

# Post-Industrialism and Political Reform in the City: A Critique\*

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Of the numerous grassroots political reform movements that swept through North American metropolitan areas during the 1970s, a great many were solidly "upper-middle class" in character. Perhaps because they were an embarrassment to left and right alike, remarkably little effort has been made to understand such movements, which frequently crystalized around environmental issues. Since the people involved do not fit traditional definitions of "working class," the left has not been eager to recognize the importance of such eruptions. On the other hand, the right demurs because outbursts of activism by affluent professionals belie those models of social integration and consensus politics which would imply that the "end of ideology" is at hand. Thus, the attempt by geographer David Ley to grapple with the phenomenon in a recent article, "Liberal Ideology and the Post-Industrial City" (Ley, 1980) is, at the very least, a welcome reference point for further discussion. Ley's analysis is seriously flawed, however. A liberal himself, Ley embraces the very ideology he ostensibly seeks to explain. Thus, instead of exposing its errors and mystifications, he ends up reproducing them. Using Ley's presentation as a focus, our aim in this paper is a simultaneous critique of liberal urban reform movements and of the liberalist theoretical premises upon which much contemporary social analysis is based.

The chief propositions generated by the "liberal ideology" under consideration are that: (1) North American societies have entered a qualitatively new "post-industrial" phase; and (2) the post-industrial workforce develops a counter-cultural consciousness that generates political movements opposed to traditional business interests regarding issues of urban growth and the "quality of life." These views are grounded in an essentially empiricist methodology, for which we propose to substitute a realist-structuralist approach derived largely from Marx. Our own position is that: (1) the post-industrial thesis is based upon a superficial reading of changes in modern-day capitalism; (2) liberal urban reform, led by what we term the professional-managerial-technical strata, is not clearly anti-capitalist ideology. Nevertheless, both "post-industrial" tendencies and "middle class" insurgency should be treated seriously, as their impact on contemporary capitalism is far from negligible. Finally, the question of what constitutes scientific method in social analysis remains the fundamental testing ground for all theories about specific historical phenomena, including our own.

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## THE POST-INDUSTRIAL THESIS: AN EXAMPLE OF CHAOTIC MATERIALISM

The gist of the post-industrial thesis, as first expounded by Daniel Bell (1973), is that the new epoch of social development is characterized by: (1), the dominance of the "service sector," (2), the prevalence of white-collar employment; (3), knowledge as the governing principle in social life; (4), an increasing role for government in social regulation. (Ley, 1980, 24-41) Commodity production, factory work, market forces and low-skill labor—the hallmarks of industrialism—are no longer conspicuous aspects of economic life. Meanwhile, power has shifted from capitalists to a new class of technical experts who act according to scientific criteria to meet public goals.

One had hoped that the overworked theory of post-industrial society has been laid to rest long ago. But it has been proven remarkably resilient, despite devastating criticisms leveled against it (e.g. Gershuny, 1978; Stanback, 1979; but c.f. Ginzberg and Vojta, 1981) Because of this longevity, and because of the conceptual muddles that remain even among its critics, the post-industrial thesis needs to be confronted in some detail. In the first part of the paper, therefore, we address basic errors of Bell and his followers concerning: (1), the nature of services and the service economy; (2), changes in the workforce and the character of work; (3), the relation of knowledge and of the professional-managerial-technical stratum to capitalist power.\*\*

The initial criticism to be levied against the post-industrial thesis is that it is poorly framed. As Christopher Lasch has observed, "The case for the transition to post-industrial society cannot easily be refuted, because it was never stated with any precision to begin with" (Lasch, 1973). For example, David Ley's astonishing claim to have found a "complementarity" in the work of Bell and Jurgen Habermas suggests that post-industrialism entails a rather broad and vacuous set of generalizations, sufficiently elastic to accommodate otherwise incompatible causal theories. But the difficulty goes beyond mere failure of specification. It goes to the heart of the method of social science used by Bell, Ley and others of their ilk. Their "chaotic conceptions," in the Marxian sense of the

\*\*We do not take up the question of government regulation and its goals in this discussion, but it is dealt with, implicitly, at length in the second part of the paper.

term, stem from a fundamentally empiricist approach to social history in which overt "facts" are taken as the whole of reality, rather than as the products of causal mechanisms or structural relations which give rise to sensible phenomena. (Marx, *Grundrisse*; Sayer, 1979, 1981). North American societies have certainly undergone important changes in this century, some of which have been properly identified by the post-industrial theorists when they have not altogether misread the data. Nonetheless, these writers have emphasized relatively superficial changes and ignored their source within the essential social relations of capitalist society, which have remained remarkably unchanged. Trends that for Bell and Ley indicate a social revolution can more realistically be seen as a phase-shift, or "system preserving transformation" in the development of capitalism (Harvey, 1973).

### The Service Economy: Circulation, Management and Indirect Production

Bell and his followers claim that the advanced industrial societies have undergone a transformation from "goods" to "service" economies. In support they cite census data showing a majority of employment in the "service" or "tertiary" sectors. These sectors includes: wholesale and retail trade; finance; insurance and real estate, (FIRE) transportation, utilities and communication (TUC); government, and the so-called "services proper" or professional, personal, business and repair services. In contrast, the non-services are manufacturing and construction (secondary activities), agricultural, mining, forestry and fishing (primary activities). Even at this level of aggregation there is no absolute agreement on categories, however, one firm believer in the "service economy" thesis excludes the TUC sectors (Fuchs, 1978). Noticeably absent from all discussions by post-industrial theorists is any clear definition of services. That is, they provide no explanatory category or system that unites the above headings, revealing their underlying commonality (Gershuny, 1978). They remain, instead, catch-all categories that group together widely disparate economic functions, occupations and producer-consumer relations.

The basic presumption of post-industrialists is that there are only two categories of employment, goods-producing and service-rendering. Goods are obviously material objects and services are, apparently, direct labor activities for consumers that, in the words of Adam Smith, "perish in their moment of performance" (Gershuny, 1978). We will call the latter "direct labor services." Post-industrial theorists believe that we are increasingly a (labor) service-rendering and (labor) services-consuming society.

The first error comes in confusing level of employment with level of output. Even Fuchs concludes that because of lower productivity in the service sectors (conventionally defined), there has been little shift from goods output to service output (Fuchs, 1968).

The second error is the notion that individual businesses and government tend to shift over time from consumption of goods to consumption of labor service in the simplistic manner predicted by Engel's law (Christian Engle, not Friedrich Engels). Individual consumers, particularly in

America, are quite fond of commodity modes of satisfying their needs. In budgetary terms, the share of disposable income spent on durable goods consumption in the U.S. and U.K. has kept up with the share devoted to consumer labor-services in the last twenty years. (Stanback, 1979; and Gershuny, 1978). Correcting for relative price inflation, the real consumption of goods has increased much faster than that of labor-services. (Gershuny, 1978). This is what we would expect if consumers freely substituted goods for labor-services depending on relative prices and if productivity were growing more rapidly for the former than the latter. One would also expect such a difference in productivity growth since labor services tend to be craft-like and goods production tends to be mechanized. That the shift away from labor-services has not been greater is testimony to the ability of people to come up with new needs requiring direct labor inputs. As for businesses, only 27 percent of their intermediate inputs are "services" as conventionally defined (i.e., wholesale trade, FIRE and business services) (Stanback, 1979). The rest are old-fashioned commodities. Similarly, much of what government provides for businesses and individuals consists of material goods (e.g., missiles, sewers) and much of what it uses as intermediate inputs for labor-service kinds of activities (such as health care and education) consists of commodities (e.g., hospital beds and textbooks).

But the biggest error of all stems from the fallacy of aggregation: the distinction between goods and labor-services cannot be transferred *pari passu* from an individual act of production to social production as a whole. This ignores the division of labor in complex economies. Few commodities are still the simple product of one person. The same is true of many services. Even within simple workplaces, not everyone is engaged directly in material handling and processing; but even the lowliest janitor is indirectly supportive of the proper functioning of all. If we step back further to the process of production and exchange as a whole, the number of people directly involved with material production is likely to be fewer still. Gershuny (1978) estimates that only 21 percent of the U.K. work force is thus engaged.

In other words, most "service" functions as conventionally defined are not actions separate from commodity production, but integrally involved and derivative of the latter. They can be better understood in terms of the following four functional groupings in the social division of labor: immediate commodity production, circulation (of money, commodities and capital), management of production and circulation activities, and adjunct activities such as advertising and product development that are one step removed from direct production, circulation, and managerial functions. Let us consider the census categories of "services" in this light (we ignore the detail division of labor, or occupations within categories, for the time being).

First, utilities cannot be classified as services. They simply produce complex infrastructural commodities, such as gas and electricity, that typically do not come in discrete bundles. Transportation (usually subsumed under wholesale trade) has a very small labor-service component,

including such things as airplane rides. Most expenditures in this category are for automobiles and trucks for the transport of people and goods. The transfer of goods or employees from one place to another is not a service simply because it occurs outside the factory. Movement within and without factories is part of a continuum. The three basic processes of production are conversion, assembly and transfer. Sometimes conversion and assembly occur within the walls of one factory, sometimes thousands of miles apart. The transport of materials between different worksites cannot be goods-production in one instance and "service"-production in the other.

Second, wholesale and retail trade are commodity circulation per se. Their function is to undertake the exchange of commodities by connecting producers and consumers across space and by linking needs to goods. While the salesperson may appear to render a labor-service by showing the consumer what is available, his/her function as the employee of a store is to move goods. The illusions of the customer as to which function predominates are not shared by the management.

Third, the FIRE functions have as their purpose the circulation of money and of titles (or claims) to property, such as house deeds and shares of stock. Both are spin-offs from basic commodity circulation. Titles, shares and the like are claims on assets that cannot be picked up and carried around or cannot be held by one person. Money is a means of facilitating the exchange of commodities. More than this, it is the representative of the value embodied in commodities. Credit-money arises to stretch exchange and value. Finally, money is used as capital, as value reinvested to make more money chiefly (though not exclusively) via the production of new commodities. Finance and insurance institutions create, store, circulate and invest money; real estate and other brokerage institutions, with the help of financiers, transfer property from one owner to another.

This leaves the "services proper": professional, business, repair and personal. Even this more limited definition of "services" can be quite misleading, however. The main source of error involves where one draws the line between commodity-production and a true labor-service. Many activities that appear to be direct labor-service are not such in fact. For example, restaurant meals are classified as "consumer services," but the only service is the waiter's, acting as a salesperson; the meal itself, as epitomized by the MacDonald's hamburger, is surely a commodity, even though it is certainly not a durable good (except the plastic case). Repair services involved the maintenance of structures, machinery and consumer durables, in other words, they restore or maintain the use-value (and value) of commodities already sold. This is a continuation of the production process over time; the "service" that satisfies the consumer's need is still rendered by the commodity, not by the repairman. Business and professional services largely involved advice, research, design and the like in support of the general managerial functions of firms.

Here we encounter head-on the trickiest of definitional problems. Many things commonly considered labor-service are in fact real, tangible commodities: computer

software, consulting reports, engineering blueprints, and legal briefs, for example. Commodities need not be great lumps of steel and wood to be discrete objects of utility and bearers of value. Electronic signals and pieces of paper bearing information are every bit as much physical objects as turbines. Both normally require some additional labor-services from seller to buyer so that they can be used correctly, but that is another matter.

The problem of classification of economic functions does not end with the allocation of census "sectors" to different functional categories. As we have seen, most activities defined in this manner fall under the headings of commodity production and circulation. Some of the "services proper," however, are either managerial or adjunct activities. Management includes, first, the various supervisory, control/command, and coordination functions required for any production process, whether it is factory- or office-based. (Under capitalism, of course, management bears a particular class-stamp, but that does not alter our classifications). Top management of corporations involves something quite different: basic decisions about the investment of capital in various activities.

Adjunct activities plug into basic workplace activities and management in both the commodity production and the circulation spheres. Research and development on new products is, for example, a necessary precursor to regulate production of any commodity today, but cannot be considered part of the normal production process; it is temporally removed from it. The same applies to corporate planning activities that have still to be implemented or to the way advertising precedes direct sales by weeks or months. An important fallacy in most classifications of adjunct activities ("services proper") is that they may occur either inside or outside of industrial financial and mercantile firms. An engineer who works within General Motors is counted as a commodity worker, but one ~~that~~ works for a consulting firm hired by G.M. is considered a "service" worker. An added irony is that in the latter case the "service" takes a commodity form (sold on the market) while in the former it does not.

What is left of the "service economy" thesis? Defining "services" to include trade, finance, "services proper" and public administration, but being more critical about which are really goods related. Gershuny concludes that only about 23 percent of the workforce in the U.K. is actively producing "services." Nevertheless, there is no denying that the percentage of employment involved in basic manufacturing, extraction, and TUC activities has declined and that the myriad activities typically situated in offices and utilizing a "white-collar" workforce has increased. The lesson is not that the economy has changed, but that the growth of the "service economy" is integrally connected to the growth of the "goods economy." Indeed, it is the prodigious increase in productivity in the latter on which the whole edifice of trade, finance and management, which are not directly productive of commodities and value, rests. It can hardly be claimed, then, that industrialism has been superseded in the advanced capitalist economies.

But the nature of tasks and of the workforce in the modern division of labor has surely changed; perhaps this change will vindicate the theory of post-industrial society.

### Work and the Workforce: White Versus Blue Collar Working Class

Post-industrial theorists support their claims of a qualitative change in North American societies by pointing to dramatic increases in "white collar" employment, which now occupies a majority of the labor force. Allegedly even more significant is that over one-quarter of all wage-earners are classified either as "professional and technical workers" or as "managers or administrators." Such figures lead Bell and his followers to conclude that the workforce is becoming more skilled, more educated, higher paid, and more autonomous and that it is generally enjoying more favorable work conditions and rewards than in traditional blue-collar employment. This conclusion demonstrates a failure to examine the reality behind census categories and a confusion between changes in the social and detail division of labor—the concrete work tasks—and changes in work relations and class relations. While the character of the working class has undoubtedly been altered, thanks to shifts in work tasks and work environment, the working class has not been done away with by the shuffling of specific occupations.

The analysis of work and the workforce must begin with the specific tasks required in the production and circulation of use-values (commodities) (Storper and Walker, 1982). Tasks have changed both on the shop-floor and outside, as new functions have risen away from the immediate locus of production. Concrete skills needed to fulfill these tasks have also changed. White-collar skills often have less to do with manual than mental manipulations and transfers of the "material" of production, e.g., information on paper. These task-skills typically require more formal education than before, with higher standards of literacy, abstraction and mathematics even among the lowliest of clerks and factory hands. Of special importance has been the growth of jobs requiring so-called "poly-valent" skills, or a capacity to handle a wide variety of tasks. Also, the physical environment of work has changed, along with a relocation of many tasks from the shop or factory to the office, lab or store. Certainly the imminent hazards of work are less in the latter, though by no means have they been eliminated. In other ways, however, the changes in work have been less fortuitous for the post-industrial thesis.

The conditions of the labor process, or internal workplace relations (technical and class), and the conditions of the wage-bargain, or rate of exploitation, show a strong continuity between traditional blue-collar employment and white-collar jobs. The skill levels—as opposed to concrete skills—demanded of white-collar occupations are not demonstrably higher than for blue-collar work.\*

Although there has been an overall rise in the base level of mental facilities needed for white-collar (and blue-collar) jobs, the great mass of tasks and workers still fall into the category of unskilled or semi-skilled relative to their peers. The preponderant number of white-collar workers are low-level clericals, secretaries or technicians. While there has been a constant creation of new skill types, particularly polyvalent skills, that constitute a modern equivalent of traditional crafts, there has been a compensating process of de-skilling through specialization, standardization of tasks and mechanization. This has gone much further in the factory than in the office, of course. But as the number of office workers has risen, the pressure for old-fashioned capitalist rationalization of work has also increased; offices are now undergoing a revolution in the nature of tasks (Braverman, 1974, *Business Week*, 1981).

Nor are skills necessarily the principal constituent of work relations and the wage-bargain (Storper and Walker, 1982). There are dynamics of the nonskill components of tasks, of workgroup interaction, and of command systems arising from the organization and technology of work as well as dynamics of sexism, racism or union solidarity brought in from outside and reproduced within the workplace. Over half of all white-collar employees are women, many "service" workers in restaurants, hospitals and the like are of minority races, few of either are unionized, work activities are frequently isolating and tedious, and relations to the boss typically autocratic.

It is hardly surprising, then, that the wage-bargain struck by most white-collar workers is not particularly favorable. Most earn less than traditional blue-collar workers, worker turnover is high, employment unstable and chances of advancement poor (Friedmann, 1976; Stanback, 1979; Kumar, 1978). Given these conditions of the wage-bargain it is also not surprising that so many women and minorities have been brought into the workforce to do jobs that white males in the mainstream of the working class would not accept on the same terms. The most important social result of the "service economy" has thus been the new entrants it has brought into the working class and the new schisms among workers that have developed. Despite the complex divisions within this enormous body of people, however, they remain unquestionably working class.

At this point the defenders of post-industrial theory are forced to fall back on their last redoubt, the importance of the managers, professionals and technical workers, comprising about 15 percent of the workforce. But even here the positions held by these workers are less favorable than they first appear. To quote Paul Blumberg:

(I)t is a mistake to imagine that this group consists solely, or even primarily, of high-paid, glamorous, or highly technical jobs on the frontier of post-industrial society. For example, five professional occupations—primarily low-paid, low status, and female-dominated—comprise over a third of all professionals: schoolteachers (nursery school, primary and secondary, librarians, social workers, nurses, and dieticians). Schoolteachers alone make up nearly one-quarter (22 percent) of all professionals in the country (Blumberg, 1978, 42-43). Those occupations most frequently associated with "post-industrial" society, such as scientist, engineer,

\* Skill level is necessarily a relative term (Storper and Walker, 1982)

computer specialist, doctor, lawyer and professor, add up to less than 5 percent of the workforce in the U.S. and U.K. Even within this elite of the professional-technical-managerial group, the unmistakable trend is toward employment within large organizations, eroding the traditional autonomy of the individual professional. The latter trend has, however, increased the number of managers. This segment now forms 4-5 percent of the workforce.

In sum, we do not deny that the nature of the workforce has changed, that the locus of employment has shifted, that the numbers of skilled "mental" workers has increased, or that the rise of "professionalism" and modern management are of sociological importance (Larson<sup>1977</sup>; Pollard, 1966). The working class is unquestionably stratified in dramatic ways. Moreover, between the capitalist and the working class lies a significant "middle stratum" comprising less than 10 percent of the working population, in whose culture and consciousness lie the keys to understanding political phenomena such as liberal urban reform movements and environmentalism. This does not, however, constitute an epochal transcendence of capitalism and class relations, as the post-industrialists maintain. We turn now to further consideration of the "middle stratum."

#### POWER AND CLASS: THE ROLE OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE POSITION OF THE PMTS (+)

The cornerstone of Bell and Ley's conceptual edifice is the emergence of "theoretical knowledge" as the "axial principle" of the post-industrial society (Ley, 1980, p. 241).<sup>\*</sup> The assertion that class position and possession of capital have been superseded by technical knowledge as the basis for power in society is hardly novel. Proclamations of a new ruling class of experts go back to Galbraith, Berle and Means, Burnham, Veblen and beyond.<sup>\*\*</sup> The notion that science and reason have supplanted the logic of profit-making and that the university and think-tank have replaced the corporate boardroom as centers of

<sup>\*</sup>It is with respect to this alleged centrality of "knowledge" in contemporary society that Ley finds a "complementarity" between the work of Bell and Habermas. Ley neglects, however, the fundamental differences in their formulations regarding the relations between knowledge, power, and ideology. Whereas Bell apparently believes that "experts have indeed attained the power to determine social ends as well as means," Habermas argues that with the increasing prominence of science and technology in the development of the productive forces under capitalism, the widely-held notion that knowledge is itself "value-free" has become the fundamental legitimating principle for advanced capitalism, partially superseding the ideology of equality based upon market exchange. Thus, the notion that scientists and technical experts actually exercise autonomous influence grounded in a commitment to universal principles of objectivity and reason has become one of the central illusions of our age, shared by the post-industrial theorists. Significantly, Habermas specifically dismisses Bell's thesis in his most complete analysis of contemporary capitalist society, *Legitimation Crisis*, 1973 (p. 17).

<sup>\*\*</sup>It also crops up in discussions of eastern European socialism today.

social governance is merely the latest version of a recurrent strain of intellectual utopianism that has its roots in Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, if not in Plato's *Republic*.

The image of an independent intelligentsia guiding the destiny of society contains several basic errors. First, it rests on a dubious distinction between mental and manual labor. All labor requires thought. Admittedly much of the conception and understanding of the overall work process has been denied workers in ordinary jobs (Braverman, 1974); but all workers have some technical knowledge of their tasks, knowledge that is essential to production. Without the mental cooperation of manual workers, capitalist production would stop (Cressy and MacInnes, 1980; Burawoy, 1979). So the idea that mental workers exist in unique relation to knowledge and have unprecedented power vis a vis capitalists is mistaken.

Second, it matters a great deal what knowledge the professional-managerial-technical strata have if we are to assess their power. A great many of this group hold key positions within the system of capitalist production, with knowledge of design, process, product, organization, finance, markets or personnel. This may very well put them in a stronger position than the skilled lathe operator. But the knowledge they lack is as important as that which they have. The capitalist class, including top management, has still greater knowledge of the whole organization, of its far-flung operations, its product plans, its investment strategy, and so forth. Investment, organizational and political strategies are determined by Boards of Directors and high-level executives, not by research specialists. In addition, the many professionals working outside capitalism's key organizations who have great knowledge of specialized medical problems or tax laws, have none at all concerning the real business of industry and government. And there are many managers who have relatively little skilled knowledge at all, but are simply the bearers of power from above.

The third and greatest fallacy of the "knowledge is power" thesis is that it ignores the greater power that emanates from ownership and control of the means of production. Insofar as the running of large production systems requires technical expertise, people are found or trained to do the job. But they serve at the pleasure of those who hire. The technical worker can withhold his labor, but the boss can withhold the job. The bosses generally prevail.

Much of the confusion over who has power in corporations derives from the complexities introduced by large organizations and a highly developed division of labor. The capitalist is no longer defined simply by ownership. The crucial power positions today derive from command of the operational units of private property and capital, i.e., the corporations. Usually the directors and top executives of corporations are also substantial stockholders or representatives of other organizations who are, but ownership is not necessary for control. Indeed, there exists today a quite developed division of labor within the capitalist class that is commonly overlooked. There are minor, passive owners or rentiers, major owners and directors, and top executives. This is further complicated by the division and interlocks between finance and

industrial capital; by familial and life-cycle ties to capitalist positions by those who are not functioning capitalists themselves (e.g., young executives who may eventually become corporate presidents); by the presence of working class and professional-managerial owners of stock and rights to pension funds; and so forth. Add to this a healthy injection of organizational/bureaucratic dynamics, personal networks and the like, and the matter of who holds power on what issues in what situations for how long poses some tricky analytical problems. But the essential issue is to identify the structural core of capital, which is identical neither to organizations, power elites, nor particular individuals.

The position of the professional-managerial-technical strata, or PMTS, in modern capitalism has been a matter of great debate among marxists, as well as other theorists (Walker, 1979). Supporters of the view that the professional managerial group is a distinct class (PMC), confuse division of labor with class, as do "managerialist" theorists. Although class divisions based on the control of the production system and command of its surplus involve an elemental "division of labor" between those who produce surplus and those who invest and consume it, this should not be confused with the divisions of tasks in service of these elemental functions. As critics of the PMC position rightly point out, many of the top people in this group are actually capitalists, even if they begin as engineers, and many of the lower ranks of the PMC are just ordinary workers, even though some are of high skilled rank. Nonetheless, it will not suffice arbitrarily to divide all members of the PMTS into the two basic classes, as David Noble does (Walker, 1979). Better to acknowledge that a small group of people do indeed occupy an intermediate position that has its won integrity. Despite their many historical errors, the Ehrenreichs, initiators of the current PMC debate, are correct in asserting the inescapable importance of the PMTS in twentieth century U.S. history. Any theory that ignores this complicating factor in American life looks very flat indeed. Wright (1978) comes closest to an acceptable theoretical recognition of the PMTS through his idea of "contradictory class locations." Such locations combine aspects of the capitalist, petty bourgeoisie and working class along three dimensions: autonomy in work, control of the instruments of labor, and control of the product.

Whether one bestows on the PMTS the title of "class" *per se* or of a "stratum" caught in a contradictory class location is, perhaps, not as important as the problem of historical analysis in which they are recognized as significant but caught in the midst of something much larger. After all, the intersection between capitalists and workers is, as we have indicated, also quite complex. Classes are gray around the edges. Such is the lesson of Thompson's (1966) warning about the error of trying to discover classes in history tied up in neat packages. Instead, one must pay close attention to the dynamics of class interaction and class formation in an empirically messy and rapidly changing world. Because the PMTS is caught between much larger and more powerful classes, it has more than the usual identification problems. For the same

reason, its members have serious identity problems as well. As we shall indicate in the second part of this paper, the consciousness and practice of the PMTS are notoriously ambivalent, even if they are recognizably distinct from other classes.

In sum, while certain of the empirical trends upon which Bell and Ley build their arguments are real and important to understanding contemporary capitalism, the case for a distinct era of post-industrialism is suspect on a number of fundamental grounds. The post-industrial theorists have a very poor grasp on the meaning of services, the nature of work, and the origins of power. They are not alone, however. Anthony Giddens' reference to Bell as "advanced capitalism's most persuasive advertising man" is telling (Giddens, 1973, p. 21). Like the denizens of Madison Avenue, Bell did not create a new idea so much as distill a stereotype of our society and project it back, bigger than life. It is significant that the leadership of the TEAM movement in Vancouver were avowed believers in the post-industrial thesis (Ley, 1980). In that context, it functioned as a self-flattering and politically useful illusion of that city's PMTS. David Ley failed to look behind the everyday wisdom of the movement he studied; instead of penetrating the illusion, he fell victim to it. He therefore misread the nature of the TEAM movement and its political fortunes, as we will now show.

## LIBERAL IDEOLOGY AND POLITICS

Having established a material basis (however chaotic) for urban reform movements, one must provide a compelling link between that base and political practice. David Ley (1980) attempts to do this by linking post-industrialism to changing (political) consciousness. In so doing he commits the common error of seeing the goals of the PMTS and the urban reform movements it spawns as diametrically opposed to business interests. This error originates in a vulgar materialist view of the origins and content of PMTS consciousness. It is compounded by a misreading of reform history and of urban spatial dynamics. In the end, one is left wondering how a social movement allegedly generated by the inexorable historical force of post-industrialization could have come to grief so easily. Ley, like many before him, simply cannot come to grips with the inherent weaknesses of the liberal perspective and the surprising frailty of liberal reform politics. The following discussion addresses the question of liberal reformism in terms of four key issues: (1), the relation of liberalism and PMTS consciousness to capitalist ideology; (2), the relation of liberal political practice to changes in urbanization; (3), the rise and fall of liberal activism over time — why it is essentially a recurrent and yet transient phenomenon; and (4), in general, the relation of liberal reformism both to the PMTS and to the capitalist class.

### The Lessons of History

In order to shed light on the recent reform effort in Vancouver, David Ley recalls the great urban reform movement of the Progressive era. He reads the book of the past badly, however. In Ley's view modern reform



involves a struggle between forces that are anti-rationalist, anti-growth, and therefore anti-business, and a business community possessed of a pro-growth, city-efficient, engineering mentality. In order to consign the consciousness of the business community to the bygone "industrial age," Ley links it with the Progressivism of the turn of the century. He contends that the Progressives' ideology of "scientific management" was an instrument of the business class, utilized to raise profits and consolidate capital's power. Unfortunately, this conclusion, echoing Hays (1964), oversimplifies a complex set of political movements.

Before it gained the title "progressivism," the turn of the century clamor for reform originated primarily outside the business community, as a "grassroots" phenomenon involving a small class of professionals, mostly in the big cities, supported by some old money New England aristocrats (Hofstadter, 1955). The newly emerging PMTS was thus in the thick of Progressive era politics just as it is today. The movement aimed at sweeping reforms to combat trusts, plunder of natural resources, child labor and other business abuses, as well as corruption in government. It gained important support from insurgent populist movements in the west and south. Its early successes, such as the Clayton antitrust act, the Forest Reserve Act, coupled with Henry George's near-miss candidacy for Mayor of New York, were no great comfort to the capitalist class.

The reform movement however, ultimately cohered around an ideology and a practice that were not antagonistic to capitalism. Although containing streaks of naturalistic romanticism, as exemplified by John Muir, and of incipient socialism, exemplified by some big city mayors, the movement's major theme was advocacy of "efficiency" and the application of scientific rationality to all phases of social life (Hays, 1967). The emergent (liberal) ideology held that the woes of modern life were attributable to maladjustments in the social fabric, not to contradictions inherent to the capitalist mode of production. Thus, problems could be solved through social engineering, education, and moral exhortation (Walker, 1977; Fitzgerald, 1979).

In time, business developed its own agenda, aimed at avoiding radical social change and easing the birth-pangs of a new era of capitalist development in which giant corporations, centralized banking, and an imperialist foreign policy were central features. Governmental reform and intervention could provide a more stable investment climate, blunt working class demands, and make city governments more efficient. Many businessmen, of course, cared little about reform; but an enlightened core of what Weinstein calls "corporate liberals" saw in popular upheavals both the necessity and the political momentum to make reforms work to their benefit. Ultimately, an alliance was forged between PMTS and business reformers. Dominating American politics after 1900, this coalition earned the sobriquet "Progressivism." This alliance was not solely ideological nor merely a political marriage

of convenience over specific issues, but reflected shared class bonds, shared experiments in exercising more control over the market and more "rational" management of business and social problems, and shared fears of radical elements within the working class and rural populists.

The progressive era ushered in a number of fundamental changes in the structure of American capitalism, not the least of which was a qualitative advance in the process of suburbanization and the spatial reorganization of cities. Factory decentralization, trolleys and streetcars, residential suburbs, and the growth of downtown offices and department stores were major functional components of the new city form. Some of the Progressive era's reforms spoke directly to the creation and management of the new geographic order: zoning, city planning, municipalization and municipal regulation of utilities, housing codes and tenement reform, and civil service plus city commission-city manager forms of government administration. Many other reformers' notions were simply idealizations of what was happening before their eyes, such as plaudits for "model" suburbs, and the gospel of "decongestion" (Walker, 1977).

Not surprisingly, the most politically "progressive" aspects of the middle class reform agenda were generally sacrificed in the alliance with business. Municipalization gave way to managerialism. City voters ended up with less power, despite hopes for more popular control through initiative, recall and referendum, thanks to reduced city councils, at-large voting, and the like. Moreover, procedural, environmental or personnel changes that once held out promise for cities and urban politics were forgotten or remolded in the more conservative times that followed. Comprehensive city planning shrank to bare-bones zoning. Tenement reform was dropped in favor of tax breaks for homeowners. Robert Moses went from bright young reformer to the "Power Broker" of New York. The Progressive era, for all its initial hopes and even occasional socialist zeal among the middle class, turned into the socially repressive and economically disastrous Roaring Twenties (Walker, 1977).

Present-day urban reform movements such as TEAM parallel in many respects those of the Progressive Era. Four main themes are similar.

(1), Ideology and goals: While elements of significant social criticism inspired by romantic or radical visions color the ideology of such movements, the central vision is still "liberal," inasmuch as it does not question, nor even identify, the fundamentals of the capitalist social order. Echoing the priorities of nearly a century ago, rational social management is seen as the key to a better society.\*

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\*For example, widespread enthusiasm among liberals for "value-free" regional planning, benefit-cost analysis, environmental impact statements and the like, points to a rationalist ideology of scientific management underlying much of the superficial romanticism of the contemporary environmental movement.

(2), Function: Although certain political demands of the reformers, such as that for clean air, go against the interests of the business class, by and large the liberal reform movement serves as the midwife of a new spatial form of the city, by helping to oust from local power interests (including small business) that resist change and by celebrating and selling the new order to the populace at large.

(3), Passing importance: The historical significance of liberal reform movements lies as much in their going as their coming, though the latter gets the most attention. Once social transformations are well underway and social upheaval has run its course, urbanization becomes business-as-usual and business, as usual, returns to more open political control.

(4), Role of the PMTS: A fourth point of comparison permeates all the rest. The PMTS plays a notable role today as it did in the past. It remains a part acted out on a stage set by capital accumulation and against a backdrop of capitalist class power. The PMTS does not assume a self-directed part as the leading class, at least not for long.

We now take up the first three themes above in more detail.

### Post-Industrial Consciousness and Criticism

According to the post-industrial theory, shifts in job structure can be linked to changes in consciousness. Ley makes this connection by using psychologist Abraham Maslow's theory of a "hierarchy of needs" (Maslow, 1954, 1962).<sup>\*</sup> Maslow asserts that basic needs for physical and economic security must be met before human beings can begin to pursue "higher" needs, involving esteem, autonomy and "self-actualization." Hence the affluent are the most likely to become involved in the fine arts, civic activities, and the exercise of creativity in their work. A link between affluence and environmentalism can also be forged within Maslow's framework. Historian Roderick Nash has postulated that only when people are secure materially can they cease to perceive nature as hostile and develop aesthetic appreciation for wilderness (Nash, 1973). It is understandable, then, that the emergence of materially-secure post-industrial strata in the workforce should generate a new wave of humanistic, environmentally-oriented values and behaviors.

Maslow's theory is founded on an untenable distinction between "material" and "nonmaterial" needs and a simplistic belief in the domination of material factors over consciousness. Because humans are of necessity thinking, social beings, all acts of production and consumption have meanings attached to them. As Mary Douglas and William Leiss have argued, material commodities themselves possess a semiological aspect; the "world of goods" embodies a sort of language all its own, through which image, status, and identity are communicated (Douglas, 1979; Leiss, 1976). Thus, fulfillment of even the most

basic physical needs is inextricably bound up with the pursuit of esteem and self-actualization and even the most materially deprived peoples maintain areas of their lives in which autonomy, mastery of skills, and the esteem of others can be attained.

Empirically, Maslow's schema is ahistorical and culture-bound, implying that few people other than contemporary upper-class Westerners have ever been afforded the opportunity to reach higher states of consciousness. For example, Nash's whiggish "full stomach" theory of nature appreciation fails to explain how it was that Native Americans, with their low standard of material life, could have been so attuned to their wilderness environment, apparently never perceiving themselves as involved in a struggle against nature. Generally, ethnographers have repeatedly documented that so-called "primitive" peoples experience a fulfilling and complex cultural life. Similarly, historians and sociologists have attested to the rich cultural aspirations and achievements of the Western industrial working classes, even under conditions of great deprivation (Thompson, 1963). Finally, if we look at the cultural realm today it is not at all clear that the materially-favored professional-managerial strata are the nation's "tastemakers," as Bell and Ley proclaim. In housing they largely cling to a miniature version of the well-kept estate in a garden pioneered by the British aristocracy and American bourgeoisie. In eating and shopping they are today increasingly slavish imitators of the tastes of the continent, replete with cafes and boutiques. In music they listen to either a blander, more commercialized version of styles coming out of working class, especially black, clubs or troop into concert halls to hear symphonic productions intended originally for aristocratic or haut bourgeois ears.

A more sophisticated theory of needs and ideology than Maslow's must be applied to the problem of urban reform movements. Real needs are rooted in the experience of people's everyday lives. Their capacity to utilize ideas, material goods, and social resources has to be developed through learning. The deprivations of poverty and exploitation may stunt that development, it is true. But there are other sorts of deprivation of experience in social life that can lead to cultural flatness and "social amnesia," and these may afflict the well-to-do as easily as the lower classes. Of particular importance for the appearance of new needs, new demands, is the creative tension between the lessons of what is conventionally possible and the suggestion of new and different forms of human activity embedded in present conditions. That tension need by no means be experienced rationally; indeed, it is normally embedded in the deep psychological inversions of the individual. It may be felt as pain rather than as hope. The creative pain among those most injured may be much greater than the creative idealism of those most favored. Moreover, experience and its contradictions are not felt at the individual level alone, but through the mediating social relations of family, workplace or nation. Here, too, are structural inversions in which the social needs of the group, which everyone experiences, are not the simple product of individual rational desires (cf. Burawoy, 1979).

<sup>\*</sup> As Gershuny (1978, p. 71) points out, the "hierarchy of needs" argument is also implicit in Bell and is central to the post-industrial service economy thesis as a whole, not just to discussion of consciousness.



In short, people's consciousness is social as well as individual; irrational as well as rational; largely unaware of its own origins; and entrapped in conventional patterns as well as struggling toward new ones. The expressed ideas and manifest practices of those involved in urban reform movements today are fashioned from all these complexities. If we are to understand those movements we must begin to sort out the various dimensions of their ideology.

The elemental aspects of consciousness formation in advanced capitalist societies are a necessary starting point. Capital (commodity) fetishism, competitive individualism, class differentiation, technological fetishism, and consumerism are perhaps the most important, although several others could be added, such as the faith in the benefit of capitalist growth, the "trickle-down effect," or the domination of nature. In each case, ideological refractions arise from everyday experience in the workplace, home and city, rather than simply being systems of thought imposed by the ruling class, even though an important measure of class power over the institutions and ideas of the media, schools, etc. undoubtedly exists.

Capital fetishism begins with the reification of human subjectivity through commodity relations. Under capitalism, people perceive themselves as atomistic individuals whose sociality is manifest only within the process of exchange. Social life appears as a "second nature," independent of human volition, and governed by a self-propelled, autonomous market mechanism. As Marx observes:

The social character of activity, as well as the social form of the product, and the share of individuals in production here appear as something alien and objective, confronting the individuals, not as their relation to one another, but as their subordination to relations which subsist independently of them and which arise out of collision between mutually indifferent individuals. The general condition of activities and products, which has become a vital condition for each individual — their mutual interconnection — here appears as something alien to them, autonomous, as a thing (Grundrisse, p. 157).

This alienation of the mass of people is extended as labor-power becomes another commodity to be bought and sold in the marketplace and comes under the direct power of capital in the workplace. The creative powers of the laborers are projected onto capital, which appears as the subject of history, the moving force. Capital is also seen as a beneficent god that brings jobs and income to the workers. A sense of control over the labor process and, more broadly, the course of history, slips away. The capitalist order seems inevitable, something created by nature that can be adjusted and perhaps perfected, but not replaced.

Competitive individualism is also engendered by commodity relations, the need to sell oneself in the labor market and the need to compete against fellow workers. Again, people perceive themselves as truly independent, possessing autonomous tastes and abilities. The social fabric of production, exchange, morality, etc., which makes everyday life, its struggles and satisfactions, possible,

remains largely invisible. Particularly opaque is the social content of ideas, seemingly the most personal sphere of all. One's allegiances and responsibilities are truncated, the pursuit of self-advancement and self-gratification the foremost task.

Class and class position are, like society as a whole, largely unseen by most people, masked by the infinite possibilities of individual fortune. Class relations are displaced into the myriad circumstances of everyday life. Expressions of class differences and class conflict, where they are not attributed to individual differences, are viewed as temporary afflictions of an otherwise harmonious social order. The bellum omnes contra omnium is seen as providing, through the marvelous regulatory powers of the market, maximum social welfare for all.

The modern capitalist faith in scientific expertise and the possibility of technical solutions to all human problems has its origins in commodity and capital fetishism. That is, objects rather than people are seen as the subjects of history, and capital — subsuming the technology of work that it controls — is held to be the productive force in society. Technology is not a messy part of social life, but an exogenous force emanating from the separate sphere of science. Delivered unto the hands of labor, it renders the latter productive. Applied to other social problems, it offers harmonious solutions that improve everyone's welfare. The bearers of expertise also remain pristine, personally above the sordid world of special interests, social conflict and politics.

Consumerism arises not merely from affluence and industrial productivity, but from the experiences of work and consumption. Work, the principal activity in most people's lives, takes place under conditions that deny as much as they promise. Lack of substantial control over the labor process and its product, lack of any good sense of knowledge of the process as a whole and one's role in it, lack even of command over particular skills, lack of security or prospects — all of these things contribute to feelings of alienation from work. Consumption, frequently aided by a wage bargain that offers the worker a good income, offers an alternative source of satisfaction. Whereas on the job people may feel unimportant and impotent, in the marketplace there is stimulation, novelty and choice. Manipulative advertisements and "packaging" of products adds to the allure and the promise of an end to boredom or pain. Mediated through the market all human needs become translated into an unquenchable thirst for commodities. Class further affects consumption by influencing people to emphasize or gloss over class differences through conspicuous or noncommensurable consumption patterns.

As deeply as capitalist relations have penetrated consciousness under late capitalism, however, people invariably have some capacity for resistance to the inversions — the partial and superficial knowledge and experience — inherent in the practice and ideology of individualism, capital fetishism, technocratism, alienation from work, consumerism and the like. We do not offer a

simple capital-logic, one-dimensional model of society and consciousness. Even among the most captive elements of the populace, some sense remains of the opposite face of reality — of social interdependence, of lack of command over one's life and labor, of class tensions and oppression, of the hollowness of self-aggrandizement and the pursuit of consumer pleasures — even if this knowledge is buried deep within the psyche. Given its dynamic yet contradictory character, capitalism cannot help create new needs and forms of consciousness that may potentially be antagonistic to capital itself. Capital is hegemonic, but struggle and contradiction persist. Moreover, cultural life under capitalism is not a skeletal formation created only from the elemental aspects of capitalist social relations, but a rich and varied creation of people living in relation to a capitalist order. Even though their cultural life is heavily conditioned by the "pressures and limits" set by the reproduction of the mode of production on which they depend, people have a degree of freedom to create new possibilities out of the materials of the past as they encounter the exigencies of the present (Williams, 1977).

The professional-managerial-technical stratum, deeply embedded in advanced capitalism, shares the basic elements of consciousness of those societies, refracted through the specific experience of their "class." Like their class position, their consciousness is deeply ambivalent, containing both potential for criticism of the capitalist order and potential for ideological conformity, with the latter generally winning out. PMT work typically requires a high degree of command, independence and creativity. This tends to develop one's own capabilities, as well as respect for the human potential for development in other spheres. In consumption, for example, the PMTS today tend to reject mass-produced goods in favor of quality workmanship and developed sensibilities. "Human potential" may even be seen as the goal of consumption, not just the acquisition of goods for their own sake. By education and work experience, the PMTS often become highly inquisitive and doubting of conventional wisdom, looking for new ways of doing things both at work and for society in general. Rigid rules and mindless authority are likely to be anathema.

On the other hand, because these people occupy positions of command and respect, a strong sense of class superiority may develop. The PMTS are likely to regard their work as something on a higher plane than mere "labor" and closely akin to science. Their special achievement in surviving the rigors of schooling and moving up the managerial ladder will reinforce ideas of individual merit and virtues of competition. This individualism is compounded by the relative autonomy of the work tasks. Involvement at the top in competitive businesses adds strongly to the belief in competition and survival of the fittest. PMTS experience in consumption is also mixed. While new, creative patterns of consumption are frequently emphasized, the relative affluence of the stratum allows for an elite and favorable experience with consumption. Consumption patterns that separate this group from the working masses who must, largely for reasons of necessity, make do with plainer, shoddier goods, easily slips into a form of conspicuous class differentiation. Consumption

that is rewarding, furthermore, suggests capitalism does, indeed, deliver the goods for a better life. This is especially true when high income allows one to consume quality goods in mass quantities.

Given their favorable access to and command of technical knowledge and the instruments of corporate planning, Members of the PMTS are usually favorably disposed toward the beneficence of expertise and social engineering. Indeed, they are the major bearers of this ideology. Similar observations apply to higher levels of the white-collar working class who share many of the attributes of the PMTS. Yet it is also possible that their greater education and understanding of the mysteries of science and technology, coupled with developed critical faculties, may lead some members of the PMTS to question the modern religion of technique and science. They may even go so far as to question the lack of planning at the societal level or the crude exploitation of nature under untrammelled capitalism. Helped along by a consumption experience that, in its affluence and rejection of mass goods, has emphasized naturalist values and outdoor recreation, the technical criticism of the PMTS has been the main pillar of the environmental movement.

Nonetheless, given the technocratic predilections of this "class," it tends, even when serious problems have been identified, to maintain a faith in the possibility of expert repair of all "maladjustments" within the existing social order.

All in all, the favored class position of the PMTS is not a fertile ground for the widespread development of revolutionary consciousness, though it is certainly the source of many radical individuals. It has been, rather, richest for the generation of a specific form of technocratic liberalism that has been crucial to the history of American social reform, but which is still rooted firmly within capitalist ideology.

The "liveable city" ideology and policy of TEAM and the new urban gentry in Vancouver illustrates the contradictory nature of this type of liberalism. Their program included more planning, more parks, fewer freeways, more rapid transit and pedestrian access, cleaner air, preservation of historic buildings, a performing arts center, better architectural design, tree planting, billboard removal and noise control (Ley, 1980). Among these are elements of a genuine rejection of business-as-usual, of asserting control over an urbanization process seemingly out of hand, of upholding human health and welfare over commercial gain, and of maintaining a sense of history. From a different angle, however, one sees an apotheosis of elitist consumerism in the form of stylish townhouses, expensive boutiques, quaint restaurants, fine parks and vistas, avenues for strolling and warehouses converted into chic shopping centers. High-priced individual consumption is still the dominant mode. The layout, while different from the preceding Vancouver cityscape, imitates scores of other gentrified cityscapes around North America. Conspicuously absent is any referent to work. Like the suburban ideal before it, the "liveable city" ideal includes an attempt to banish the facts of production, commerce and working class life in order to create a controlled,

picture-book environment for the upper classes (cf. Williams, 1973).\*

It is believed, moreover, that the liberal ideal of harmonious urban change can be achieved through the corrective power of enlightened city planning, hastening the city along its preordained path into the post-industrial future. In contrast, Marx identified three essential disharmonies or contradictions characteristic of capitalism: between competition in the market and planned production in the factory; between production for profit and for human needs; and between classes. Growth management reformers believe these can all be overcome: rational planning can curb the misdeeds of developers and the excesses of property booms; one can design with nature and still show a profit; a city can be made a post-industrial showplace for the new classless, noncommercial society. Despite whatever meritorious intentions and critical faculties liberal reformers may have, they have shown themselves consistently to be incapable of recognizing the contradictions inherent to capitalism.

In short, no clean break with the past is indicated by the reformers' goals. They are, rather, a contradictory mixture of old needs wrapped up in new forms and new needs struggling to emerge from the capitalist nexus.\*\* Furthermore, the reform program chiefly addresses the furniture rather than the house in which it is set. Without penetrating the ideology of the reformers and making a careful examination of particular issues and political struggles, it is virtually impossible to stamp any of it clearly conservative or liberatory. This sort of liberalism demonstrates, as Marx put it, "both the strengths and the weaknesses of the kind of criticism which knows how to judge and condemn the present, but not to comprehend it." (*Capital*, I, p. 638).

### Liberal Reform Politics in a Changing Urban System

The inability of middle class (PMTs) liberal reformers to break with the capitalist order and follow their own path is even clearer in politics than in consciousness. Reform slogans and seemingly good intentions mask their all too frequent willingness to compromise with or accept uncritically the forces of capitalist reality. Consider, for example, the reform movement in Vancouver that David Ley

\*One is reminded of a similar ideological manifestation in Baltimore, another city undergoing downtown gentrification: on entering the city from the south the sign that long read "Baltimore—A Working City" has been changed to "Baltimore—A Living City."

\*\*The ambivalence of middle-class liberalism towards capitalism runs deep. Liberal thought since the Enlightenment has been characterized by tension between the scientific and the aesthetic. For example, both the call for nature appreciation and the advocacy of "scientific planning" point to an underlying faith in "natural law," which if known and respected will ensure beauty, justice, and social harmony. Such utopian idealism has been prominent within the literature of the modern environmental movement; an excellent example is Ian McHarg's *Design With Nature*, a document popular with planners and reformers. Ley has simply reproduced this contradiction (see remarks on p. 3).

discusses. The goal of TEAM was the creation of a "liveable city," in accordance with the slogan, "people before property" (Ley, 1980). Ley errs, however, in taking at face value the movement's "anti-business" image and this error stems in large part from a poor grasp of changes in the contemporary urban space-economy.

Like many contemporary cities, Vancouver is undergoing a transformation. Finance, corporate administration, state functions and accessory business services have expanded rapidly during the past twenty years. As a result, the central city is being remade, and these office-based functions agglomerate there (Stanback, 1979; Armstrong, 1972). Office space in Vancouver doubled between 1967 and 1977 (Ley, p.244). Meanwhile, manufacturing has been decentralizing. The reasons for these spatial changes include the growth of large corporations and their management functions and the desire of corporate heads to gather close together at prestigious addresses, and production changes in manufacturing, among others. As industry restructures after the long post-war boom, obsolete manufacturing facilities are being closed down and more technically advanced ones are being constructed in suburban or rural locations (Massey and Meagan, 1979; Walker and Storper, 1981).

Along with changes in the distribution of employment have come dramatic shifts in residential patterns. Blue-collar workers have been pushed out of many central city neighborhoods by more affluent office jobholders. A residential property boom, including inner-city gentrification and condominium conversions, has complemented the continuing office expansion. Confronted by this upheaval in the local housing market and space-economy, both white-collar and blue-collar city residents have begun to take a greater interest in urban politics.\* This has happened from Santa Monica to New Jersey. (Kesteven).

Out of this mobilization, which was well under way by the late sixties, TEAM emerged in Vancouver. The leaders of TEAM felt themselves to be residentialist Davids confronting the Goliath of the corporate world. But they were by no means uniformly anti-business. Advocates of "controlled growth" and an enhanced "quality of life" by no means spurn the ideal of business efficiency, as shown by research into an episode of conflict over growth in the San Francisco Bay area (Greenberg, 1981). The environmentalist mayor of Livermore during the early seventies repeatedly declared that his political objective was "to run government like a business instead of *for* business." This sort of statement — common during the Progressive era — was echoed by reform leaders in Vancouver. The objection is not to business *per se*, but to such abuses as excessive land speculation, growth racing ahead of services, and special interests controlling local government. Despite the often-strident rhetoric of "no-growth," the actual programs offered by liberal reformers have almost invariably been aimed at orderly, rational "growth management."

\*White-collar workers, especially the PMTS, tend to be the first to mobilize for rent controls and other reforms.

Moreover, on closer inspection the TEAM reformers had a very selective view of what constituted the class of businessmen who were their adversaries. Small retailers and city-based manufacturers were taken by TEAM to be representative of "business" in general. Oddly enough, they did not view financiers as capitalists. Instead, the latter were seen as "post-industrial" employers. The TEAM mayor declared that, "We can easily identify financial institutions as being a very desirable kind of business...and technological industries and many other 'clean' industries (as well)." (Ley, 252).

In other words, TEAM policies appear to have been a common form of selective boosterism that welcomes some kinds of jobs into the city but not others. It is wrong to think, as Ley does, that because TEAM concurred with a regional plan to decentralize jobs that they were not interested in retaining employment within the city. It is likely that, as in the San Francisco area, local finance capitalists had a large hand in any regional planning effort and that they had little interest in keeping manufacturing on central city land better suited for their purposes of building offices and middle-income housing for the white-collar labor force (Hartman, 1975). The one detailed example of a major TEAM-sponsored project mentioned by Ley, the redevelopment of an area known as False Creek, involved conversion of a declining manufacturing area into smart townhouses. Far from demonstrating that "social and aesthetic priorities eclipsed economic reasoning," (Ley, 253) this project has merely exchanged one land use for another one more appropriate to the new urban economic structure and to the new dominant class of residents from the PMTS.

In other words, far from being opposed to business interest, TEAM's "liveable city" ideal could just as well be interpreted as a vehicle for facilitating the capitalist-led conversion of inner Vancouver. TEAM therefore acted as political midwife in a historic transition in urban form and social structure, whether wittingly or unwittingly. Liberal reformism and the PMTS appear once again as Janus-faced, more clearly in the service of capital than opposed to it.\*

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\*Some sense of the importance of liberal reform in relation to economic dynamics and capitalist class power can be had by comparison with two other cities undergoing similar spatial transformations. In San Francisco, where the growth and power of financial institutions has been enormous, gentrification and the creation of the quintessential "liveable city" in the PMTS mold has taken place chiefly through decentralized market processes. Progressive political mobilizations, such as the anti-highrise and anti-freeway movements have been directed specifically *against* the financial center for destroying neighborhoods and a pre-existing city. In Baltimore, on the other hand, where office growth has been limited, corporate leaders have taken charge of the gentrification program, without benefit of any discernable PMTS mobilization for or against it. Liberal reformism can thus be seen as more of an effect of change than a cause of it.

## The Eclipse of Liberal Reformism

Liberal reform movements often pass as quickly as they come. The case of Vancouver is again instructive. In the late 1970's the TEAM movement fell from power. As Ley (1980) explains it, the movement was challenged on the left by another party more appealing to the working class, tenants, ethnics and Catholics. This group complained of TEAM's elitist disregard for mass housing and welfare issues.\* Over time, the traditional working class probably perceived that PMT liberals were attempting to remake Vancouver into a city in which they would have no place. On the right, TEAM encountered a rising tide of conservatism. As Ley observes:

the perception of decreasing economic efficiency, leading to the fear of a further reduction in personal consumption standards, (was) translated predictably into a political movement for free enterprise. A critical factor then becomes the strength of the economy, for it is during an economic downturn that tensions and vulnerabilities are bared, and the legitimacy of government policy is challenged. The harmonizing goals of efficiency, equity and the quality of life are profound problems...(257)

As a result, "the political platforms endorsed in 1968 had lost their historical momentum a decade later" (Ley, 257). TEAM activists and supporters defected in both directions, with the right ultimately rising to power. To the mass of voters, and apparently to financial capitalists as well, changing economic and political circumstances rendered the liberal agenda largely irrelevant. The contradiction of liberalism, springing from class, political, and ideological contradictions, are revealed in its disintegration. The harmonizing center could not hold.

Although Ley's insights on this point are helpful, there are difficulties reconciling them with the theories of post-industrialism and liberal ideology which he espouses. If TEAM indeed represented the class of professionals leading society into the new age of post-industrialism, how could they have proved so vulnerable politically to the obsolete business and working classes? Furthermore, how could an old-fashioned economic recession, the hallmark of the bygone days of industrial capitalism, have played so crucial a role in turning things around? Ley has mistaken a decade of unusual popular upheaval for a new norm and a cyclical reappearance of liberal reformism for a secular change in the nature of capitalist politics.

Ley's analysis suffers from his failure to come to grips with the nature of ideology and class power under capitalism. The cosmopolitan savants of the PMTS who championed environmental quality, humanistic values and the politics of "lifestyle" were ultimately unable to transcend their class position and penetrate the surface appearances of capitalism. They thus built their political program on a foundation of mystified consciousness.

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\*Ley acknowledges the merit of this charge, though both he and the leftists undoubtedly attribute too much responsibility to TEAM for spiraling housing prices (255).

They were fundamentally mistaken in their view of how the economic system operates and where the political apparatus fits into the larger social structure. They were unable to understand that it is still capital, and not value-free "post-industrial" expertise, that calls the tune in contemporary North America. When the objective needs of capital accumulation and the subjective desires of the intellectuals no longer coincided in Vancouver, the influence of the latter evaporated; suddenly, they were no longer "opinion leaders." In particular, the passage from a period of property boom to one of economic malaise meant a shift in overall capitalist class concern from the procurement of government aid for planning a new downtown to the freeing of capital from *all* restrictive government controls. It also meant a shift in working class concerns from a desire to control the excesses of capitalist growth and gain a more liveable city to support for the unleashing of capital to produce more jobs and income. That the TEAM leadership was too "naive" to read the economic signs that would spell their defeat is because they, like David Ley, never understood the historical basis of their own political movement.

#### CONCLUSION: THE PROBLEM OF METHOD

We have so far questioned the accuracy of two theories applied to contemporary political movements: that the material base of reformism is the transformation to a post-industrial society and that reform ideology and policy break with the dominant capitalist order. Behind these specific theories, however, lie broader philosophical formulations with which we also take issue. We once again use David Ley as our foil.

Within the field of geography, David Ley has acquired a reputation for the eloquent espousal of humanistic principles in geographic inquiry. To his great credit, he has consistently criticized all forms of positivism and reductionism that obliterate human subjectivity. Nevertheless, he has not broken with the empiricist ontology that lies behind positivism. He does not distinguish between events, everyday life, individual experience, and their causes, which are normally unobservable and unaltered by the contingent situations of everyday circumstance. Thus he, like so many others, thinks that the incoming waves on the surface of history — for example shifting census figures on "service employment" — mark tidal changes in the mode of production. Similarly, he takes the ideological pronouncements of human subjects, such as the "anti-business" rhetoric of the urban reformers in Vancouver, at face value, instead of catching the refraction of consciousness off the hard surface of material reality. The resulting form of analysis is not therefore a satisfactory replacement for positivism. It is yet another kind of eclecticism and superficiality parading as scientific explanation.

Contrary to what Ley and most geographic humanists believe, explanation in the social sciences can be systematic without being positivist and grounded in reality without being empiricist. Following Harre and Madden (1975), Bhaskar (1978, 1979), and Sayer (1979, 1981),

we hold that a "realist" conception of social science can provide the basis for a philosophically sound research methodology. Furthermore, the marxian tradition, while not without problems and unresolved issues, provides the most compelling conceptual framework for the investigation of social life within capitalist societies.\*

Methodological discussion within the social sciences in recent years has mainly involved a dialogue between champions of positivist and "hermeneutic" forms of explanation (epistemology). Supporters of the latter approach, from Charles Taylor (1971) to Peter Winch (1958), have emphasized that: (1) social inquiry is always a human endeavor in which the theorist is internally related to the subject matter; (2) "facts" are linguistically mediated and thus invariably theory-laden; and (3) since humans are self-interpreting, conscious beings, the realm of intersubjective *meanings* must be addressed directly. With its emphasis on the value-free collection of sensible facts, positivism has been unable to provide a convincing counterattack. As a result, we have witnessed in recent years a proliferation of "humanistic" approaches that incorporate existentialism, phenomenology, and Weberian *verstehen*, severing objective "explanation" from intersubjective "understanding." Furthermore, the allegation that scientific truth-claims are necessarily linked with instrumental reason and social domination has led to increasing skepticism regarding the very desirability of explanation in either the social or natural sciences (cf. Walker 1981 and Sibley 1981). Thus, it seems that the dominant ethos guiding scholarly inquiry could eventually be Paul Feyerabend's slogan, "anything goes" (Feyerabend, 1975).

This methodological anarchy is disturbing. First, it is nihilist. If societies are subject to change and the possibility of improvement of the human condition exists, then for one to act responsibly and competently one must understand the world. Second, if judgments regarding what constitutes good explanation must be made, so that we do not act in error, the criteria for such evaluations should be explicit, systematic and open to critical discussion. Third, if society has disagreeable features, humanists cannot escape responsibility for and participation in it. Practitioners of social science are still social beings, subject to particular interests and ideologies. One's theories, no matter how personal or nonpolitical they appear to be, are never entirely so. At best, nonexplanatory discussions can claim to have no effect whatsoever. But this, too, is no escape, for by avoiding issues of power, exploitation and the like, one contributes to their persistence. In other words, the problem of scientific responsibility does not reside in the purity of our minds but in the relation of science to social life.

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\* See also the recent debate among Marxists which addresses the same philosophical issues and speaks to their intransigence, whether one is inside or outside the Marxian tradition (Thompson, 1976; Anderson, 1980).

Similarly, the dilemma of science revealed by the hermeneutic critique is not resolved simply by clearing one's head of positivist illusions about value-free inquiry. The impossibility of pure objectivity does not preclude sensible intersubjectivity regarding observations, explanatory merit of theories and degrees of objectivity in the practice of science. We will have to go on muddling through the quagmire of an imperfect human world, trying as best we can to avoid the quicksands of error and deceit. But the option of nonexplanation is no solution to our predicament.

In an attempt to resurrect the possibility of systematic, critical explanation, Roy Bhaskar has developed a "transcendental realist" philosophy of science (Bhaskar, 1978, 1979). His great advance over the humanists comes in seeing that the most important philosophical shortcoming of positivism lies not in the realm of epistemology, or how we come to know the world, but of ontology, or our basic axioms about the world itself. While rightly emphasizing the socially constructed nature of cognition, hermeneutic approaches to reality fail to see that perceptions are not identical to the world itself. In asserting that the world indeed exists independently of our particular conceptions of it, Bhaskar distinguishes between the transitive and intransitive dimensions of science. Positivists and other descendents of Humean empiricism confuse the two, believing that all there is to know about the world is what we as humans can verify through sensible experience. They thus claim that observable events are the only admissible evidence for and objects of scientific study.

Bhaskar goes further, arguing that empiricists have an erroneous view of how the world is structured. They do not distinguish events from the causal mechanisms that generate them. It is the discovery of these mechanisms, or structures, that comprises the true objective of scientific inquiry. Indeed, as Bhaskar points out, there would be no reason for controlled experiments in science if observable events were not contingent and therefore different from their underlying causes, which do not change from moment to moment; it is by achieving regularity in events through the elimination of contingent determinations that we can penetrate to the basic mechanisms at work. In addition, reality must be understood as stratified, or containing different "levels" with their own integrity. The progress of science thus consists not merely in discovering systematic causes, but in penetrating to new and deeper levels of reality.

Within a realist conception of science, the *sine qua non* is not prediction but explanation, that is, the production of models that account for the mechanisms generating phenomena of interest or importance to science (Bhaskar, 1978, p.15). Prediction can be a viable criteria for truth-claims only under closed, experimental conditions. Social phenomena, in particular, involve so many contributing factors that such conditions never exist.

Furthermore, in contrast to postivism, explanatory significance attaches to agents' subjective reasons for actions. But such reasons do not *in themselves* constitute sufficient explanation, since at other, deeper levels, pro-

cesses are at work generating the apparent reasoning one gives for one's actions.

Upholding a realist conception of social science does not automatically eliminate all problems regarding objectivity and the theory-ladenness of facts, etc. So long as research is performed by actors who are themselves historically situated, no scientific claims to privileged or absolute knowledge can be made. Knowledge-production can be viewed as having limits, however, and yet still proceed according to explicitly, mutually-agreed-upon rules and standards. Thus, the reflexivity inherent to social inquiry must be confronted openly, and indeed be made an internal aspect of "science" itself.

Karl Marx's voluminous writings have been interpreted as ranging from Hegelian to positivist in their philosophical character. Bhaskar and his followers, however, have argued that Marx's mature conceptualization of the capitalist mode of production should be viewed as reflecting a realist form of social scientific inquiry (Sayer, 1979, 1981, Keat and Urry, 1975).<sup>\*</sup> "All science would be superfluous," wrote Marx, "if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided" (Capital III, 817). In Capital, Marx demonstrates the divergence between capitalism's surface phenomena and the essential, structural relations which generate its "laws of motion." Marx saw his own task as the "critique of political economy," that is, the penetration of the categories used by bourgeois theorists to describe the appearance of social life, with the aim of exposing the deeper relations that lie hidden to everyday consciousness. In the sense of exerting pressures and setting limits (Williams, 1977), it is these underlying relations that "determine" the "structure" of everyday life in capitalist societies.

Postivism and Humean empiricism mistake the surface appearances for the whole of social reality. They take common-sense categories at face value and search for overt empirical regularities. In its uncritical adoption of chaotic conceptions such as "services," and its lack of any system of *necessary* relations that could explain how society reproduces itself, the post-industrial thesis provides an excellent example of vulgar empiricism. Similarly the benign view of liberal reformism as representative of a new, liberatory consciousness and an anti-capitalist practice is based on acceptance of liberal ideology at face value, ignoring its tangency to the fundamental issues of capitalist society, and mistaking transient events, such as an electoral victory or two, for changes in basic power relations.

Realist Marxism is not free of difficulties, of course. The analytic problem confronting any scientific theory is the separation of that which is structurally necessary from that which is to varying degrees contingent within the particular situation under investigation. Seduced by the elegance of the Marxian model, too many Marxists have been guilty of extrapolating the "logic" of capital onto real history in simplistic fashion. There is a significant differ-

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<sup>\*</sup>Althusser and Balibar were the pioneers in this position.



ence between an abstracted model of a "pure" mode of production and an explanatory framework suitable for an historically specific social formation in which capitalism may be dominant, but is clearly neither universal nor all-determining (Keat and Urry, 1975, Thompson, 1964). As a form of realist science, Marxism can only point to *some degree* of structural necessity associated with the essential workings of capitalism. The development of social science involves a laborious process in which through empirical research, theoretical concepts are developed, refined, and differentiated.

We make no claim of privileged access to truth regarding the service economy or urban reform movements thanks to the use of realist ontology and marxist theory. The dialogue between our way of seeing and that represented by David Ley must continue if knowledge is to advance.

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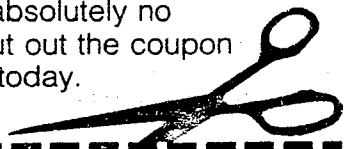
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