

**VOLUNTARY SERFDOM: AN IDEOLOGICAL JOURNEY
INTO DUAL-CLASS LABOR CONFLICTS AND
POSSIBLE WORKERS' SOLUTIONS ***

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ABSTRACT

This article identifies my paradigm shift toward greater acceptance of conflicts and alienation sociologies from Marx and from Seeman. Having never been a follower of their sets of ideas, ample evidence has been found in recreational and sociological literatures, and at work, to support the contention that they are more important than I had previously thought. The conclusion is derived from reviewing a variety of novels, poems, a travelogue, sociological findings on dual- and antagonistic-class structures, data about alienation, and putting a theoretical twist to Merton's goals-means model of adaptation.

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"Nothing like division of labor."
(Harriett Beecher Stowe,
Uncle Tom's Cabin, 1984)

INTRODUCTION

I have hardly been a great fan of certain elements of conflict and alienation sociologies because I never really felt deprived. When I was young my family owned a cartage company in Chicago and we lived in a historic suburban village. Drafted into the army, I had cozy duty in Texas when other troops went to Viet Nam. In college my expenses were covered by veterans' assistance programs, graduate and research assistantships and separate teaching contracts. Without ever having a tenurable job, I was published, sat on M.A. thesis committees, was active in sociology associations, and was an Associate Editor for a jour-

nal which encourages creative sociology.

In spite of these modest successes, I left higher education due to the uncertainty of contracts from one term to another, where paychecks were unevenly distributed, in pursuit of other opportunities. My current employment in a privately-owned and non-union factory, and reflection on my twenty-five-something years as a scholastic outsider, have enticed me to rethink my favorite sociologies, forging a finer understanding of, and appreciation for, the conflict and alienation perspectives in sociology as they are related to the real presence of a dual-class and tension-based bourgeoisie-proletariat structure with its separate outlook of "rank has its privileges." The dramatic changes in employment core values and treatment of workers serve as the basis for this ideological journey.

Besides the normal library re-

search for a project like this, there were two related methods of gathering information. The first of these was ethnography, “the native’s point of view” (Harris 1968 572), which consisted of field observations and conversations with my fellow workers. This method is in agreement with the emic tradition in socio-cultural anthropology wherein testimony is acquired from a speaker who uses the voice of the “I” or the first-person singular. However, since the orator is often untrained in contextual analysis the research puts the idiographic accounts into nomothetic frames of reference as the etic heritage of anthropology allows (Geyer 2001; Harris 1968).

The second method of investigation for this article was the use of auto-ethnography or “reflective observation” (Forsyth and Palmer 1999), an “interior vantage point” (Hummel 1994), and “opportunities research” (Reimer 1977; Ronal-Rambo and Ellis 1989). This “complete-member-researcher” method (Adler and Adler 1987; Ronai-Rambo and Ellis 1989), the joining of the actor-orientation and the observer-orientation as the combined voices of the first- and the third-person singular, allows us to view the world of the “I” and the “the...” in a variety of ways We can walk with my good friend Dick Hummel when he engages in, and writes about, blood sports as “I, the hunter-scholar.” We can sit in a night club and watch dancers hustle customers as “I, the table dancer-sociologist” (Ronai-Rambo and Ellis 1989). We can sit in a room and listen as a sports writer attends weekly meetings with his dying former sociology professor as “I, the reawakened-student” (Albom 1997).

We can eavesdrop on the customers of a restaurant in Chicago’s Hyde Park district as they tell each tall tales, friendly lies, and solve the world’s problems over coffee and food (Duneier 1992). Finally, we can ride with an outlaw motorcycle gang by reading about the experiences of “I, the biker-journalist” (Thompson 1967). This *analytic-experiential* and *inclusion* method of data gathering is in accord with a famous invitation for the sociologist to take an unfamiliar look at a familiar world (Berger 1963)— one wherein the investigator is first a participant in society, who then becomes an invigorated spectator whose own observations become the objects of study.

There are four facets to this study which lead to its successful completion. There is a need to identify how dual-class structures have been presented in the mass and popular media, for two reasons: First, it is through such entertainment outlets that many of the public’s perceptions of social stratification are derived; and second, those mediated realities lend support to the arguments made at the end of this article. Then, specific sociological interpretations of class data are reoffered through the writings of scholars like Weber (1978) and Edwards (1979) with targeted emphases placed on the contributions of Marx (1959) and Seeman (1959, 2001) which identify various dimensions of workers’ economic alienation. These debilitating experiences are discussed in detail because factory workers are subjected to varieties of devaluation and social indifference by an owner-managerial social class. The data about alienation

are followed by identifying the means by which workers can adjust to a harsh environment using the assorted methods of adaptation offered by Merton (1968). The body of the article is concluded with summary and cautious remarks about the presence and outcomes of the tensions between the “haves” and the “have-nots.” The assembly of arguments begins by providing evidence from classical and contemporary literatures, as well as visual media, which underline the contention that there are many and varied forms of criteria for dual-class stratified systems.

RECREATIONAL SOURCE EVIDENCE

All literature reviews are undertaken with the purpose of supporting the author’s point of view. With that in mind, let me remind the reader that social classes are not just categorical differences in lifestyles led by associations of people. If that were the case then the divisions would exist on a horizontal plane as simple nominal classifications. However, when some sort of *moral worth* or *social importance* is assigned to the groupings they are turned ninety degrees, a vertical angle to the original plane, now existing as ordinal categories— hence socially stratified.

The pieces of work used here do not represent all possible identifications of social-class systems; instead, they were chosen because they offer examples of bipolar arrangements. The search for evidence was entertaining because I had to locate appropriate passages in books I had already

read, and then find additional confirmation in new publications. The illustrations come from a variety of sources including general thematic novels, poetry, a travelogue, a book about sports, and several movies and television shows as they collectively identify the universality and the diversity of two-dimensional class structures. So, just who are these storytellers who have the audacity to be sociologists *sine qua non*, and what are the shows which have the gumption to teach sociology outside the classroom?

Some of the writers who were selected for quotation include such noted Euro-Russian authors as Victor Hugo of *Les Miserables*; Fyodor Dostoyevsky who wrote *Crime and Punishment*; Leo Tolstoy who composed the short story “Master and Man,” and the controversial social conscience of Victorian England, Rudyard Kipling, who masterminded the poem “The Ballad of East and West.” Reliance is also placed on Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Theodore Roosevelt’s exploits from *Through the Brazilian Wilderness*, as well as Charles Nordhoff and James Norman Hall’s trilogy of books about the mutiny aboard the H.M.S. *Bounty*. Unfortunately, only snippets from these volumes can be used because of space limitations, but additional sociology can be found in them.

Four thematic novels are also reviewed, and they include Stowe’s book again, Alan Paton’s *Cry the Beloved Country*, as well as Alexander Waugh’s *Island in the Sun*, all of which are woven around racial politics. Then Leon Uris’ *Trinity* is concerned with the politics of religion in strife-torn Ireland.

Several stanzas from Dr. Seuss' "The Sneetches" are also important, as are the contents of several movies and old television series, but first I begin with analyses from Hugo's Novel.

Les Miserables is a story with which I became familiar as a seventh-grade student. One of my teachers had an extra class period with us, and during it he would tell us about the adventures and the flights of the hounded Jean Valjean as he fled from the dogged detective Javert. Later in life I decided to read the book, and in my copy of it there is a wonderful line which depicts the Dickensian lifestyle of the underprivileged poor who were under the heavy-handed control of those people who had social influence and who held legal power.

As there is always more
misery at the bottom than
there is humanity at the top...
(Hugo 1987:8)

According to the French law at the time of the story, ex-convicts could still be relentlessly pursued by the police, under the assumption that they were always criminals. Valjean's continuing, though well-meant, activities automatically made him a permanent member of a criminal underclass of people— the prosecuted and persecuted poor.

The Russian crime story *Crime and Punishment* (Dostoyevsky 1950) also identifies the presence of two social classes, using a related variable to separate them— purely legal power, compared to the legal-poverty factor used by Hugo. Dostoyevsky's Dounia talks about her Raskolnikov's vision of social reality in the following passage.

I am not blaming him; please don't think that; besides, it's not my business. A special little theory came in, too —a theory of a sort— dividing mankind, you see, into material and superior persons, that are persons to whom the law does not apply owing to their superiority, and who makes laws for the rest of mankind, the material, that is (Dostoyevsky 1950:476).

The unequal distribution of legal power endorsed by both Hugo and Dostoyevsky is directly reflected in modern sociology through some writings of Becker (1963) who identifies the *rule creators* of society as legislators, and the *rule enforcers* as police. Likewise, O'Sullivan (1994) identifies the *rule interpreters* as jurors who determine if laws are correctly or wrongfully applied to allegations of illegal behavior, often in an adversarial contest consisting of the accusers and the accused— a dualistic legal proceeding.

A melding of these contemporary approaches with thoughts that are worthy of Hugo or Dostoyevsky, or an English legend, is derived from the history of hunting.

Hunting and fishing as sports were owned by the European aristocracy and preserved for them by law...Poachers continually challenged this domination by taking game whenever and wherever it offered itself. Laws provided draconian penalties for violators who

had the misfortune to be apprehended. (Hummel 1994:134)

Privileges and rights go to those who own them.

Tolstoy, the other enlightening and informed Russian author, wrote the poignant short story "Master and Man" (1977), and the title could stand by itself as evidence of dichotomous statuses. The tale involves a relationship between an astute and miserly businessman, Vasilli Andreich Bekhunov, and his employee-servant/serf Nikita.

Vasilli Andreich did not pay Nikita the eighty rubles a workman such as he was worth, but only about forty, which he paid without any proper reckoning, a bit at a time, and then for the most part not in money but in goods charged from his store at a high price (Tolstoy 1977:70)

Although Nikita owed his heart and his soul to the company store, he dedicated himself to his master with obedient and fatal loyalty. That which Tolstoy has successfully done for us, beyond describing a feudal economy, is to show the callous disregard for, and the vulgar exploitation of, one social class toward another— the "bread and butter," the *idée fixe* of conflict and alienation sociologies.

The first U.S. novelist in this work is Stowe via her book Uncle Tom's Cabin (1984). Stowe's character St. Clare, a member of New Orleans' gentry, is talking to his northern cousin Ophelia about local customs when the

following distinctions are made.

Look at the high and the low, all the world over, and it's the same story— the lower classes used up, body, and soul, for the good of the upper. So it is in England; and so it is everywhere; and yet all Christiandom stand aghast, with virtuous indignation... (Stowe 1984:211-212)

Total exploitation of the oppressed by the oppressors was institutionalized. Even though the practice was abhorred by many it was still allowed to exist, thus legitimizing it. This opinion is further advanced by one of the books more notorious characters, Simon Legree.

Legree took silent note of Tom's availability. He rated him as first-class, and yet felt a secret dislike to him—the native antipathy of the good for the bad. (Stowe 1984:349)

Legree, of course, considered himself to be the "good" guy because he was a white slave owner, whereas he viewed Tom as a "bad" guy because he was a black slave, even though the story proves otherwise.

Thus far, the cited findings underpin the premise that there are two major social classes in society which have caste-like or feudal qualities to them. However, they are locally determined, they are commonly called the "haves" and the "have-nots," with their attendant features and obligations to each other. Still, several questions may be lingering in mid-air, and they would include: "Is there to be any

blending of them or diffusion between them?" and "Is it possible for there to be more than one duality existing at any place or in any point in time?" There are answers to these questions.

With regard to the possible amalgamation between categories we can review parts of the poem by Kipling, visit one of the Bounty books, and then return to Stowe for the possible answer. First, Kipling's "The Ballad of East and West" clearly identifies the vision of English colonialism and imperialism on this subject.

Oh, East is East, and West is West,
 and never the twain shall meet,
 Till Earth and Sky stand present
 at God's great Judgment Seat,
 But there is neither East nor West,
 Border, nor Breed nor Birth,
 When two strong men stand face to face,
 tho' they come from the ends of the earth!
 (Kipling 1900)

This expansionist sentiment is also covered in Nordhoff and Hall's *Men Against the Sea* (1946), the second book about the events surrounding the H.M.S. *Bounty*.

This story recounts the heroic voyage of Captain Bligh and eighteen of his loyal seaman who were cast adrift by Fletcher Christian. In their forty-day journey, traveling about 3,400 miles across the Pacific Ocean in a launch the size of a large family van, the men visited some inhabited islands. The following lines depict how desperate men, but still Englishmen, look upon the mannerisms of some of the people who they encountered.

These Indians were unlike any we had seen in the South Sea; they were coal black, tall and remarkably thin, with long skinny legs. Two of the men stood leaning on their spears, with one knee bent, and the sole of the foot pressed against the inside of the other thigh— an attitude common as it was uncouth. (Nordhoff and Hall 1946:116-117)

As gaunt, starved, exhausted, and as hopeless and as helpless as they were, they were still able to look askance upon people whose mannerism were unfamiliar to them— that is, not Britons, but seen by others as "foreigners" in their own land.

A similar sentiment about cultural separation is contained, once again, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Now an aristocrat, you know the world over, has no human sympathies, beyond a certain line in society. In England the line is in one place, in Burmah another, and in America another, but the aristocrat in all of these countries never goes over the line. (Stowe 1984:224)

Together, Kipling, Nordhoff and Hall, and Stowe are telling us that cooperation is impossible: Such a thought is never even considered in the tradition of the "haves" for the "have-nots." It is evident then that that which creates any dualism and maintains it is simply ethnocentrism, and the ability of one category to exercise complete control over another.

In answer to the second question, it is possible for several dualisms to co-exist. There are hints of this issue in Hugo's volume, but Stowe's book is used again because of the logical substitutions derived from it, along with additional bolstering from Roosevelt. Stowe writes

[t]here stood two children, representatives of the two extremes of society. The fair high-bred child, with her golden hair, her deep eyes, her spirited, noble brow, and her prince-like movement; and her black, keen, subtle cringing, yet acute, neighbor. There stood the representatives of their races. The Saxon, born of cultivation, command, education, physical and moral eminence; the Afric, born of ages of oppression, submission, ignorance, toil, and vice!
(Stowe 1984:244)

While Stowe's images are fragrant with the ethnocentric cultural conceit necessary for her story, we can take the categories "Saxon" and "Afric" and replace them with multiple substitutes: Republicans and Democrats, privately-schooled and publicly-schooled, upper-class and lower-class, full-time faculty and part-time faculty, the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives, white-collar and blue-collar, military officers and enlisted personnel, as well as management and labor¹. The sets of labels are real and simultaneous, the identifiers being as important as the modifiers, and such arrange-

ments are universal, as is affirmed elsewhere.

Theodore Roosevelt is known for his Presidency, his burly anatomy, his robust lifestyle, and for his prolific writing. His book *Through the Brazilian Wilderness* (1920) is the tale of his travels and exploits in South America. It was there that he saw at least two dualisms existing together. One was based on religion, and the other was founded upon ethnicity. Roman Catholics were accorded higher social statuses than were members of any other religious or spiritual background because of the strong historic and missionary movements in the area. Then, Europeans, especially Spaniards, were accorded opportunities not available to others, for the same reason.

Two-tiered classes can be based on variables other than ethnicity, economics, the law, and religion. *Mutiny on the Bounty*, the first of the series, for example, reveals that sex-gender identity can also serve as a basis for social differentiation, depending on local mores, as in Tahiti during the time of the story.

[T]he Indians believe that Man was sky-descended, and that woman was earth-born; Men *raa*, or holy; Women *roa*, or common. Women were not permitted to set forth in the temples of the great gods, and among all

¹ An argument could also be made that Hummel's (1994:44-46) elitist-exclusive and democratic-inclusive attitudes toward sportsmanship fit into an opposing class system, but that would require work beyond the current project.

classes of society it was forbidden –unthinkable in fact– for the two sexes to sit down together. (Nordhoff and Hall 1960:84)

Not only did the Tahitians make earthly distinctions between men and women, but the division was given great credence because the separation had a supernatural source. This division was enacted in daily life as was shown in *Pitcairn's Island*, the final book about the mutineers. Having landed on that fateful island, Fletcher Christian and his followers sat down to eat.

The women, according to Polynesian custom, waited until the men finished before partaking of the food. Their hunger satisfied, the men drew apart and lay in the shade, some sleeping, some talking in desultory fashion. (Nordhoff and Hall 1936:41)

The reader may wish to explore beyond the meager offerings cited in these pieces of literature which contain confirmation of bilateral classes in other general novels, poetry and travel accounts. Several thematic novels, beyond Stowe's presentation of slavery in the antebellum South, contain similar distinctions based on racial politics. Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country* (1948), for example, is concerned with the existence and the effects of apartheid in South Africa which was the law of the land for many years until its recent legal demise. Another novel about racial politics is *Waugh's Island in the Sun* (1955) which weaves a

complex story on a British-governed island in the West Indies. This novel, unlike Paton's and like Stowe's, addresses the subtle discrimination toward people of blended heritage in the manner that Stowe looked at the fates of the quadroons, the mulattos, and the Creoles in her story.

Changing direction, Uris' *Trinity* (1976) details social-class warfare in Ireland at the turn of the 1800s into the 1900s, but the conflict is between Irish Roman Catholics and British Anglican Protestants. Unlike Roosevelt's findings, the story's Roman Catholics are the underdogs, the "have-nots," in a land where the political and economic institutions are controlled by people other than themselves– that is, the numerically small but politically greater Anglo-"prots," a conflict which exists today. Without divulging too much of the stories' plots, it is sufficient to say that no matter how enlightened, noble-minded, and "modern" the privileged classes are, traditions and practices are often resistant to change.

All of the authors presented have done their homework well, for they have described societal scenes which are valid and are easy to envision. The writers can then be justifiably called sociologists without portfolios because they describe societies using readable and entertaining formulae, in much the same way that many of us can name a particular professor who made sociology, anthropology, or the humanities come alive for us.

The print media portion of this review is finalized with a humorous, though pointed, poem which is often considered to be children's literature, but really contains a high level of

social, moral, and adult sophistication. Dr. Seuss wrote in "The Sneetches":

Now, the Star-Belly
Sneetches
had bellies with stars.
The Plain-Belly Sneetches
had none upon thars.
Those stars weren't so big.
They were really quite small.
You might think such a thing
wouldn't matter at all.
But, because they had stars,
all the Star-Belly Sneetches
would brag, 'We're the best
of the Sneetches on the
Beaches.'
With their snoots in the air,
they'd huff and they'd snort
'well have nothing to do with
the Plain-Belly sort!'
And whenever they met
some, when they were out
walking,
they'd hike right past them,
without even talking
(Seuss 1961:3-4)

No interpretation of meaning is needed here.

If the works cited had to be called a "population" that was studied, they would be labeled a combination of purposive and convenience samples. They were chosen because they uphold my stance and my change of thought, and because they were available to me. They are not meant to exhaust the range of evidence in popular outlets; in fact, more findings can be seen in such moves as *Driving Miss Daisy*, *Dirty Dancing*, Ralph Macchio's *Crossroads*, and *The Cutting Edge*, as well as old television series like *Upstairs, Downstairs* and *Beacon Hill*. While such inquiries can be made

privately, it is now time to turn to sociological literatures on two-sided class conflict and worker alienation.

SOCIOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Almost any introductory sociology textbook informs the student that there are several sets of class structures in our society. One of these systems contains three categories being the upperclass, the middleclass, and the working or the lower class. Another configuration shows either five or six layers— the upper-upper, the lower-upper, the upper-middle, the lower-middle, and the upper-lower and the lower-lower or the poverty level. Then the third form, used in this article, contains just two categories comprised of the enfranchised or the "haves," and the disenfranchised or the "have-nots." So just how many systems are there and of what are they comprised?

All three stratified orders are consistent with public opinions formed by way of the mass media, making an absolute definition difficult, just as it is hard to identify perfect criteria for membership in any of the groupings. Further difficulties are posed because, depending on the criteria used, and the purposes to which they are put, we see multiple and contiguous categories. Emphasis here, however, is placed on the latter arrangement and the conflicts and the tensions which entail between the associations of people.

Any economic differences between clusters are based on a division of labor: People are skilled at different tasks, and organizations have complementary needs. The existence of a

bourgeoisie-managerial class is just as important for business as a proletariat-worker class. In a perfect world they work in cooperation for mutual benefit, but all too often the former exploits the latter, from which tensions emerge, providing antagonisms and preventing concert, and it is in such strain that this article is grounded.

Social conflict theory is rich in history, subject matters, interpretations, applications, and in possibilities for social reform. We see its presence in pre-Solonic Greece prior to the advent of democracy, and it is evident in the writing of American, French, and Russian revolutionaries; it is contained in the writings of such sociologists as Weber, as Edwards, as Marx, and as Seeman, as well as Becker or O'Sullivan as earlier shown; and inequality is the calling card of class warfare between Democrats and Republicans.

The following sections of the article offers quick reviews of sociological presentations from Weber, from Edwards, and from Marx. Attention is then focused on illustrating worker alienation from a Marxian viewpoint, and the same is done with alienation from the vision of Seeman, and these discussions begin.

Weber, Edwards, and Marx: Briefly

Weber was kind enough to inform us that social-class membership is usually a function of the differential distribution of power, prestige, esteem, and wealth. That is, the more a person has of all of these rewards the higher the person's status is apt to be. In similar fashion, social-class affiliation is also dependent upon a person's income, occupation, and education—the

more a person has of one, the greater the likelihood the person owns more of the others, resulting in variations in status assignment.

In keeping with these thoughts, Edwards has notified us that there are two categories of work in which we are likely to be engaged. *Primary labor markets*, on the one hand, are those occupations which have high individuality and autonomy of effort, and entail great personal satisfaction for work completed. *Secondary labor markets*, on the other hand, have lower levels of social prestige; do not require extensive education or skill development; have routinized, repetitive, and over-seen work; incur fairly low wages; and create great boredom for the worker. A comparison of Weber's and Edward's contributions reifies the thesis that there are two competitive and often dueling social classes in our society.

Some of the most noted discussions about the sociology of economic life come from Marx and his friend Engels who covered such diverse topics as modes of economic exchange, guidelines for economic reform, and analyses of different social classes. While the latter subject contains descriptions of such groupings as the salariat, the landowners, a petite bourgeoisie, and the *lumpenproletariat*, most modern sociological and activist emphases are placed primarily on the bourgeoisie as an owner-managerial category, and on the proletariat as a wage-earner division. A very generous rendition of the bourgeoisie means that its members are the monetary and the political high-rollers of an area who are able to influence or determine how the economic variables of land, labor,

and capital are to be used; whereas a similarly liberal interpretation of the proletariat means that its members represent everyone else whose lives are controlled by the whims of those who are powerful— that is, the *proles* are the manor lords' vassals. If so, then the "haves" and the "have-nots" are genuine, regardless of which specific criteria are used for membership, as has been shown with ample evidence.

Another aspect of Marxian sociology is that it looks at the relationship between the two classes from the perspective of the less-powerful groups, because is it through them that social change will occur. This viewpoint stands in opposition to the recreational pieces offered earlier, because it was there shown that the powerful assemblies determine the courses of history and local mores. It is widely held in conflict theory that the discontent felt by the lower classes for the upper classes contains the seed for social reform —the ability to create history and new futures through revolution for significant modification of social institutions— with which I stand in some disagreement.

I would like to reveal through the corresponding writings of Marx and of Seeman, and my fieldwork, the types of alienation which have been felt by factory workers because they, as members of the proletariat, are disenfranchised and devalued due to the designs of a company's owners and their managers. The illustrations are derived from my employment and curiosity at "Industrial Development, Inc." (IDI) which is located in "Lichenville, IL," where we render outsourced sub-assemblies of engine parts for Woolly

Bear, Inc." a Fortune 500 company, whose corporate offices are in nearby "Will it Play Here? City." Woolly Bear has an international reputation and market for its earth-moving, mining, and farming products, as well as for its sturdy diesel engines. That company earned the nickname "Big Saffron" because of the mellow yellow color of paint used on its goods, and the company's sole labor union is the "Unified Horseless-Carriage Workers of America." Let us now see how Marxian sociology can be applied to IDI as it goes about the business of supplying parts for Woolly Bear.

Elements of Alienation: Marx

One of Woolly Bear's main money makers is its diesel engine division, which provides the power units for its own products as well as for such other commercial uses as the trucking and maritime industries. An engine block is put on an assembly line carousel for its three-hour journey, along which all needed parts are attached. IDI people do the sub-assemblies for almost all of the engine's external parts so that Woolly Bear's union workers only need to take the assigned parts from racks, kits, or tubs and bolt them to the engine. IDI sub-assemblies are accomplished in the interests of profitability for Woolly Bear, meaning that costs are reduced when IDI does the work rather than having union members do the same tasks. IDI people attach hoses and supports to radiators, connectors to fuel-related parts, drains on oil pans, housings on clutches, and so on, for Woolly Bear's products. IDI's workers are thus deprived from the feeling of accomplish-

ment with the final *product* because they usually only work on one type of part in a single bench area, and are almost never allowed entry into Woolly Bear's plants due to security reasons. Work then is boring and repetitive, and there is little a person can do except "grin and bear it," or maybe seek cloned work at one of Woolly Bear's other suppliers where only lateral or horizontal social mobility is attained, at best.

IDI employees are also alienated from the *profit*, which the company earns. Assemblers are paid a wage which starts at \$7.25 per hour, a working poor earning, and have a modal rate of about \$8.00 or \$8.50 per hour; and a few workers earn as much as \$9.00 to \$10.00 per hour. The company does have profit-sharing as its "retirement" plan wherein an employee is fully vested after five years of employment. However, only about twenty of the IDI's 250 employees are so situated because people quit often, relinquishing any shares which may have been earned. When an employee nears full enrollment in the plan, it is common for the personnel director to lower the person's wages, then reassign the employee to a job which is either dirtier, harder, or on another shift, hoping that the worker will quit; and people have been fired just prior to maturation because all forfeited monies from voluntary or involuntary terminations revert to the general fund.

One payday we received our annual earnings statements, and there was a negative entry for my year's total. I immediately asked the personnel director what that meant, and I was told that the company did not earn a profit

for the past year. When I asked her if that was in the report filed to the Internal Revenue Service or in the report for the company's stockholders, I was given a blank stare. Profits seem to be elusive things, which the workers are unable to comprehend or need not take interest.

IDI workers are also alienated from *themselves* since there are virtually no opportunities for upward social mobility within the tightly-run, almost managerially-incestuous, organization; and there are not chances for the worker to show individual initiative or creativity. Assembly designs come from Woolly Bear and any variations from them will result in product errors, subject to fine by the contracting company. Each engine has a specific configuration and there is no tolerance for variations and mistakes. Even if a worker knows from experience that an engineering flaw is present, the product must be sent as defined; interestingly then the worker will be held responsible for the mistake by his or her employers. Repeated mishaps can result in a "no questions asked" firing and a replacement worker will be hired at a lower wage whenever possible.

The fourth form of alienation, according to Marx, is *separation of the workers from themselves* to keep them from becoming a collective, conscious, and conscientious body politic, and such detachment is actively promoted in several ways. Since IDI is not a union shop fault is quickly found with any worker who openly discusses unionization or violations of OSHA safety regulations. We are constantly told that we should spend our days working ceaselessly, and that we

should chit-chat among ourselves only during breaks or lunch periods. Managers are famous for finding hiding places where they can spy on us; and workers whose jobs require movements through the facilities have been followed by supervisors, foremen, or leads who make notations of the person's movements and conversations. I surmise that IDI's owners and managers feel that we are a disruptive cabal, actively plotting the demise of the company; but, there is no evidence to prove that several bomb threats were made by anyone associated with the company, past or present.

As was mentioned at the beginning of this article, I had never been in an employment setting wherein I formed a deep appreciation for the "workers" or the "have-nots." Reflecting on my downward occupational and economic mobilities, as well as daily interactions with my working colleagues, I have changed my mind about the value of conflict and alienation sociologies stemming from the ideas of Marx, but since his ideas do not stand alone, I turn to the thoughts of Seeman as I continue to share this paradigm shift.

Elements of Alienation: Seeman

Like Marx before him, Seeman took a humanistic stand in his investigations by looking at workers' viewpoints about themselves and the places where they work because the employee is the focal point, the subject and the object, of private experiences. Accordingly, Seeman also identifies matters of economic alienation which are valid from the discernment of the worker, and I would like to review

them and illustrate them, still using IDI as the specific setting.

Seeman's *powerlessness* is the inability to control one's work environment, and Hobson and Sullivan (1990: 90) state that this condition is virtually identical to Marx's alienation from the product because the worker can do nothing to affect the processes of production. I would like to go one step further and note that powerlessness also refers to the general managerial disregard for constructive input which the worker might have. In a weekly safety meeting and a "pep talk", our foreman always reminds us that no one, not even himself, knows our individual work areas as well as we do. Would it stand to reason then that through such knowledge, we might have reasonable ideas for the improvement of production and safety? "No!" It is their reasoning that the plant has been designed for maximum efficiency and safety, so no changes need to be made.

Our foreman seems to enjoy playing a psychological game with his pattern of praise in one breath and foul berating in the next. His efforts to make us feel as if we are important people are overridden by the open disregard and contempt for us as peers. An example of his true feeling for us occurred when he met an employee at a convenience store on the way to work and she tried to say "hello" to him. He told her that he did not have to talk to her because they were not at work yet. It would seem that he does not like her, and he does not like us.

My own interactions with the foreman support the same contempt and

distrust. I had a severe accident at work which required long disability leaves for healing, therapies, surgery, and more therapies. I stopped at IDI with some papers from my doctor and medical bills when the foreman walked past me, and instead of inquiring about my health, he asked "When are YOU coming back?" He does not like me, but once again he made it obvious that he does not like us.

Company officials justifiably treat alibi ailments with suspicion. Yet when people are truly sick or have been injured on the job they are still treated with unwarranted disdain and wariness— as if infirmities are malingering or show lack of fealty to IDI.

Seeman's *self-estrangement* is likened to alienation from work processes (Hobson and Sullivan 1990:98) because there are few additional material payoffs as incentives beyond actual wages. IDI's retirement plan is built for long-term employees, and there are no bonuses for hourly workers for work well done. The company does have a quarterly bonus of \$100 for perfect attendance, but when it is earned, it is attached to the paycheck so it becomes taxable income. However, if a person is five minutes late for work, or if a person has to leave work for a doctor's visit or a court appointment, then the reward is nullified. Pay raises are small, rare, and denied to individuals as punishment. I received my last raise increase more than three years ago, and since insurance costs have risen in that time my next paycheck is lower than it was then.

An extension of this theme addresses the duration and conditions of employment at IDI: It is not guaran-

teed, and exists only as long as the company's officials want an employee on-site to do the assigned and rote work. So if someone walks to the time clock at the beginning of a shift and finds the timecard missing, then the employee has been fired and the company does not need to give advance notice. There are no job assurances, and people are fired with stalinistic efficiency and eldritch glee.

Seeman's notion of *social isolation* seems to correspond with Marx's alienation from others (Hobson and Sullivan 1990:98). IDI workers perform thousands of assemblies for the union workers at Woolly Bear, but equal statuses are not assigned to both sets of workers. Woolly Bear's workers receive much higher wages than we do, and that company's reputation for quality is founded upon the union's claims of superior workmanship through collective bargaining and training. A brief story indicates the differences of comparative opinion which at least once IDI worker has about himself and others.

I played golf with some of my buddies one day after work, and as we drifted into the pro shop, I hailed one of them by asking, "Hey, don't we work together at IDI?" He did not want, under any set of circumstances, not even jokingly, and certainly not in public, to be linked to, or embarrassed by, IDI and its local reputation. We still play golf together.

Seeman also talks about *normlessness* wherein codes of conduct are either non-existent or *anomic* (Durkheim 1951; Merton 1968), or they are so fluid in their interpretations and applications that they may as well be ficti-

tious. It would seem that Seeman was almost prescient about IDI and its managerial orientations towards behavior standards. Safety glasses and steel-toed shoes are to be worn by everyone on the factory floor— except it seems by even such managers as our safety officer. No one is supposed to smoke or have open beverage containers on the work floor— except apparently by supervisory personnel who openly smoke and drink coffee as they wander around keeping their vigil on us. No one is supposed to be eating as they assemble— except apparently managers who eat at their corrals on the floor. Late attendance or absence without just reason results in dismissal without pay, for one day or for three, depending on frequency— except apparently, for “brown-nosers” for whom rules are suspended or bent. Foul language is discouraged, except when an employee is being reprimanded. References to canine ancestry or personal habits are not tolerated, except for when a worker gets chastised by a manager. Laws forbid sexual harassment, yet one day a former lead of mine told me that he loved me, and neither my supervisor nor my foreman took any corrective action for his misdeed. In other words, it is difficult to predict what will happen from one day to the next, except that we work our shift and depart—tired, dirty, smelly, and sweaty— leaving deference to ill-tempered managers behind us.

Finally Seeman acknowledges the condition of *cultural disengagement* wherein workers are not in touch with dominant ideologies or sets of creative ideas in society, and it is here, I believe, that both caution and additional

research are needed before significant conclusions can be drawn. Indeed many of IDI’s employees are not highly trained, educated, or apparently interested in outside pursuits, but there are exceptions to this rule: “Sam,” for example, is president of a local astronomy club and he is the manager of the city’s celestial observatory and telescope. While profane lunchroom banter is an index of disinterested people who have no desire to expand their horizons, it must be remembered that schooled interests require free time, disposal incomes, and rudimentary skills, so many of my colleagues do not have the opportunities, wherewithal, or the talents to follow artistic, philosophical, ideological, educational, or linguistic endeavors.

This element of disengagement, along with the absence of a collective identity, is especially consequential for the maintenance of a system of inequality. The inability of a labor mass to experiment with alternative ideologies and economic practices due to the apparent absence of opportunity inhibits social change. An individuated class of people “in itself” does not mean that it can be translated into a unified body of people “for itself” when it lacks skills, leadership, and resources to do so. The system then perpetuates itself.

When I interviewed my subjects, I did so with discretion to maintain their dignity, trust in me, confidentiality, and to avoid arousing suspicion by company officials. One of the questions on my agenda was, “If you could change just one thing about IDI, what would it be?” The pervasive and plaintive response was along the lines of “Change their [management’s] atti-

tudes toward us," which seems to summarize and encapsulate the sociological descriptors we have about alienation, but certainly not expressed so eloquently and as scholarly as academicians have done. That descriptive task was left to such people as Marx or Seeman who objectified the subjectivity of personal experience and dissatisfaction of workers in place. So, it seems that both Geyer and Harris are correct when they state that it is the analyst who ascribes the labels and the language of alienation rather than the repressed, thus representing the best of ethnography's interpretive traditions.

My understanding of worker conflict and alienation theories is dependent upon the materials I have read, and upon my ability to relate to them and apply them. It is also underscored from over four years of employment at IDI, which allows me the opportunity to add several other notations about the surroundings of discontented members of a proletariat.

OTHER DISHEARTENING ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

In addition to the known elements of alienation and exclusion, there are two less tangible, and important, factors which are associated with being economically "kept," and they can either serve as conduits through which all other ideas flow, or they can be seen as umbrella covers under which the others are included. Wage-earning factory workers, including myself, my fellows, and the employees of Woolly Bear, feel as if we are human chattel, to be used and discarded with as

much sentiment as a replaced spark plug for a car; and there is a strong feeling of negativity which permeates the worker's psyche. Both sensations are actually promoted by management, itself, as the following sets of orientations indicate.

Human Chattel

The word "chattel" has several meanings. Originally, the term meant cattle which are owned, controlled, and herded by ranch owners and ranch hands; they are live property. Another definition for the word means that it is the owned physical capital of a person or a business enterprise; it is non-animate property. Cattle have no free will over their ownership or their plight to become T-bone steaks or hamburgers, and a machine is just as incapable of emotions or affecting its destiny. Neither definition for the expression can be credited to IDI's management as they look upon their workers as just so many pieces of property which, not who, can be manipulated and replaced for any number of real or imagined reasons; but I want to provide a specific example of such a mindset from a conversation I had with a manager as evidence of IDI's microcosmic specimen of bourgeois mentality.

While on a lunch break, I had a chance to talk to a general supervisor about the managerial obligations of our foreman. I acknowledged the fact that the man has a formidable task to maintain production schedules and standards, and the general interests of the company; but many employees feel that his communication skills need improvement. The general supervisor

appreciated my input, and indicated that employees' ideas are always valuable and welcome because we are important assets to the company, at which point he departed. The guys with whom I was eating and I concluded that we are more like resources than pieces of property which offset liabilities on accounting balance sheets. Words convey meanings and the choice of words offers insight into the speaker's vision; and the difference between an asset and a resource is a clear index of disparate points of view.

Such variations in thought are abundant in recreational reading as shown by the thoughts of, or conversations between, story characters; but the authors of such tales have more literary license than academicians are allowed, so oftentimes we can only hint at disparagement with antiseptic language. Like the unwanted, expressed, and undeserved feelings of inferiority and being totally controlled, negativity is as thick on the floor of IDI as are its industrial dirt, grime, forklift truck tire dust, oil slicks, loose parts and discarded dunnage.

Negativity

This term also has several meanings which include an absence of positive attributes, and responding in a direction away from that which is positive. In the assembly arena of IDI it means a condition of entrapment or slavery wherein nothing the worker does is seen as being worthwhile, and wherein the employee receives little, if any constructive input from managers. It also means that the worker almost always receives a negative response

for any inquiry, as a list of actual questions and answers shows: "Can I have a raise?" No. "Can I work another shift?" No. "Can I transfer to another building?" No. "Can I work under another lead?" No. "Would you please install an electrical outlet so I can have a fan?" No. "Can I go to Woolly Bear on the 'hot truck' to see how the line works?" No. "Can I change my vacation schedule?" No. "Can we open the big doors for better air circulation? It's hot in here." No. "How does this part work on the engine?" I dunno. "Will we be laid off when Woolly Bear goes on vacation?" I dunno. "Why can't we open the big doors?" I dunno. "Is Woolly Bear gonna keep this product line?" I dunno. "Are we gonna get any new lines from our competitors?" I dunno. "Why can't I have an electrical outlet for a fan?" I dunno.

Someone, somewhere, once said that knowledge is power. If that adage is true, then the owners and managers of IDI work hard to keep us ignorant and powerless; and, speaking as a wage earner, it gets old, quickly. Our foreman's version of positive feedback is to tell us that we had no fines levied against us by Woolly Bear. There are other ways to express satisfaction, like a simple "Atta boy," but that would seem humane for the company's handlers who appear well-versed in the history of feudal lord-vassal relationships. Maybe they selectively agree with some of Zeitlan's (1968) synopses of relationships between elites and non-elites according to either Pareto, Mosca, or Michels; or perhaps they identify with Tolstoy's Vasilii Andreich, with Stowe's Simon Legree, or with

William Bligh as they go about micro-managing the daily affairs of the small fiefdom called Industrial Development, Inc.

Much time has been spent discussing the subjugation of workers at IDI, but little attention has been paid here or elsewhere to identify how workers might adapt to a non-halcyonic environment. That task is now accomplished using Merton's well-known modes of adaptation with a theoretical twist.

A MERTONIAN APPLICATION

It is rare in sociology to see the writings of conflict and alienation exemplars joined with the offers of someone who is often considered to be an archetypical functionalist, and it is daring to use that person's paradigm in a conflict vein; yet, both are accomplished in this article. Once used by O'Sullivan (1995) to show how people go about the process of religious congregation switching resulting from spiritual dissatisfaction, Merton's goals-means model shows how IDI's wage earners can cope with their loneliness.

The five adaptations can be sorted into two major groupings. Three of the modes are labeled as belonging to a quit-dismissed range of possibilities, and the remaining two are arranged into a stay-retained cluster. Each set of outcomes has specific and different benefits to the worker and to the company.

Since many of IDI's workers are openly unhappy with their employment milieu, there are several means by which they can adjust. The IDI worker-

rebel may quit spontaneously with great fanfare and name-calling, to which IDI's leaders pay no heed, except to escort the now-former employee to the exit; much personal satisfaction is felt, though, because, following the title of Johnny Paycheck's popular song, IDI is told to "Take This Job and Shove It!"—many a worker's dream. The IDI worker-*retreatist* also quits figuring that working there is just not worth the effort to stay, and may even feel that unemployment insurance pays more than IDI does. The IDI worker-*innovator* becomes a workers' paladin, or a reformer, hoping to make IDI a better place to work. Managers neither like provocateurs nor do they tolerate their commentary: they do not want trouble-makers, making it convenient for them to look for errors in the worker's habits as justification for dismissal. Even if fired, employees find some solace in the expression "I was looking for a job when I found this one," but there are still two alternative choices.

The IDI worker-*ritualist* realizes entrapment, but may have even fewer options so the employee goes about assigned duties mechanically and well, while avoiding company politics which could result in trouble. Finally, the IDI worker-*conformist* is fairly content with his or her lot, and engages in constructive output for the company—assuming new duties voluntarily and casually which later take on the aura of assignments; making no errors in assembly; talking positively about the company and its owner-managers, and so on. The workers *ritualist* and *conformist* stay because work is proximate to their homes;

because a spouse works there, too; because a court requires it; because the worker has no real marketable skills so he or she can get by, there; because the employee likes the company; or, because other life circumstances affect employment. As we say, "It's the job I have today," but IDI is only where we work; it does not define who we are.

There is now an interesting theoretical twist centering on these choices. Yes, the workers who leave and the ones who stay are apt to feel rewarded in some way— they "win," either morally or financially. Yet, the company is designed for its own "win-win" benefit. Disruptive employees have left by one way or another, while the ones who remain get paid the lowest wage possible, with full knowledge of their voluntary serfdom plight, earning profits for people who do not seem give a whit about their workers. The conflict-based division of outcomes identified here, the rules of engagement between the bourgeoisie owner-managers and the proletarian workers, are always maintained by those who are in positions of privilege. This aspect of Mertonian sociology, then, fits well with other conflict and alienation sociologies according to the connected sayings "Take it or leave it" and "There's the door"— both suggestions being oft-spoken by our bosses.

My appreciation for the differential distribution of power and privilege has changed over the past several years. However, I am not a complete convert, and there is need to identify some of my reservations.

A SHORT DISCUSSION ABOUT CHANGES OF VIEW

Scholars have long paid attention to conflict and alienation studies, discussing the origins of their practices and terminologies, as well as addressing their religious, philosophical, and religious dimensions (Geyer 2001; Lichtheim 1968; Seeman 1959, 2001). Because the type of work which a person does and where that person works are often co-indices of a master status, significant attention has been paid to the psycho-sociologic-economic aspects of alienation by looking at workers who are separated from the dominant means of production and the determination of economic policies. Emphases have shown the disparities of rewards and privileges between the bourgeoisie controlling class and the proletarian subdued class.

While my views on this subject have changed, I do not completely agree with the monotonous chorus of universal tension, anxiety, and class warfare. I do not believe that there can be all-encompassing macro-level, national, or international conspiracies on the parts of the "haves" to control the "have-nots" because ample evidence has been provided showing diversity of dichotomies to dispel the contention of collusion. I also do not believe that there can be unified efforts on the parts of the "have-nots" to overthrow the "haves" for the same reason. Membership in either a "have" or a "have-not" category does not hold true over time and in different locales, as the comparison between Roosevelt's observations and the groups in Uris' book clearly showed; and further diffi-

culty if evident when someone ranks high on one status scale, yet low on another.

However, once focus is shifted to micro-level economies and businesses like IDI where absentee owners' managers yield unheralded palatine power over third-estate workers, or to universities which outsource teaching loads to adjunct faculty members². Then the tensions and disparities of power, prestige, and privilege become apparent to even the casual observer. It is here then that I believe conflict and alienation scholars are more correct in their understandings of class struggles than I had been willing to acknowledge—the divisions are real and consequential, although tensions and antagonisms vary locally.

CONCLUSION

Personal narrative is a useful research device for the social scientist because it permits the vision of insight via the voice of the first-person singular research subject. The speaker though may not be qualified to interpret personal thoughts or activities or be able to put information into a larger intellectual context. Enter then the ethnographer to accomplish those tasks with visual imagery for appropriate audiences.

Given that the scientist is also a participant in society, and thus has experiences which no one else has had, the analyst can then and should use autoethnography to become the subject of study, narrating from the actor-observer self, putting that which has been recounted into appropriate frames of reference for scholarly use.

By so doing, the investigator can add credence to the discipline, and continuity can be given to that which has already been learned, not through replication because that would be impossible, but through closely-related studies.

For example, the data used by Marx and by Seeman are valid by them-selves. While acquiring confirmation through continued study, those findings can assume additional meaning for the scholar-teacher when the constancy is affirmed directly and personally. The teacher-scholar can then say "Marx was right after all, and I can attest to his conclusions because..." In similar fashion, the teacher-scholar can debate Goffman's 1961 ideas on regimentation of life in total institutions by saying "Not all of our soldiers' daily lives are as strictly ordered as he says they are, and I know that because..." A sense of trust and credibility is almost automatically accorded to someone who can honestly say, "Been there, done that."

Sociologists easily become too comfortable with old notes, and may develop myopia because they treat ideal types as real types; because they see the world through small openings in their ivy-covered windows; and because they only view social actuality by way of questionnaires whose responses are coded for computer-generated statistics. Many college stu-

² Another interesting study would be the investigation of colleges' and universities' out-sourced instruction via temporary faculty members, but I fear that acquiring sufficient information would be difficult.

dents are first-generation attendees, and their families know about the "real world" because they are police officers, military cadre, factory workers, secretaries, truck drivers, prison guards, dental hygienists, carpenters, are on workers' compensation disability, and so on. If an instructor talks "sociologese" to students about topics, where in the student is a practical expert and the teacher is not, then a built-in "B.S. alarm" will warn that the forthcoming lecture is based less on experience and more on laziness, theory, narrow and limited observations, and on crunched numbers.

Most of us entered the social sciences or the humanities because we felt they were fun, controversial, and vital to us and to others. It is time to make them so again by allowing us to look knowingly at our surroundings in several ways. Either before the degrees plan is finished, or during vacations and sabbaticals, we should become cops, truck drivers, stevedores, laborers, roughnecks and roustabouts, or teachers in public- or inner-city schools, thus permitting us the opportunities to use our voices of the first- and the third-person singular, the actor-observer, to challenge our world views, academic truths, and ideal types, in order to help our peers and students evoke theirs.

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