

Comments by John Porter

I cannot comment on Michael Burawoy's paper from the point of view of any of the current "problematiques" of contemporary Marxism, since I am not schooled in them. What little I have read does not particularly help me in clarifying the kinds of problems that interest me.

But when I first read Braverman, I was very much impressed and after rereading large sections of the book for this particular task, I am still very much impressed and I do not make that judgement in terms of his contribution, whatever that may be, to Marxian labour economics or Marxian sociology. Nor is it because what Braverman has said is new. Most of this compilation of materials - studies of work, labour force statistics and other things - we knew before. Perhaps I was impressed because the book was an articulate reminder of facts we did know but were prepared to overlook, and I use "we" here in the sense of the whole gamut of followers of conventional social science, of the post-Second-World War period. I think we were prepared to overlook this evidence because of our overconcern for economic growth as the *raison-d'être* of industrialization, and the way we saw worker productivity linked to economic growth. As well we believed consumption to be one of the major goals of the industrialization process.

So convinced were we of these objectives, both those in actual work situations and those studying them, that we overlooked much of the change that Braverman analyses. Certainly social scientists accepted growth and upgrading of the labour force as basic to modernism, and I think the best illustration of that is found in every intergenerational mobility matrix where one compares the marginals of fathers and sons, and takes the difference as representative of progress because overall

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the sons have done better than the fathers. The objective of the exercise in mobility analysis is to discover how respondents have exploited the opportunity provided by occupational upgrading. So we ask whether or not the class structure is permeable, and to what degree. Again, the basic assumption underlying analyses of these father-son occupational data, on which I have been engaged myself, is that the overall effects of industrialization have been beneficial and progressive. Social scientists, of course, bear this burden of oversight, or guilt depending on how severe one considers the offence to be.

I can remember papers back in the fifties in which industrial sociology was being condemned as "cow" sociology, and in which industrial psychology was referred to as deep therapy on the assembly line, so that the picture is not totally one of the social sciences going to work for capitalist enterprise, although I would not deny for a moment that that has been their major thrust. There have always been critics of this direction, however.

Many of the things said about the degradation of work, or the character of work, have been criticized through various art forms, if not sociology, and certainly Taylorism has been subject to ridicule for a very long time. So I would see Braverman's contribution as a massive critique of what work has become, whether or not he made any contribution to theory. I think the critique is particularly strong not only because of his analysis of work in the factory, but also because of the extent to which automation and new forms of technology have affected the tertiary sector, as well as the application of science and technology to the work process and the effects they have brought about. Also, his observations (he is eclectic here) on the role of education and how it has helped to create the illusion of upgrading

of the contemporary labour force is consistent with other current criticisms of credentialism. His appendix on occupational classifications is fascinating for anybody who has attempted to develop occupational classifications, but more importantly his analysis of the methodology of the prevailing official ones, more than any other part of the book calls into question the notion of an upgraded labour force. All of these things add up to a tremendously powerful critique of how we have looked at work.