

SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CLASS IN MALTA

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INTRODUCTION

There exist a variety of approaches to defining “class” but, as Joppke (1986, p. 55) points out, none of these approaches can avoid addressing, in a sympathetic or critical manner, “*the two main sociological traditions which – more or less in mutual rivalry – have shaped the discussion on class up to the present*” These are the Marxist and Weberian analyses of class, and it is this classical sociological tradition that needs to be briefly addressed first before we consider the structure of power relations in Malta.

A MARXIST CONCEPTION OF CLASS

Any reference to “class” and to its attendant concepts – or rather, practices – of “class consciousness”, “class exploitation”, and “class struggle” immediately call to mind the figure of Karl Marx (b. 1818, d. 1883).¹ Marx argued that in human history, all the social formations that were set up were characterised by the leadership of a dominant group who, in different ways, exploited and oppressed other groups of people within the same society. According to Marx, this dominating-dominated relationship was above all an *economic* one, i.e. the group which had economic power, which owned the means of production, organised social life in such a way that they maintained their privilege, power, and wealth. This economic relationship of dominance and exploitation was not always present and, importantly for Marx, it was possible – indeed *imperative* for those who had a moral concern for justice – to imagine and *bring about* a classless society. Marx was mainly interested in analysing, explaining and envisaging a social formation which was more equal, just and humane than the society of his age, characterised by a capitalist mode of production.

According to Marx, while the industrial revolution had brought about with it the possibility of greater material wealth, the relations of production were organised in such a way that the hierarcical class divisions that existed between lord and serf in feudal relations of production were emphasised. In the capitalist social formation, people without property of their own – not owning the means of production (including tools, raw materials, industrial sites) – and having only their ability to work (labour power) to offer, sell this labour power to the capitalists (who own the means of production) in return for a wage (hence wage-labour). Marx argued that in a number of key ways, working for a wage was similar to the feudal rent imposed and appropriated by the feudal lord. This is because the capitalist does not give the *real* wage to his labourers,

but underpays (extracts surplus value from) them to such an extent that he can make profit. The industrial workers, like the serfs of the past, have to surrender a proportion of what is due to them in return for their labour to an industrial "lord" who makes a comfortable living, so to speak, on the back of his workers. Thus, out of a working day of, say, ten hours, if the cost of providing a wage is recovered after six hours of work, the remaining or surplus value produced in four hours is appropriated by the capitalist and transformed into private profit. Miliband (1987, p. 327) notes that "*All societies need to appropriate a part of the product from the procedures for such purposes as the maintenance of the young, the sick and the old, investment for further production and later distribution, the provision of collective services, and so on. In a classless society, however, appropriation would occur only for those purposes*" (emphasis in the original). In a class-based, capitalist society it is the capitalist who appropriates surplus value as profit, by virtue of his ownership rights and privileged position.

Marx – and others such as Engels, Lenin and Kautsky who developed his thoughts – also argued that this exploitative wage relationship between capitalist and workers led to a conflict of interests between the two groups, or classes, of people. It is in the interest of workers to struggle together as a group – within the same factory against the factory owner, and with other workers in other factories nationally and internationally against the capitalist class as a whole – to win for themselves higher wages, better conditions of work, more holidays, longer periods of rest during the working day, and a measure of control over the production process – in short, all those legitimate things which are not in the interest of the capitalist to concede.

While in feudal society, struggle against exploitation by lords was often fragmented – peasant revolts apart – due to the family-based economy, the situation in capitalist industrialist societies is different. For the factory and the city brought large numbers of workers together in the same place, and this made them become deeply aware of their condition not as individuals but as a group (hence "*class consciousness*"). Such awareness of the unjust and inequitable state of affairs, argued Marx, would lead to class conflict and class struggle which would pave the way to an equal and just society where "*the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all*", where people work "*according to ability*" and receive "*according to their need*". In this new social formation, workers would produce to satisfy real needs, and citizens would be involved in direct democratic participation, decision-making, administration and problem-solving. As Giddens and Held (1982, pp. 6 – 7) note, such labour organisation extends to the political sphere: "*The existence of parliaments and recognition of the formal right to organise political parties in the apparatus of bourgeois democracy permit the formation of labour parties that increasingly challenge the dominant order. Through such political mobilisation the revolution is made – a process which Marx apparently believed would be a peaceful transition in certain countries with strong democratic traditions but more likely to involve violent confrontations elsewhere*".²

Pertinent to later discussions it is necessary to ask: “*How does the ruling class rule?*” (Therborn, 1978). The ruling class not only controls (and generally owns) the means of production, but also the main means of communication and consent (Miliband, 1987, p. 329). In other words, as Gramsci (1971) has pointed out, the ruling class has an interest to establish its hegemony in society, i.e. a state of affairs whereby it is only their ideas, values and categories of thought – e.g. the belief that wage-labour is a fair exchange of money for labour, that profit is an indication of success, that ownership implies control – are in fact distributed and given legitimacy. Althusser (1971) notes that the ruling class tries to rule through engineering consent by using Ideological State Apparata such as schools, the churches and the media. It is only when these fail and that people see through common-sense ideas and realise that these are working against their own interest and in favour of the interests of others that the ruling class is obliged to use its Repressive State Apparata, i.e. the police and the military.

The above account of Marxist views on class has emphasised the division between the “two great classes”, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Marxist writers have, however, given importance also to gradations of social ranking or stratification in relation to these two basic classes. Keeping in mind that in this approach economic relationships form the basis of classes, workers who have different relationships to different sectors of the economic structure will also form different social classes. Miliband (1987, pp. 330–3) for instance, distinguishes between the “power elite”, the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie, the working class and the “underclass” in the pyramid that is constituted by modern class structures. This will be discussed in some detail as we come to describe the class structure in Malta.

A WEBERIAN CONCEPTION OF “CLASS”

In outlining Weber’s approach to social class³ and distinguishing it from that of Marx and his followers, it is important to point out that the latter emphasised that for the truly human society to come about, different occupational groups had to forget and forgo their sectional interests in favour of presenting a stronger united front of proletariat against capitalists.⁴ The emphasis is on social relations of production. Not so for Weber (b. 1864, d. 1920) who considered relations of production to be only one factor which led to a relationship of inequality, and that economic power was not necessarily, as it was for Marx, the overriding factor which determined political power or historical change. For Weber, the conflicts between states, ethnic communities and “status groups” were at least as important as class conflict.

One way of understanding the thrust of Weber’s analysis of class is to think of the economic system not in terms of those who own the means of production and those who do not, but rather as a market where occupational groups try to sell their skills or labour power. Those aggregates of individuals which have similar skills or work to “sell” to employers constitute social classes, and these are not interested at all in overthrowing capitalism in favour of another economic system. Rather, as Weber portrays them, these occupational groups

compete with each other in order to attract towards themselves the best life chances, i.e. rewards and advantages, possible. Towards this end these different classes employ a variety of strategies, which, in the case of the traditional professions for instance, include controlling access, through certification, of the number of people practising a particular skill so that what they have to offer remains scarce, and therefore the market is obliged to pay more for their services.

According to Weber these occupational groups are unable to take coordinated action on a class basis because they organise internally around two other poles of group solidarity, namely as “status groups” and political parties. As Giddens and Held (1982, p. 10) point out, “*status groups are founded upon relationships of consumption rather than production and take the form of ‘styles of life’ that separate one group from another*”. Occupational groups therefore share a variety of similar experiences and conditions at work, and tend to develop similar lifestyles, which fact tends to enhance intermarriage and the reproduction, from one generation to the next, of the same values, beliefs, and cultural practices⁵. Weber also argues that groups can come together on bases other than economic relations or status by attaching themselves to a political party in order to defend and assert ethnic or nationalistic rights which do not necessarily coincide with either class membership or class interest.

The central concept used by Marx with reference to class, namely expropriation of the workers from control of the means of production, is for Weber an unavoidable and irreversible fact of life as a highly technological and modern society moves, irrevocably, towards bureaucratic forms of domination. In other words, for Weber the culprit, so to say, is not capitalism but industrialisation. It is in the very nature of a bureaucracy that the ones in the lower echelons of an institution lose control over their work as this is devised for them by the ones in the upper echelons. In the Weberian approach to class, therefore, class struggle is not an attempt to move outside of the institutional rules and legal framework – in other words the rules for the social game – determined by a parliamentary system. Rather, it is “*another version of the eternal struggle for power between individuals and groups in human society*” (Joppke, 1986, p. 56). Unlike Marx, Weber did not develop either an optimistic or a progressive vision for human society.

EVALUATION OF THE CLASSICAL TRADITION

Both Marxist and Weberian approaches to class have been subjected to criticism. The former has been accused (Giddens, 1982) of explaining inequality solely in terms of social relations of production and not giving attention to how people of different race, colour, religion and gender are also disadvantaged in social formations. Recent Marxist scholarship with reference to class has, in fact, given more attention to these dominated groups without, however, denying the centrality of class analysis in an explanation of oppression in modern societies (cf Wright, 1983). Marxist approaches to class

have also been considered to be “evolutionist”, i.e. there is the belief that social formations will *inevitably* experience class struggle which will inevitably lead to the proletariat taking over the means of production and eventually inevitably form the classless society which Marx called “communism”. Some critics have also argued that Marx did not foresee the swelling in numbers of the middle classes and the progressive “disappearance” of the working classes due to the information technology which will eradicate most of the manual occupations (Gorz, 1982). Braverman’s (1974) path-breaking book has however argued that high technology has increased rather than decreased the numbers of the working class, since the process deskills workers and removes any vestige of autonomy and control over their job.

Weber’s approach to class has, on the other hand, been criticised because its emphasis on marketable skills leads to a situation where practically each individual could be put in a separate “class” as s/he would have a skill which differs from that of others to a greater or lesser degree. Parkin (1982, p. 94) notes that the standard Marxist critique of Weberian approaches to class is that it is “*concerned with the world of mere appearances – patterns of social inequality and distribution – instead of with the real essence of things, the system of productive relations. In short, Weber is accused of a preoccupation with social effects or consequences, rather than with their underlying causes*”. Weber also tends to focus on occupation as an indicator of class, and hence neglects that even in contemporary society there still exists a group which holds a concentration of economic advantage (wealth) and power and which monopolises the ownership of the means of production. It is this lack of acknowledgement of the enormous degree of power wielded by this group, and the effect this has on so many aspects of a social formation that I consider to be the chief failing of a Weberian approach to class. Consequently it is the recognition of the utter centrality of capitalism as a massively structuring force which has a major impact on every other structural relationship and antagonism that gives Marxist accounts of class such power to “*give theoretical and empirical meaning and coherence to the vast accumulation of data of every kind which make up the historical record and the present life of society*” (Miliband, 1987, p. 325).

For the purpose of this article, it will be argued that the analytic and conceptual tools provided by Marxist and Weberian perspectives on class are not necessarily irreconcilable, and that the explanatory power of class analysis can actually be heightened by a careful perusal of both approaches. The Marxist perspective helps us to move away from seeing classes as merely groupings of people who share similar attributes such as occupation, income, lifestyle, etc. The Weberian approach allows us to understand more adequately the complexity of social inequality, i.e. the different gradations of rewards and consciousness in that large section of the population who are not capitalists. A working definition of social classes which draws on both perspectives is that of Anyon (1980) who, making reference to the work of key authors such as Wright (1978), Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and Williams (1977) provides us with the following statement:

“One’s occupation and income level contribute significantly to one’s social class, but they do not define it. Rather, social class is a series of relationships. A person’s social class is defined here by the way that person relates to the process in society by which goods, services and culture are produced. One relates to several aspects of the production process primarily through one’s work. One has a relationship to the system of ownership, to other people (at work and society) and to the content and process of one’s own productive activity. One’s relationship to all these aspects of production determines one’s social class; that is, all three relationships are necessary and none is sufficient for determining a person’s relation to the process of production in society.” (Anyon, 1980, p. 68).

The definition successfully summarises and draws together the different strands of class analysis which have been described thus far, and should be kept in mind as we address the local structure of domination and subordination. It also, as in Giddens’ (1973) account, points to the fact that in modern class societies⁶ structuration exists between those who own property and the means of production (the upper class), those who possess cultural capital in terms of education or technical qualifications (the middle class), and those who only possess manual labour power (the working class).

SOCIAL CLASS IN MALTA

Malta, like every other social formation you would care to mention, has its own pattern of structured inequalities. The relations of domination and exploitation have, of course, changed with the fortunes of Malta as the archipelago passed from the hands of one ruler to another (see Zammit, 1984, pp. 77ff.). In any case, any account of the contemporary local formation of class and gender (and regional if not racial) differences has to keep a number of special and local peculiarities in mind. These would have to include our past colonial and present neo-colonial history, our small size, our geographic location, and the crucial fact that, as Baldacchino correctly points out (1988a), as a post-colonial society we have an underdeveloped manufacturing industrial base which involves a small percentage – never more than 10% – of the population of the Maltese islands⁷. To this I would also add the fact that the prevalence of small industrial set-ups – in 1987 88.5% of workers in manufacturing, quarrying and construction and non-manufacturing industries were to be found in establishments employing less than twenty people (Central Office of Statistics, 1988, p. 200) – has a direct consequence on the kind of control exercised on labour as well as the responses that are likely to be made by workers. In our case, with the entrepreneur directly supervising the work and often labouring alongside his employees, we are more likely to find feudal patterns of labour relations, with the owner acting in paternalistic, often benevolent ways, assuming many social costs (such as refraining from firing workers in periods of slack production). There is therefore little foundation here for the development of a radical consciousness, and unity and struggle in any Marxist sense (MacDonald, 1988, p.101).

Of historical importance too is the fact that for sixteen years – between 1971 and 1987 – Malta was governed by a Labour Party, most of it under

the leadership of Dom Mintoff whose declared intention was the eradication of class differences. While this period is perhaps still too recent to attract adequate socio-political analysis, there are the beginnings of such an account in Zammit (1984) and Vella (1989). In this context it is important to highlight a number of redistributive social measures introduced by the Labour Party (see Zammit, 1984, p. 63). These included the nationalisation of a number of companies, the lowering of wages of executive and managerial class workers to match those working with the government, a policy of granting annual costs of living increases and bonuses by a flat rate rather than a percentage rate, as well as encouraging initiatives in worker participation in a number of industrial set-ups. The Labour Party also narrowed wage differentials in the civil sector from 15 to 5 times. The labour government often referred to the terms “*social class*” in its discourse, arguing for a necessity to construct an “*egalitarian society*” which, as Zammit (*ibid.*, p. 63) points out, was to be interpreted not in the “*complete levelling of incomes*” but rather “*the removal of privileges*” and the creation of a truly meritocratic society where the same opportunities existed for one and all. This required the creation of a welfare state⁸ so that those who started life in relatively underprivileged circumstances could be given support and help by the State in their competition for access to resources. It also required the eradication of “*snobbishness and similar forms of social exclusiveness which are still noticeable in Malta*” (*ibid.*, p. 63). It was work in all sectors of the economy which would be the basis of an economically successful and equitable Malta (*ibid.*, pp. 59 – 60), and hence that, rather than division between manual and non-manual workers, was what mattered.

CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

There is no general consensus that class relations prevail in Malta. In the local *Sunday Times Magazine* for instance, journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia comments that “*Our Prime Minister is right when he says that there is no class system. There is no class system because in a piddling society like ours there is not much scope for pigeon-holing people into lower, middle or upper class, or combinations of the two*” (January 1990, p. 44). It is indicative – though somewhat contradictory – that she then goes on to argue that in spite of this, class distinctions can be narrowed down if the lower classes were taught a bit more “*civility*”. The question “*Are there classes in Malta?*” could invite a number of responses, but it needs to be established from the start that even if a majority of citizens had to answer in the negative, this would still be a subjective statement. This is important in its own way, but it would certainly not represent all that there is to say about the matter. While Vassallo (1985) has argued that the question of class – in the economic sense – has been utilised as a rhetorical strategy by the Labour party to attract people into its ranks, one can also consider the corollary of such a proposition. In other words, what am I suggesting is that in the sociological analysis of the structure of power and privilege in Malta it is far more important to ask: “*In whose interests does the denial of the existence of class work? Who stands to gain*

and who to lose by a belief that there is no structured inequality in the economic relations predominant in Malta?" It is helpful in this regard to note the distinction that Marxist sociologists draw between a "*class-of-itself*" and a "*class-for-itself*".. In the first instance, classes objectively exist in as much as individuals and groups have different relationships to the economy. If these individuals and groups are aware of their subordinate and exploited status, and hence also of their lesser power to exert self-determination, lesser wealth, prestige, and life-chances generally relative to other groups, the objective class condition becomes "*class consciousness*" for these groups are now appreciative of their objective social location. If they unite in order to struggle for social change in their own favour, we then have a "*class-for-itself*", i.e. one which is ready to take action on its own behalf.

Boswell's (1982) research on occupational and residential prestige – or social worth – in Malta presents some interesting data on levels of status, if not class consciousness locally. In his study of households in four urban localities in Malta – namely Senglea, Sliema, Fgura and Attard – he found that there has not been a shift that he anticipated from a dual-class to a multi-class view of society. Rather, it became obvious that "*over sixty five percent of the householders in each locality characterised their society as consisting of three or four social classes*" (*ibid.*, p. 21). Boswell (*ibid.*, p. 45) therefore concludes that "*local householders have a clearly defined perception of their own socio-economic characteristics; that the social status of occupations is very generally perceived in terms of a single hierarchy within which three large clusters may be discerned; that these clusters approximate to socio-economic groups which are further perceived in terms of occupations that are alike by reason of their education and skills, their associated income, their conditions of work etc; and that this view of the occupational structure is maintained across the most established working-class and bourgeois, as well as the most personally socially mobile members of the urban population*". On the basis of these findings Boswell notes that there is a highly developed perception of occupational status in Malta, representing a very high degree of social consciousness as well as political involvement.

Zammit (1984, pp. 127 ff.) presents a more detailed account regarding the perceptions of "class" on the part of a representative sample of 186 respondents he interviewed. Taking "social class" in the Weberian sense of "*grouping people who automatically share common characteristics*", Zammit (*ibid.*, p. 130) reports that 78% of his sample recognised the existence of social class distinction in Malta, 3.2% denied their existence outright, and 18.8% "*failed to give a coherent answer or preferred not to express themselves on this matter*". Of the 78% who said that there were social classes in Malta, 60.8% had a hierarchical image of class divisions, a class structure composed of three or more 'classes' or 'strata' based upon the possession of objective attributes – namely education, occupation and wealth (30.1%) and upon interactional or prestige criteria (30.6%). The other 17.2% of those who held that classes exist in Malta generally saw two major classes divided in terms of access to power, wealth, or simply (or additionally) pure snobbery.

Supplementary data Zammit collected from 23 Drydocks shop stewards and Union activists confirm an overall view that it is only a minority who have class consciousness in terms of Marxist categories of “class struggle” and “class-for-itself” in an attempt to, as a proletarian movement, take over economic power through increased or total ownership of the means of production. For the majority of these respondents, society is not conflictual but harmonious, a conception which “*implies constant individual conflict in a situation of formal equality among the bulk of a population*” (Zammit, 1984, p. 134). Of the minority who see Maltese society in terms of conflict, more of these were to be found among manual workers. Zammit (*ibid.*, p. 136) also found that most of his respondents accepted the principle of income differentials “*provided that these are based on effort and ability*”. The author concludes that “*all this suggests that the existence of social ‘classes’ is generally accepted as fair and legitimate – or, at any rate, a necessary fact of life*” (*ibid.*, p. 136). Consonant with such attitudes, it seems logical to assume – and this assumption is in fact borne out by 90.5% of the author’s respondents – that there is “*an overwhelming belief in the ability for upward mobility through individual rather than collective efforts*” (*ibid.*, p. 138–9). In other words it is believed that the boundaries between classes – hence social mobility – can be overcome through merit and hard work, education for oneself and one’s children, and patronage networks: in short, a combination of patronage and merit.

Both Boswell’s and Zammit’s research indicate high levels of social and status awareness among the Maltese, although this does not necessarily translate into “class consciousness” or “class action” – indeed, if we follow Poulantzas (1974, p. 16), classes can only be defined and grasped in struggle. Such action on the part of economically subordinate groups in Malta would entail, as suggested earlier, unification and struggle not merely to gain higher social status and financial returns for their labour, but to transform the social relations of production. This would signify such practices as collective ownership of the means of production, the production for need rather than commodity exchange, and the development of a classless and stateless society based on the direct democratic participation of all citizens in decision-making, administration and problem-solving (Freeman–Moir *et al.*, 1988). This struggle would be aimed at abolishing class relations which, as Therborn (1986, p. 111) has argued, can be effectively achieved in one of two basic ways: “*either by abolishing owner-non-owner relations and making superordinate positions of management representative of the subordinates through elections of the former by the latter (and the possibly higher income of the former dependent on the choice of the latter); or by abolishing the vertical dimension of super- and subordinate and disproportionate rewards altogether. In most cases, the former would appear to be the most realistic alternative*”. When we consider these goals in the light of organised working class struggle in Malta, it would be difficult to disagree with Zammit (1984), Vassallo (1985) and Vella (1989b) who, utilising different theoretical tools,

nevertheless all conclude that class struggle in the Marxist sense is either absent or incorporated within a welfare state approach. Even the movement towards worker participation in the management of industry could represent a sophisticated form of labour control (Baldacchino, 1988a,b).

ACCOUNTS OF CLASS FORMATION AND STRUCTURE IN MALTA

It has been argued above that there are objective as well as subjective accounts of class, and that sociologists' major interest is in the former, although the latter is not without its particular importance. An account of class formation in Malta has still to be written, although a number of authors – sociologists in the main – have theorised about class locally. Of these I will choose two, namely Mario Vassallo, who has written about class from within a Weberian tradition, and Mario Vella, who has adopted a Marxist perspective. In some ways I am aware that I will be overemphasising their achievements: both, but especially so Vassallo, are prone to assertions about class which are not founded on any empirical research. Nevertheless, in the critical consideration of these authors' respective analyses it is hoped that the reader will develop a deeper and more informed understanding of the local patterns of power.

A WEBERIAN APPROACH TO CLASS RELATIONS IN MALTA

Vassallo (1979, p. 227) has argued that in the absence of “*social mobility studies and of statistics on the distribution and employment of wealth*” in Malta, one cannot really speak of class in a Marxist sense. He therefore subscribes “*to a view that upholds the existence of a stratification system based on status ‘status-groups’, primarily, but not exclusively related to educational achievement [...] rather than an economic power in the Marxist sense*” (*ibid.*, p. 227, f.n. 59). Vassallo (*ibid.* p. 64) argues – without, however, backing up his assertions with any empirical evidence – that access to education ensures the dissolution of traditional patterns of stratification. Thus, he writes (*ibid.*, p. 64) that “*Inherited titles are no longer associated with authority, and the patronage patterns of the past, though still a force within politics, are generally disintegrating as children help their parents to reverse the consequences of ignorance and illiteracy*”.

Vassallo also proposes the view that rather than social class, the factor which leads to social stratification today is political patronage, whereby the political party in power ensures that the necessarily scarce resources of a small state such as Malta are directed towards its adherents. Vassallo therefore believes that Malta is a meritocratic society and that what has brought this about is “*not exclusively but to a considerable extent... the diffusion of education*” (*ibid.*, p. 64). He therefore concludes that any reference to contemporary class distinctions in Malta “*may generally be interpreted to be more of an attempt to politicize the issue, and legitimize the action of political leaders*” (*ibid.*, p. 227, f.n. 59; see also 1985).

In a more recent work on the Maltese family Vassallo (1983), in contrast to key sociological work on the particular strains and stresses experienced

by working class families due to their dominated position in a social structure (e.g. Komarovskiy 1962, 1987), prefers to base his analysis on “socio-geographical” (*ibid.*, p. 54) rather than “socio-economic” grounds. Thus, there were noted consistent differences between families in the urban and rural sector in Malta, but Vassallo concludes that “*it might of course be that in the next generation or so, the differences will be completely removed as the local community loses its grip on the individual who ‘graduates’ as it were, to ‘national’ society*” (*ibid.*, p. 55). It is therefore a generally harmonious, consensual and meritocratic view of Maltese society that Vassallo presents us with, rather than a conflictual one where classes dominate or are dominated. There are no forces specified, no vested interests in the situation he describes. There is no analysis of the effect of socio-economic differences or experiences of different relations to production described which might affect what happens in the family. In a recent paper Vassallo (1989) specifically states his belief that with the arrival of what he calls the “new professions”, the “*concept of ‘class’ in the Marxist sense is fast becoming irrelevant. It is being replaced by ‘status groups’ in the Weberian sense, and these are not necessarily income-based*” (*ibid.*, p. 39).

There are a number of problems with Vassallo’s analysis. It seems to me that he starts off with a personal preference for a Weberian account and then takes the presumed “absence” of any evidence of class structure in the Marxist sense to confirm his personal bias by default. In so doing, he takes for granted as a fact that educational expansion leads unproblematically to social mobility – an untenable position given the results of a number of local empirical studies which point towards the contrary (see Sultana, 1990c; Darmanin 1990). Vassallo’s emphasis on meritocracy and social consensus fails to provide an explanatory framework to make sense of the power structure and struggles – based on economic relations – that prevail in contemporary Malta, although his Weberian approach does alert us to the possibility that power relations can be played out at different levels, some of these being outside of the economic realm. Finally, however, it is Vassallo’s failure to support his claims with any form of empirical evidence or research data – at least in his published works to date – that represents the most serious shortcoming of his particular thesis.

We will now turn to an analysis which places economic relations right at the heart of the Maltese power structure, an account provided by Mario Vella.

A MARXIST APPROACH TO CLASS RELATIONS IN MALTA

As Milliband (1987, pp. 332 – 3) points out, Marxist class analysis involves (a) “*the detailed identification of the classes and subclasses which make up [a specific society] – in other words, the tracing of a ‘social map’ that is as detailed and accurate as possible and includes the many complexities which surround the nature of class*”; (b) “*class analysis must demonstrate the precise structures and mechanisms of domination and exploitation in [a society] and the different ways in which surplus labour is extracted, appropriated and allocated*”; (c) “*class analysis must be concerned with the conflict between*

classes, pre-eminently between capital and the state on the one side and labour on the other, although it must also pay close attention to the pressures exercised by other classes and groupings, such as different sections of the petty bourgeoisie, or social movements with specific grievances and demands”. Vella has long been involved in a consideration of local class analysis along these lines, with ideas he developed as a member of the Maltese Communist Party between 1974 and 1984 appearing in an introduction to a book of poems he co-authored with Sciberras (1979). Further statements appeared in article form (1989a) and more completely in book form (1989b). While Vella – or anyone else utilising classical Marxist tools to throw light on the local situation – has still a long way to go to provide a detailed analysis of the class structure in Malta, he does make a number of points which should be highlighted.

Vella argues that Malta, like other countries peripheral to highly developed capitalist countries, has not gone through a phase of industrialisation as early or as thoroughly as other nations. He attributes this mainly to the lack of a local entrepreneurial bourgeois class. The Maltese who did have capital, argues Vella, preferred to use it to buy and sell merchandise (hence merchant capital) and make profit that way rather than invest that capital in industrial development. Such a lack meant that feudal relations of production persisted in Malta – as they did in southern Italy and Sicily for instance – right up to late in this century, with rich landowners (and Vella identifies the church as one such) extracting feudal rent (*“il-qbiela”*) from peasants. Since few industrial set-ups were developed, there was consequently little grouping of industrial workers where trade union or class consciousness could develop and which would lead to some form of class struggle.

In Vella’s views, therefore, as in classical Marxist thought, industry and industrialisation (but not industrial capitalism) are not only important but necessary in order to provide the material wealth to feed, clothe, and shelter all the population. Such an industrialisation will necessarily have to pass through a capitalist stage, i.e. the capitalist class will own the means of production and organise the relations of production to suit their immediate interests. Finally, industrialisation, by bringing workers together in a condition of exploitation (i.e. extraction of surplus value), will lead to class consciousness and class struggle, which will lead to the working class taking over the means of production (factories, tools and economic capital generally).

Vella also argues that practically the only industry to develop until after the second world war was shipbuilding, and it is not surprising that it is there that the most class-conscious of the proletariat are to be found. Due to the lack of enterprising bourgeoisie, Vella argues that *“as often happens in societies with an underdeveloped bourgeoisie, the tasks of a national democratic revolution had to be carried out by movements that derive their strength from the working class. This has happened in Malta, beginning with the post-war years but more decisively after 1971”* (Vella, 1989b, p. 165). In other words, according to Vella, it fell to the Labour Movement to develop an industrial capitalism in Malta, which fact led to a number of contradictions,

not least being that of inviting the working class in Malta to take up “*the tasks ‘classically’ implemented by the bourgeoisie*” and then “*presenting to them state models that are quite compatible, if not necessary, to capitalism (including the welfare state) as either quasismialism, or, worse, as a specifically national variant of socialism*” (*ibid.*, p. 169).

This historical and analytical sketch of the power struggle in Malta has led to a specific class structure, which Vella gives some details of and which I am in this context placing squarely within a contemporary formulation of class structures generally as provided by Miliband (1987). The latter author distinguishes between the two major groupings in society, i.e. the dominant and the subordinate classes. The former consists of the “power elite” and the “bourgeoisie”; the latter of the “working class” and the “underclass”. Between the ruling and the ruled class lie the “petty bourgeoisie”. It is clear that Vella has this sort of structure in mind as he attempts to describe local power relations. In the sections that follow, I will follow Miliband (1987) closely in providing a description of the members of each particular class grouping, and then draw on Vella (1989a,b) to relate that description to the local picture.

The Dominant Class

1. The “**power elite**” is made up of those few people who “*control the few hundred largest industrial, financial and commercial enterprises in the private sector of the economy*” (Miliband, 1987, p. 330) as well as those who “*control the commanding positions in the state system – presidents, prime ministers and their immediate collaborators, the top people in the civil service, in the military and the police, in the judiciary and (at least in some systems, such as the American) in the legislature – and this element also includes people who control public or state enterprises and the media in the public sector*” (*ibid.*, p. 330).⁹ Vella (1989b, p. 167) argues that in Malta there is a small industrialist capitalist class “*led by an emergent national bourgeoisie eager to demolish legal, political, cultural and other obstacles hindering the further development of modern manufacturing capitalism*”. Spiteri (1989, p. 4), himself a Labour minister, has analysed various income and profit trends in gross domestic product and argues that the dominant class of local capitalists actually grew in numbers throughout the sixteen years of socialist administration. Spiteri also correctly points out that we need to distinguish between “foreign” and “local” or “domestic” capitalists. This takes us into the realms of “dependency theory” which argues (cf Frank, 1978; Cardoso and Faletto, 1979) that in “conditioned societies” (Carnoy and Samoff, 1990) such as ours is, any class analysis has to take into due consideration first the role of metropole capital, and secondly the kinds of allegiances and compromises reached by metropole capitalists and local ones so that wealth and other forms of power are distributed in directions previously agreed upon.

2. The “**bourgeoisie**” only has a fraction of the power wielded by the elite, but is still part of the dominant class “*because its members do exercise a great deal of power and influence in economic, social, political and cultural terms,*

not only in society at large but in various parts of the state as well" (Miliband, 1987, p. 331). There are business and professional elements in the bourgeoisie. In the first we find "people who own and control a large number of medium-sized firms forming a vast scatter of very diverse enterprises, dwarfed by the corporate giants yet constituting a substantial part of total capitalist activity" (*ibid.*, p. 330). In the other, "a large professional class of men and women (mainly men), made up of lawyers, accountants, scientists, architects, doctors, middle-rank civil servants and military personnel, senior teachers and administrators in higher education, public relations experts, and many others" (*ibid.*, p. 330).

While there are fractions and groupings within the dominant classes, "they usually remain sufficiently cohesive to ensure that their common purposes are effectively defended and advanced... for whereas such people may disagree on what precisely they do want, they very firmly agree on what they do not want and this encompasses anything that might appear to them to threaten the structure of power, privilege and property of which they are the main beneficiaries" (*ibid.*, p. 331). It is difficult to extract the size of this particular class as a percentage of the total Maltese work force, for Census occupational groupings (Central Office of Statistics, 1986) include a variety of other workers in their top employee category.¹⁰ The latter category amounts to 7.7% of the total labour force.

Between the Dominant and Subordinate classes

3. The "**pretty bourgeoisie**" – commonly known as the "middle class" – lies between the dominating and subordinate classes, and while sharing many of the conditions of the latter class (e.g. lack of autonomy at work, dependence on wage), its loyalties oscillate between the two major classes depending on the stage of capital accumulation at a particular point in time. Unlike the capitalists and the working class, whose interests and allegiances are clearly demarcated and in oppositional, conflictual paths, the petty bourgeoisie oscillate between the two major classes depending on whether or not these groups experience capitalism as an external force. When economic conditions are favourable (in terms of success in small business ventures for the traditional bourgeoisie) then the allegiance of the petty bourgeoisie is towards the dominant or ruling class. When they are proletarianised, i.e. they experience more closely the conditions of life of the working class/es, then it is to these that their allegiance is addressed.

This class is composed of two distinct elements: "first, a disparate range of small businessmen, shopkeepers, tradesmen and self-employed artisans" and "second, a large and constantly growing subclass of semi-professional, supervisory men and women engaged as salaried employees in capitalist enterprises, or in the administrative, welfare, control, coercive and service agencies of the state – social workers, local government officials, and the like" (Miliband, 1987, pp. 332 – 3). Vella, following Poulantzas and Baudelot and Establet, accords these so-called "middle class" groups great importance and sees them as "residues of pre-capitalist social formations and/or from earlier phases of development of capitalism itself" (Vella, 1989a, p. 10). He

too distinguishes two subclasses within the local petty bourgeoisie, namely the traditional one consisting of “*small-scale production and ownership, independent craftsmen and traders, and – in the Maltese case – the small holding farmer*” (Vella, 1989b, p. 170) and a new petty bourgeoisie “*made up of wage-earning groupings which, although ‘produced’ by capitalist development itself, do not perform productive labour, that is labour which directly produces surplus-value, which valorizes capital and is exchanged against capital*” (*ibid.*, p. 170). Vella argues that this group has grown in size, and includes employees such as office workers, business machine operators, engineers, accountants, researchers etc (1989a, p. 10).

Vella (*ibid.*, p. 11) argues that both “traditional” and “new” petty bourgeois groups are effected by contemporary developments in the Maltese sociopolitical structure, quoting statistics from the 1985 census to show that while the former group is decreasing in number, the latter group is increasing.

The Subordinate Class

4. The “**working class**” comprises by far the largest section of the population and is “*an extremely variegated, diverse class, divided on the basis of occupation, skill, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, ideology etc.*” (Miliband, 1987, p. 332). While in modern capitalist societies and due to technological innovation and changes in the labour process the industrial, manufacturing component of the working class is dwindling in numbers, “*the working class as a whole, the people whose exclusive source of income is the sale of their labour-power (or who mainly rely on transfer payments by the state), whose level of income puts them in the lower and lowest ‘income groups’, whose individual power and responsibility at work and beyond is low or virtually non-existent – this class of people has increased, not diminished over the years*” (*ibid.*, p. 332; emphasis in the original). Vella (1989a, p. 11) has pointed out a swelling in the number of those who depend on a wage for a living (from 67.59% of male labour force in 1957 to 85.33% in 1985; and from 54.56% of female labor force to 95.13% in the same period) and the dwindling in numbers of “own account workers” (31.23% to 12% for males and 45% to 4.2% for females in the same period).

Neither Vella nor any other class analyst locally has provided any detailed **cultural** account of the working class in Malta, although there are some interesting attempts in the writings of Mizzi O’Reilly (1981) for instance. Spiteri (1989) speaks of the working class in terms of those who depend on others for their living, i.e. the wage renders them dependent. This, however, is not enough. We need to distinguish between those who depend on a wage but whose experience of the working life is significantly different from the better paid segments of the wage-earning population. It would be useful in this context to make use of dual labour market theory (Addison and Siebert, 1979) which suggests that the labour market is divided (for the benefit of the capitalist) into several categories of occupations each with different criteria of hiring, paying, promotion, rules and behaviour. The essential division is between the primary and secondary sector, with very little economic mobility between the sectors. Jobs in the secondary sector are characterised by repetitive tasks,

specific supervision and formalised work rules, low wage rates, poor working conditions and instability of employment, and lack a career structure and opportunities for promotion. The “working class” would clearly fall into this secondary sector of a segmented labour market.

5. The “**underclass**” is described by Miliband (1987, p. 333) as “*issued from the working class and in some ways still part of it, yet also distinct from it: the more or less permanently unemployed, the members of the working class who are elderly, chronically sick or handicapped, and those unable for other reasons to find their way into the ‘labour market’*”. To Miliband’s list one can add workers under age whose activity in the “twilight economy” renders them highly vulnerable to exploitation (cf Sultana 1990a,b). Again, no local author has given this class element much attention, partly, I would suggest, because the extensive welfare provisions put into place by a Labour government have guaranteed the basic necessities of life to all Maltese citizens (*Tomorrow*, 1984).¹¹ Despite a 3.9% unemployment rate – as a percentage of the labour supply in April 1990 (*Economic Trends*, April 1990) – there is little immediate sign of the rise of the “new poor” that is so much in evidence in those countries – such as Britain, France and the United States – where welfarism has come under attack. While the present nationalist government has in some respects consolidated rather than dismantled the welfare system, its increasingly “free market” approach to the economy and wage spiralling have resulted in an increase in the cost of living which could lead segments of the working class to experience conditions of poverty.¹²

The above class account – developed in the main by Vella – has its particular strengths in that the structure of power between the two major classes and the reasons for conflict between them emerge much more clearly. It generally fails, however, to throw much light on how the different economic relations give rise to different lifestyles and patterns of consumption. This is more satisfactorily achieved by Weberian approaches (e.g. Bourdieu, 1984), by interactionist perspectives which enter into the phenomenological fields of social actors, and by a culturalist rather than orthodox/structuralist brand of Marxism as developed by Thompson (1968) – and subsequently by the members of the *Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies* in Birmingham – who argue in favour of seeing class as both an economic and cultural formation. Thompson (1978) in fact argues that “*it is impossible to give any theoretical priority to one aspect over the other... what changes, as the mode of production and productive relations change, is the **experience** of living men and women*” (emphasis in the original). Vella, to my mind, also needs to give more attention to the particular alliances between local and “metropole” capitalists and the effect of this on class relations in Malta. Similarly missing from the above account is a direct reference to the place of the Church – still a leading institution despite political changes in post-feudal Malta (Koster, 1981) – within the contemporary hierarchy of wealth and power. At a different level, Vella is also guilty of ignoring the contribution of the Nationalist Party towards industrial development in the late 1950s and 1960s. He also fails to highlight the fact that the Labour Party, through the Malta Development

Corporation, sold many of the “people’s industries” to private and foreign owners in order to turn them into efficient concerns. Moreover, the most controversial point seems to me to be Vella’s unproblematic contention that Malta necessarily **had** to pass through a capitalist industrialist phase. This “evolutionist” perspective, common to many orthodox Marxist approaches, denies the possibility that a number of alternatives exist at different points in history, and that while, in Olin Wright’s (1983) words, there might be “tendential forces” which push one alternative course of action to the front, there nevertheless remains the option to work against such forces.

CODA

Class analysis in Malta has generally, as we have noted above, largely remained at an abstract theoretical level, divorced from empirical research which would strengthen the theory and sensitize the analysis to local peculiarities in the power structure. While this paper has set out to acknowledge some of the analyses that do exist and to critically come to terms with them, it is also necessary to chart the course for future work in class analysis and to indicate some of the areas which need to be explored. Clearly, some of this work has already been embarked upon and indeed, this paper represents the preliminary ground-work on the part of the author as he readies himself for empirical research on the relationship between class and education in Malta. Others in the small academic community of Maltese sociologists have indicated special interests in a variety of topics which could contribute to a deeper understanding of class as it finds expression in Malta: Darmanin (1989) is the first to have developed sociological perspectives on the Maltese educational system in any depth and sophistication, looking at the interaction of class and gender in the construction of privilege in Malta; Chircop (1991) has attempted to uncover the agendas of the more radical members – the true “left” – within the Labour Movement; Baldacchino is continuing his early empirical and theoretical forays into the class dimensions of industrial relations in Malta, while Abela has recently finished his doctoral research on the value systems of young people in Malta. The latter, while not explicitly formulated within traditional class discourse, promises to provide useful empirical data regarding class consciousness and class practices among youthful sections of the Maltese population, and utilises a methodology which lends itself to comparison with European data on the same topic.

Given that the only advantage that the small size of the social sciences community in Malta has, namely the possibility of designing and carrying out co-operative research projects, it is indeed a pity that there has been no attempt made to integrate research efforts in order to provide a more systematic class analysis. Such co-operation between social science researchers – who need not necessarily share the same theoretical perspectives on class – could lead to a more profound focus on a number of related issues. Among these issues – which could be addressed in both a descriptive and critical manner – I would suggest the following:

- (a) The documentation of the class based nature of inequality in Malta, with a direct focus on the labour process and capitalist relations at work at the point of production.
- (b) The acknowledgement of the determining constraints posed by national and international capitalism and national and international capitalist class relations on the project of promoting a classless society.
- (c) The analysis of class struggle and class mobilization as it has developed in Malta since the 19th century, and the particular forms it has taken in more recent history.
- (d) The detailed definition and counting of the class forces of the present from whose struggle some form of future social transformation is expected. This involves the demarcation of class boundaries in the attempt to develop our own class cartography.
- (e) The analysis of political power and the State as manifestations of class power, giving due attention on the one hand to the bearing of capitalist powers upon state government, and to the relationships between class relations and state structures/state power configurations on the other.
- (f) The use of class structures as raw materials in the process of modelling class voting and left-wing party strategies.
- (g) The analysis of social mobility paths and patterns, and its incidence on an individual and group basis, as well as on an inter- and intra-generational one.
- (h) The tapping of class consciousness, which would include a neo-Weberian stratificationist perspective on culture that would lead to an understanding of class and ideology in contemporary Maltese society. It would also include an analysis of class-differentiated behaviour and attitudes, and the relationship of these to status and prestige in Malta, and to life-chances generally.
- (i) A concern not only with the workplace, property, markets, scarcity and economic equality but also, very much in the spirit of the Frankfurt School theorists, a focus on language, culture, discourse, communication, the individual, and non-economic power. This would lead to the social psychological investigation of the societal integration of individuals, and the cultural-theoretical analysis of the mode of operation of mass culture.

The fact that much of the above research agenda remains mostly untouched speaks eloquently of the lack of development in social science in Malta, and of the need for concerted action so that these gaps are filled and the passage from the rhetoric to the practice of social justice and democracy is facilitated.

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Notes

1. Marx's account of class can be analysed from the following selection of his writings: "*The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*", "*The German Ideology*", "*The Poverty of Philosophy*", "*The Manifesto of the Communist Party*", "*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*", "*A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*" and "*Capital*" (Vols. 1 and 3).
2. It is important to note that there is a Marxist tradition from Lenin onwards which argues that "trade union consciousness" will only lead towards reformism, i.e. the attempt by workers to win rights and concessions without, however, overturning the capitalist order. Lenin therefore argued that the revolution needs to be led by a cadre of intellectuals who were capable of understanding that certain battles should not be fought so that the greater war could be won. Implicit in all this is the belief that the State is "the executive committee of the bourgeoisie" and that "the long march through the institutions" provided by the liberal democratic state will not lead to a different social order (see Carnoy, 1984 for a full account of this debate about the State).
3. Weber's account of social class can be analysed from the following selection of his writings: "*Economy and Society*", vols. 1 and 2 and "*General Economic History*".
4. That this has not happened in the West is made abundantly clear by Burawoy (1979) who notes that in the last thirty years trade unions have generally redistributed conflict in lateral struggles, i.e. there has been an increase in conflict **between** different occupational groups vying for better wages, conditions, status, etc rather than **against** the managerial or capitalist class.
5. For a contemporary account of "status groups" and the particular life styles these have developed in France, see Pierre Bourdieu's richly detailed *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984).
6. Habermas (in Dews, 1986, p. 42) provides a useful definition of modern class societies which, he argues, prevail in the East (sic., as it was before the momentum of change gathered speed) as in the West. In modern class societies, the state and the economy assume distinct forms. "*Class structures persist as long as the means of production and socially useful labour-power are deployed according to preferences which reflect sectional interests in society. At any rate they do not express the universal interests of the population as a whole, or the compromises the population might be prepared to make. In state-socialist societies the bureaucratic elites which control the means of production form an opaque, complex system. This system is essentially authoritarian and has shown itself to be impervious to democratic decision-making processes with regard to the priorities of society as a whole. In late capitalist societies the power structures are even less transparent. To the extent to which the priorities of society take place in an unplanned way, as the secondary consequences of the strategies of private enterprise, class structures survive here too. Control over the means of production by political elites on the one hand, and by private privilege on the other, are variant forms of class relations at the stage of development reached by modern societies*".

7. Busuttill (1973) gives a valuable account of the British strategy to strangle the indigenous cotton industry so that the Maltese would be reduced to a state of economic dependence on the Empire.
8. There is a problem, from a Marxist viewpoint, with welfare statism which gives capitalism a human face. Habermas, for instance, has argued that there has been a “class compromise” where the state, through welfare schemes, protects the underprivileged from their peripheral and precarious positions in the economy through unemployment benefits, national health schemes, etc. This is, of course, not bad in itself, but it has led to the co-opting of the working class and their engagement in reformist and ameliorative action rather than in a struggle to change a system which is so structured as to subject some to a position where welfare is required. It is because of this class compromise that Habermas has argued that the working class can no longer be considered to be the motor of history – he points instead to social movements such as feminism, the environmentalists, ethnic rights movements etc. which give priority to values rather than to technocratic concerns.
9. Work still needs to be done to identify the local power elite. While it is relatively easy to trace the networks of power in western countries through such publications as the “*Who Owns Whom*” (published annually in the U.K. by Dun and Bradstreet), no such information is readily available in Malta. Urry (1989, p. 78) suggests that an analysis of the values of the property declared for death duty is “*the best estimate of wealth held in the form of land, houses, shares, factories and durable possessions*”, even though these declarations “*contain considerable inaccuracies as families try to minimize their declarations and hence their liability for paying such duties*”. Such information can help us see more clearly the local patterns of the distribution of wealth, although it needs to be said that a problem specific to Malta is the large percentage of currency held in circulation – 50% of GNP in 1985, compared to 5 – 10% in many other countries in the same year (Briguglio, 1988, p. 94). This tendency – partly a strategy to evade taxation – effectively sabotages attempts to document the distribution of wealth through a perusal of official statistics. Drawing on a variety of sources – including statistics on death duties paid – Urry (*ibid.*, pp. 79 – 80) concludes that in the U.K. four-fifths of the people share only about 15% of the total wealth, and 64% of the people are in the lower 80% of both wealth holding and income. The only immediately available source of information about the local power elite comes from Manduca’s (1987) “*Who’s Who*” which gives details of the “leading members” of the artistic, educational, banking, commercial, diplomatic, clerical, religious and military professions. It also provides limited information about the “nobility”. This source is, however, limited in that it fails to inform the reader about the family origins of these individuals, or of the source of their power and/or wealth.
10. The 1985 Census categorisation of occupations is faulty and misleading in many ways. Among these limitations we can mention the fact that allocation of economic status, “*despite the exhaustive instructions that were given to enumerators, depend to some extent on the exercise of judgement on the part of the enumerators, since it was not always possible to draw a well-defined interpretation between the different occupational classifications*” (Central Office of Statistics, 1986, p. 87). Vella (1989a, p. 11) furthermore notes that the category of salaried employees “*misleadingly includes a very small number of capitalists who appear as salaried employees of companies they control*”. Despite these limitations, however, it provides a useful quantitative indication of the local occupational hierarchy, and therefore glimpses of the class structure in Malta, although of course, as has been

pointed out in a number of places in this paper, the occupational structure is **not** the same as class structure. The Census (Central Office of Statistics, 1986, pp. 35–6) presents an hierarchical representation of employment status with all working members (105,293 persons) being classified under three categories, as follows:

- (a) Employers (2,315 persons, or 2.2% of total work force)
 - (b) Own-account workers (10,695 persons, or 10.2% of total)
 - (c) Employees (92,283 persons, or 87.6% of total). The employees were then sub-divided into:
 - i. Professionals, technical and other related workers: These make up 7.7% (8,106 persons) of the total working population.
 - ii. Administrative, managerial and other related workers: These make up 5.2% (5,506 persons) of the total working population.
 - iii. All executive, clerical and other related workers: These make up 19.2% (20,229 persons) of the total working population.
 - iv. Skilled and semi-skilled workers: These make up 35% (36,921 persons) of the total working population.
 - v. Unskilled workers i.e. those who do not possess a basic knowledge of any trade or skill. These make up 20.4% (21,519 persons) of the total working population.
11. Tabone (1987, p. 134) gives a list of these: the introduction of the national minimum wage and the compulsory payment of a yearly bonus to all workers as from 1975; the granting of parity of women's wages with those of men, in 1976; the compulsory grant of a cost of living increase to workers in the private sector and the payment of adult wage rates at the age of 18 as of 1977; the introduction of children's allowance in 1974; the regular increase of old wage pensions, national insurance benefits and social assistance payments; the introduction of a national health scheme by which hospital services are freely available, and the provision of a large number of dwellings to solve the housing problem. Tabone, (*ibid.*, p. 136) however also calculates that a family with more than three children and only one income would find it difficult to cope with the cost of living.
12. "Poverty" is, of course, a subjective and relative definition of a variety of forms of indigence. When poverty is defined as "*the absence or inadequacy of those diets, amenities, standards, services and activities which are common or customary in modern Britain*", Townshend (1979) concludes that 25% of households and 23% of persons in the U.K. were poor. This means that more than half of the population in Britain will experience poverty at some point in their lives. It is imperative for local researchers to establish some form of "poverty index" so that indigence can be documented, and social policy measures be taken accordingly.

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