
The Comparative Project on Class Structure and Class Consciousness

by Roger Jones¹
Social Science Data Archives
The Australian National University

This is a brief summary of this data collection gleaned from the papers given in the references, which are themselves a very limited selection from those available from the project. Those interested in obtaining further details of the project and its results should contact the principal investigators at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

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Introduction

Most of the quantitative empirical research on class is based on the gradational concepts of class – that is, classes are understood as being ordered in terms of the degree to which their members possess some quantifiable attributes such as income, education, or occupation for example. The names used to describe class positions – upper, middle, lower – reflect this ordering. However, most sociological theories of class adopt relational views in which classes are defined in terms of the qualitatively defined system of social relations – capitalist and worker, haves and have nots – and these relational properties are at best only indirectly measured in conventional data sources.

This project, initiated by Eric Olin Wright at the University of Madison– Wisconsin, sets out to fill this gap in class analysis. By developing a survey questionnaire which includes measures of the relational concepts of class as well as the usual gradational concepts, Wright aims to provide relational class descriptions of developed Western industrial societies and compare the explanatory capabilities of the various alternative concepts of class.

The basic objectives of the project are (Wright, 1982A):

- to investigate rigorously the objective contours of the class structures of advanced industrial societies in relational terms;
- to understand and explain the character of the variations in these class structures;
- to analyse the effects of these variations in class structures on a variety of individual level outcomes: income, social and political attitudes, political behaviour;
- to examine the interactions between

macro-structural variations and micro-biological variations in determining individual outcomes.

Operationalising the Model

In order to allocate individuals to class positions, Wright's approach requires much more information about a person's occupation than is usual. Respondents have to be asked about:

- supervision, particularly the ways in which people in supervisory positions can or cannot impose various kinds of rewards and punishments on their subordinates;
- decision-making over various kinds of policy issues at the respondent's place of work;
- autonomy over various aspects of the respondent's own work, particularly over the design and planning of the content of work;
- formal hierarchical position, that is, the official location of the respondent's job within the organisational hierarchy of the workplace; and
- ownership of the means of production, both in terms of one's principal work and in terms of owning income-generating property.

Variables for descriptive analysis

To understand and explain the character of variations in class structures, the study includes a great deal of information on what Wright calls the respondents class biography: class origins; the experience of self employment, unemployment and previous supervisory positions; detailed work histories over the past two jobs; class and occupation of close friends and spouse. These data make it possible to examine the effect that class experiences have on patterns of class consciousness, identifications and so on, and also provide the basis for a comparative study of class mobility.

Data on labour market issues allows systematic examination of the interrelationship between labour market segmentation and class structures. Topics include job shifts from the previous two jobs; unemployment experience; promotional expectations on the present job; level of formal and informal education; seniority and other variables.

Part of the study has been devoted to issues around the sexual division of labour in the home. These include rough measures of the amount of time and responsibility devoted to different tasks; relative influence over certain kinds of decisions; occupation and class of spouse.

Social Attitudes and Social Consciousness

A major aim of the study is to examine the relative importance of individual biographies and experiences compared to structural and historical factors in determining social attitudes and class consciousness. The major variables of this type are:

- codings of open ended questions seeking explanations for crime, poverty and the energy crisis, and of what solutions to these problems would be most effective;
- views on what is good and bad, desirable and undesirable on various political policy matters, male–female relations, economic inequality and other issues;
- views on the feasibility of alternative ways of organising society, the economy and politics; and
- conventional questions on class identification and party identification.

Other measures of class

One of the most important features of this data set is that it contains good measures of class and stratification concepts from a variety of different perspectives and from a variety of countries. This allows analyses which compare the predictive power of alternative concepts of class, in particular Marxist versus non-Marxist but also alternatives within the Marxist tradition. The study includes standard measures of occupation; most important work activities; industrial sector; education and training for the job; promotion patterns; income; characteristics of any second job; and involvement in "second economy" activities.

Counties surveyed and available data

To the best of my knowledge, the survey has been fielded in the following countries to date:

Country	Year	Principal Investigator
U.S.A.	1980	Eric Olin Wright, Univ. of Wisconsin
Sweden	1980	Goran Ahrne, Uppsala Univ.
Norway	1982	Tom Colbjornsen, Univ. of Bergen
Canada	1983	John Myles, Carlton Univ.
Finland	1981	Raimo Blom, Univ. of Tampere
U.K.	1983	Howard Newby, Univ. of Essex
New Zealand	1984	Chris Wilkes, Massey Univ.
W. Germany	1985	Herman Strasser, Univ. of Duisburg
Denmark	1985	Jens Hoff, Univ. of Copenhagen
Australia	1986	John Western, Univ. of Queensland
Japan	1987	Katsu Harada, Meiji Gakuin Univ.

Funding proposals have been submitted in Italy, France and Portugal and a pilot study has been carried out in Poland.

A five nation merged data file including data from the surveys conducted in the United States, Sweden, Norway, Canada and Finland became available through ICPSR in 1986 (Study Number 8413, Class II). The second version is expected to include additional data from the remaining six surveys conducted to date and should be available from ICPSR in 1989.

A proposal was submitted to the NSF in January 1988 for funding of a joint USA–USSR survey 1989 which would replicate many of the questions asked in the earlier survey and

provide additional information on attitudes about worker control of workplace decisions, distributive justice and economic change; work history; household economy and participation in the informal economy. This survey is also to be fielded in Hungary.

References

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