

The working class and the middle classes: Allies or foes?

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Classical Political Economists

- “The produce of the earth [...] is divided among three classes of the community, namely, the proprietor of the land, the owner of the stock or capital for its cultivation, and the labourers by whose industry it is cultivated” (Ricardo).
- “As soon as land becomes private property, the landlord demands a share of almost all the produce which the laborer can either raise, or collect from it. His rent makes *the first deduction from the produce of the labor* which is employed upon land. (...) Profit, makes a *second deduction from the produce of the labor* which is employed upon land” (Smith 1981: I.viii.6 and 7, emphasis added).

Marx's Approach of *class power within class struggle*

* “For nearly 40 years we have raised to prominence the idea of the class struggle as the immediate driving force of history” (Marx-Engels 1879, MECW Vol. 24: 269).

* Classes “cannot be defined separately one from the other, but only through the social relations of an antagonism, which brings the one class in confrontation with the other” (Étienne Balibar 1986).

Marx's notion of the Mode of Production

The mode of production as the structural interconnectedness of a certain social system of class domination and exploitation:

“It is in each case the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the immediate producers [...] in which we find the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social edifice, and hence also the political form of the relationship of sovereignty and dependence” (Marx, *Capital* III: 927).

The Middle Classes in Advanced Capitalist Societies: (a) Traditional Petty Bourgeoisie

* “Independent producers who employ no labourers and therefore do not produce as capitalists [...] are *producers of commodities* [...] not [...] sellers of labor [...] their production does not fall under the capitalist mode of production” (Marx, *Theories ...* I: 407.

* “The only absolute barrier he faces [...] is the wage that he pays himself, after deducting his actual expenses [...]; and he often does so down to a physical minimum [...] [P]roduction [...] proceeds without being governed by the general rate of profit” (C. III: 941 ff.

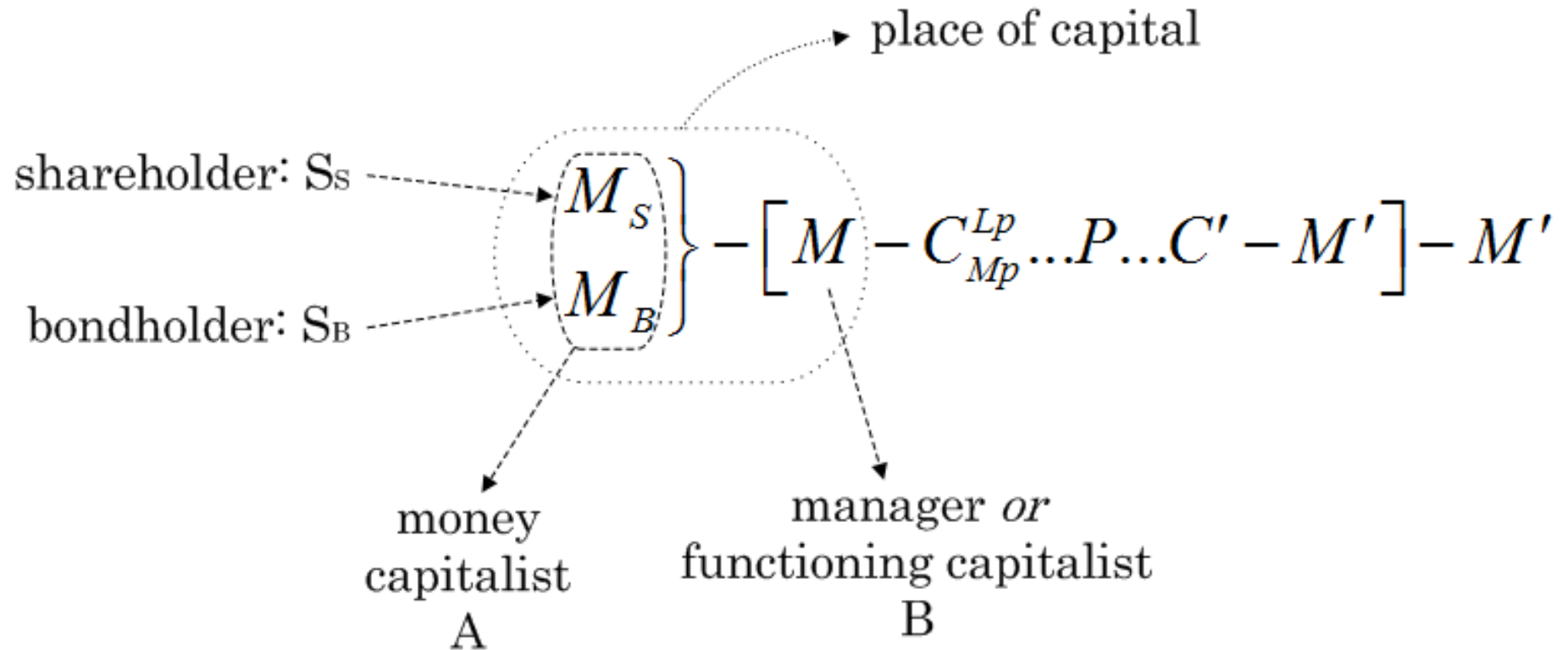
The Middle Classes in Advanced Capitalist Societies: (b) The Middle Bourgeoisie

“Capitalist production only really begins [...] when each individual capital simultaneously employs a comparatively large number of workers [...]. A certain stage of capitalist production necessitates that the capitalist be able to devote the whole of the time during which he functions as a capitalist, i.e. as capital personified, to the appropriation and therefore the control of the labour of others, and to the sale of the products of that labour” (C. I.: 439, 423).

Three different relations to the means of production [MoP]

- *Use* of the MoP is defined as the exclusive performance of actual labor with a view to producing use-values. [Direct Laborers]
- *Possession* of the MoP refers to the management of the production process, the power to put the MoP into operation.
- *Ownership* as an *economic relationship* is the control over the MoP: the power to dispose of the surplus obtained. [Ruling Class]

Money capitalist and functioning capitalist



The Middle Classes in Advanced Capitalist Societies: (c-1) The New Petty-Bourgeoisie of the Cap. MoP

Within the *collective worker*, who forms an “industrial army [...] like a real army, officers (managers) and N.C.O.s (foremen, overseers)” [C. I: 450], a special kind of wage-laborers is formed, whose exclusive function is the work of *management-supervision* (as opposed to the performance of actual-manual-labor). Functions that insure the extraction of surplus-value, such as the supervision-overseeing-control of the production process (technicians, engineers, etc.).

The Middle Classes in Advanced Capitalist Societies: (c-2) The New Petty-Bourgeoisie of the State

- Wage-earners who staff the apparatuses of the capitalist state, and so exercise powers in the name of the capitalist system in the process of its social reproduction. Perform functions that insure the cohesion of capitalist political power (state bureaucracy, police, the judicial apparatus, the military, etc.) and the systematization and dissemination of the ruling ideology, such as education.

Class Places vs. Class Positions: The Capital-Labor Contradiction

- “A social class [...] may take up a class position that does not correspond to its interests” (Poulantzas, 1975: 15-16).
- A first demarcation line is shaped in relation to the capitalist strategy of austerity, market liberalization and privatizations. As the *living standard* of labor is the “*labor cost*” of capitalists, this line polarizes on the one side the bourgeoisie and on the other the working class: propensity towards reformism.

Class Places of Middle Classes

MIDDLE
BOURGEOISIE

TRADITIONAL
PETTY BOURG.

NEW PETTY
BOURGEOISIE

Class
Places

Hybrid MP

**Simple Comm. Pr. CMP: Economic +
+ Non-economic level**

Ownership
plus
possession
of the MOP

Yes

Yes

No

Use of MOP

Partial

Yes

No

Relationship
with the
enterprise
and the state

External

External

Internal

Potential “Anti-Capitalist” Positions

	MIDDLE BOURGEOISIE	TRADITIONAL PETTY BOURG.	NEW PETTY BOURGEOISIE
* Opposition to Big Companies	Yes	Yes	No
* Opposition to Private Ownership	No	No	Possibly
* Redistribution of Wealth	No	Possibly	Yes
• Aspirations of Upward Social Mobility:			
-Through Profit	Possibly	No	No
-Through Professional Uplift	No	No	Yes

Political Polarization + Class Strategies

MIDDLE
BOURGEOISIE

TRADITIONAL
PETTY BOURG.

NEW PETTY
BOURGEOISIE

*** Right-
Wing
Extremist
Movements**

Yes

Yes

No

*** Reformist
Movements**

No

Possibly

Yes

**• Auto-
nomous
Class
Strategy**

No

No

Possibly