classes of the capitalist system — a defeat and/or political crippling which manifested itself in destroying the inherent and often even explicit internationalism of these classes in favour of their re-integration into the nation-state framework. This was the case with bourgeois internationalism between the Thermidor and 1848, it was the

case with proletarian internationalism since 1871 and it has been partly the case with 'Third World internationalism' since the 1960's. But, as we shall see later, lower class internationalism is and remains a dormant force and political factor in the international system.

The second question I proposed to answer preliminarily was whether class formation, being a function of capitalism proper, is not a contradiction when dealing with underdevelopment. The answer to this again extremely complex issue has to be sought within that analytical and historical framework which allows us to see underdevelopment as a function of capitalist development and not as an early stage to later take-offs. By that very definition, the underdeveloped countries are part of an international system created and shaped by the capitalist mode of production and thus subject to transformation into class societies — but into class societies of a new and peculiar order. The empirically indisputable fact that Third World countries in general are characterized by sharper cleavages between 'rich' and 'poor', between 'haves' and 'have-nots' than are the leading capitalist nations does not provide us as such with analytical categories and is not directly translatable into class terms. In fact, class antagonisms in their 'classical' forms — leading to the state-nation reaction as indicated before — can and will be found only in those Third World countries which have developed a strong capitalist-industrial sector of their own, integrated though into the system of enlarged capitalist reproduction of the metropolitan economies, but functioning at the same time as sub-imperialist transmissionbelts to weaker societies of their respective regions with an active foreign policy. Brazil, Mexico, Argentina for Latin America, India and Indonesia for Asia, Israel and Iran for the Middle East, South Africa for Africa are the main clusters of this type. This modern capitalist sector might be quantitatively small — in the case of India for example it comprises probably not more than 20% of the population, the rest remains in the traditional sector and is thus not yet stratified along class lines — but it determines both the foreign policies of the countries concerned and it ties these sectors and their classes in with the metropolitan economies more than is the case with other Third World countries. — A second group of countries comprises those with formerly enclave economies but who have meanwhile lost some of their significance for the metropolises and therefore are now embarking on the development of national capitalist systems of enlarged reproduction. In the long run (in the case of Chile, however, this was a relatively short process) this gives rise to class contradictions which are difficult to contain through the mobilization of a large traditional sector so that the resort to open repression remains a distinct possibility. Besides Chile this would apply to Venezuela and Peru for example or to Egypt. The sheer

size of the given nation-societies does play a certain role by conditioning the margin of socio-economic manoeuvring space — compare, e.g. Brazil, India or Indonesia with the three latter prototypes. — A third group of Third World societies which can be identified comprises those in which the semi-colonial model of capitalist accumulation continues: Haiti, Paraguay or Zaïre for example, none of them approaching as yet a restructuring along classical class lines except in marginal forms in the traditional enclaves.³ From this we can conclude: a) it would definitely be wrong not to apply the class concept to Third World societies, in fact the formation of classes based on the destruction of or domination over pre-capitalist social formations is a process which is approaching the point of its completion for most or at least the most important underdeveloped countries or their leading sectors respectively; but b) this class formation is characterized by specific distortions emanating from differentiated positions of these societies within the international hierarchy, and it is far from being an evenlevelled process, manifesting itself more or less equally in all societies at the periphery of the international system: the contrary is the case.

But this uneven development is, at the same time and by being capitalist generated development, combined development. The unevenness takes today — among other things — the form of growing differentiations between the Third World countries, notably and in addition to the 'tiers' of countries mentioned before, with the emergence of the oil producing countries. Their ascendance to politico-economic prominence will be most likely transitory as far as these countries themselves are concerned but it has the more important effect of sharpening social conflicts and specific forms of class divisions within the rest of the undeveloped societies. This is a point to be returned to later. That what is meant by *combined* uneven development, however, has also found new historical verifications. While the mercantilist-colonial phase mediated the various parts of the international system basically through exploitation and, more importantly, through trade relations, while the phase of classical imperialism being itself the politico-economic manifestation of the industrial revolution, mediated and integrated the parts of the whole through capital export as well as through an uneven exchange of raw materials against industrial goods, the phase initiating basically after World War I saw the slow emergence of internationally operating combines, trusts, and cartels (as Lenin called them) or, more recently, of multinational corporations (as they are called euphemistically today). The latter, being put under pressure by a tightening international competition and higher labour costs in the metropolitan centers — the result of the relative strength of organized labour and the ever recurring need to secure a stable social base for the metropolitan state — and having the tech-

nological means of radically improved international communications at their disposal (from transport to world-wide decision making), are now embarking on something of great importance for our question: the internationalization of production proper. This particular aspect or form of world-wide capitalist reproduction has been amply researched empirically in recent years as well as subjected to theoretical analysis — enough at least for us to take the familiarity with those findings for granted. The one aspect or dimension of the internationalization of production, however, which has not found enough attention and systematic treatment is the labour aspect of it. While transnational production is consistent with the growth and the integration pattern of the emergence of a world market — implicit in the revolutionary capitalist mode of production from its very beginning — it has been largely overlooked that the internationalization of production creates the conditions of the possibility of the emergence of an internationalized working class as well: now not only merely related to each other in terms of the relative position the working classes occupy within their own societies (i.e. Marx's projection of an objective internationalism of the oppressed and exploited everywhere) but more concretely and directly connected with each other through the mediation of being national parts of an international production process; a car, an airplane, an engine might in certain cases be products to which Turkish workers (in Turkey), Brazilian workers (in Brazil), British workers (in Britain) etc. have commonly contributed. They become in real terms adjuncts of a world-wide assembly line.

Labour unions in general, and European unions in particular, have begun to realize the implications of this development and are currently working towards strategies to cope with this seemingly irreversible trend.⁴ But it is more the union leaderships than the the working classes themselves who are planning such actions — quite understandably given the complexity of the process and its very real remoteness from the concrete experiences of the national working classes themselves. American unions, incidentally, tend to oppose even that minimal counter strategy of an internationalist response. 'Organized labour abroad', writes the U.S. Tariff Commission, 'tends to look towards the eventual cohesion of the international labour movement to the point where unions in different trades and industries will be able to approach the MNC's with the same single-minded view of the world as a whole as that of the companies themselves. U.S. labour, on the other hand, doubts the possibility of any meaningful international labour solidarity as an unworkable goal. Indeed, such a goal may not serve highly paid U.S. labor's own self interest. Alle unionists would like to be committed to the notion of international brotherhood among working men, but the fact is that the world labour movement is troubled by divisions and disagreements

among key national and international leaders. These divisions are an important factor preventing unified labour policies toward the companies'.⁵ Since organized labour and the multinationals are not our main analytic object or concern, I do not want to even enter into the argument; it is sufficient to see even those wide-spread stirrings in the labour unions of the major and highest developed capitalist countries as indicators of or reactions to the already for advanced process of international production. But, we have to add, in that narrow and specific sense of the emergence of an international proletariat, tied to one integrated labour process, it affects at this point only small sectors of the working population of the world and as yet only in relatively few countries. Internationalist class formations tend to develop therefore either within that 'first tier' of the imperialist system which is mainly composed of subimperialist centers because of the existence of a strong and competitive modern industrial sector, and/or to some extent within the 'third tier' (as distinguished previously) of those countries where because of the availability of an industrial reserve army enclaves have sprung up. But it is not to be expected — in general — among that rather important group of countries where national bourgeoisies and/or modernizing-technocratic military regimes try to broaden their own social base as a means of capital accumulation after having lost their role and function as colonial appendices of the metropolitan powers: Chile and Peru as the two cases already cited earlier. Here the formation of national class divisions and conflicts is more likely than elsewhere.

But internationalized production is only *one* of the combining elements laying the objective foundations for an internationalization of the labour force under the conditions of unevenness. Another one has to be seen in the large scale labour migration movements, generated by the concentration of capital. We should not hesitate to point out that the process as such is as old as the international system itself: it started with the enforced transportation of black labour into the New World, amounting to at least 10 million slaves between the late 15th and the early 19th centuries, it continued with the migration movements from the Old World into the Americas, Australia, S. Africa etc., and it finds its current version in the millions of 'guest workers' hired in the EEC peripheries or converging 'voluntarily' on the metropolitan centers. The research and literature on this subject has swollen enormously during the last few years and, as far as the process of class formation is concerned, there seems to be a general consensus as to the divisive consequences of labour migration for working class cohesiveness: ethnic conflicts rather than trans-national class solidarity result from job differentiations and job competition. And yet, despite the overwhelming empirical evidence of such inter-class hostility along ethnic lines, we have

to maintain that the real and objective processes work in the long run towards the recognition of common socio-economic if not, eventually, even socio-political interests. The tough measures taken by immigrant countries' authorities against so-called radical agitators among foreign visitors demonstrate their keen awareness of the dangers to social peace springing from any break-down of those divisions; the attempt to favour the tapping of industrial reserve armies from countries culturally further removed from the Central European metropolises — like the Turks — might in the short own have the desired effect of creating stonger interclass barriers. To sum up, internationalized production leading to internationalized labour, and labour migration are two forms in which international society manifests itself no longer only tendentially but concretely as an international class society.

However, we see less than half of the picture by concentrating only on the emergence of internationally mediated class formations on the labour side of the total process. Capital has been and is producing internationally functioning social networks thus giving rise to trans-national class alliances which are more real and concrete than those of labour. This is, sociologically speaking, a function of improved means of communication, of education and, most importantly, of structural factors, i.e. of the need to create functioning control and exchange systems for the management of an international economy which moves, as was pointed out earlier, from foreign trade to internationally integrated production and distribution combines in accomplishing the completion of the world market. This class has been so far only marginally subjected to any socio-scientific analysis, and then only in terms of measuring internationalist 'attitudes' or 'outlooks'. It will surprise no one that corporate managers and businessmen with operations in many countries on many continents develop so-called internationalist orientations and loyalties which are no longer primarily projected onto nation states; this is particularly true of those operating out of Western Europe and in the modernized, world-integrated sectors of the sub-imperialist Third World countries. The elite life-styles, consumption patterns and value orientations developed by this class have become shared norms the diffusion of which has long-range destabilizing and denationalizing effects on the upper bourgeoisies of the metropolitan countries and their closest satellites. But it is more important to note the concrete socio-political network this class commands, a network more formal and structured than is usually assumed. It operates through international financial institutions, through banks, business training schools, consortia engaged in common projects etc. The Time Magazine ad in the Economist of May 11 1970 speaks for itself: 'The fact is that Time's 24 million readers are apt to have more in common with each other than with many of their own countrymen. High in-

comes. Good education. Responsible positions in business, government and the professions . . . Time readers constitute an international community of the affluent and influential, responsive to new ideas, new products and new ways of doing things'. Even though it will most likely be impossible to ever provide the empirical proof for it, but the growing difficulties created for Chile's Unidad Popular immediately following Allende's election have all the characteristics of a concerted and orchestrated action on the part of this international 'business community', or rather, capitalist class; politics and (American covert) diplomacy entering only during the final phase.

The military forms another organized part of the international capitalist system's controlling stratum. Again, this is not true of all military forces everywhere or under all circumstances — but if we accept or start from the basic correlation which exists between nation-state development, the capitalist mode of production, and the socio-economically stabilizing function armaments and armed forces play then we can approach and interpret the empirically undeniable fact of the militarization of the international system as one more control and stratification mechanism, created to protect 'law and order' which is in concrete terms the law and the order of the world market. This is not to ignore functional and structural differences of military organization and recruitment patterns or the 'modernizing rôle' played by various military regimes in different Third World countries. But the internal logic of military government as well as the institution of national armed forces after decolonization or, as was the case in Latin America, after the loosening of direct interventionist controls, have ascribed to them the function of stabilizers within the international system. More important, technological developments in the field of weapons systems etc. have created dependency structures of long-term duration, and on that basis they have developed informal as well as formal structures of socio-political intercourse — common training, coordinated command systems, information exchanges, etc. which allow for internationally concerted actions to maintain an international 'equilibrium'. The military must thus be regarded not as a subservient instrument of foreign policy but rather as a tactically independent part of an international class formation. Its strength lies in the firm social base it has acquired within the political economies of the societies forming the world market: in the U.S. and in Western Europe this 'social base' has been labeled the 'military industrial complex', meaning basically the function of armaments as a stabilizing element of developed capitalist economies. In Third World countries the 'social base' of the armed forces implies, under varying circumstances and conditions, more their monopoly or quasi-monopoly of cohesive socio-political organization as well as the job security and advancement opportunities they provide for

the socially uprooted and proletarianized masses. But in both cases the justification for dealing with the armed forces within the framework of class analysis stems from their firm roots in the productive process.

A quite different problem — analytically as well as politically — is posed by the recent explosion of ethnically based unrest and violence on a world scale. It ranges from Northern Irish Catholics, Spanish Basques, French Bretons and Swiss Jurassiens to American blacks, the Kurds, Turks and Greiks on Cyprus, and even certain nationalities within the Soviet Union. Here, I suggest, class analysis can again shed some light and, implicitly, if not explicitly, point towards solutions. In their various forms these manifestations of dissatisfaction seem to have one thing in common: they are under the given circumstances concrete expressions of inequalities imposed on these minorities by increasingly rigidly stratified societies or polities — in and of themselves functions of the rigidity and stratification strategies of the international system — which are experienced and are being articulated by some victims of these stratification strategies in the most readily available and operational forms, i.e. in the form of ethnic resistance. Such ethnic resistance — using the term rather loosely — has an internationally contagious quality, a spread effect challenging in very radical ways the attempted homogenization and disciplining of the international system for the sake of the functioning of an integrated world market with standardized production and consumption patterns. This ethnic identification or resistance identity tends to create what Abraham Léon has termed with regard to the ethnic survival of the Jews through so many centuries a 'nation class' or 'nation classes',⁶ i.e. socially and ideologically cohesive reagents which under the circumstances take on the functions of social classes. It is, therefore, certainly no accident that with hardly any exception these 'nation classes' articulate themselves in socialist or 'marxist' terms. This seems to hold true for the nationality resistances within the Soviet Union as well, even though we would have to employ an infinitely more sophisticated analytical apparatus or framework to make inner-Soviet stratification strategies visible as a function of the Soviet Union's growing integration into the capitalist dominated international system.

At this point I would like to break off. What I have tried to demonstrate was not only the legitimacy of the concept of class as a fertile and differentiated analytical category for a further and more realistic understanding of international politics and the international system, but even the necessity of applying it to the socio-political reality of our epoch, the epoch of the capitalist revolution. In a little known essay entitled 'Who Thinks Abstractly', Hegel argued that it is abstract, i.e. bad, thinking to take appearances at their

face value, in his example, to identify a murderer as a murderer and be satisfied with the factually correct statement as the answer. Concrete in Hegel's sense is that thinking or that analytical approach which recognizes in the proven murderer the sum-total of a variety of psychologically mediated social forces and influences which conditioned him to commit the act in the first place. Such concrete thinking is required on the part of students of international relations as well. To speak of international conflicts in terms of power rivalries — which is but their superficial manifestation — or to simply term wars, wars, or to satisfy ourselves with stating and empirically proving dependencies or North-South conflicts by means of sophisticated and differentiated models, means abstract thinking and abstract, i.e. bad, analysis. Concrete, scientific analysis has to dig deeper and must try to get to the roots of such conflicts and contradictions as we observe daily and of which we have been or are still becoming victims.

Notes

- 1 Cf. Michael Mauke, *Die Klassentheorie von Marx und Engels*; Frankfurt/Main 1970.
- 2 Cf. Bertell Ollman, Toward Class Consciousness Next Time: Marx and the Working Class; in: *Politics & Society*, Fall 1972; blz. 1-24.
- 3 Cf. Anibal Quijano, La terza fase dell'imperialismo; *Il Manifesto*, April 28, 1974.
- 4 See e.g. Kurt P. Tudyka (Hsg.), *Multinationale Konzerne und Gewerkschaftsstrategie*; Hamburg 1974.
- 5 U. S. Tariff Commission, *Report on Multinational Firms to the U.S. Senate Committee on Finance*; Washington, D.C., GPD, 1973; Vol. III, blz. 686.
- 6 Abraham Leon, *Kapitalismus und Judenfrage*; Frankfurt/Main 1972.