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THE AFFLUENT WORKER AND THE THESIS OF *EMBOURGEOISEMENT*: SOME PRELIMINARY RESEARCH FINDINGS

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Abstract Historically, interest in the affluent worker has centred on the presumed *political* consequences of rising living standards among the industrial labour force. In Britain in course of the 1950s, it was frequently argued that growing working-class prosperity was a major factor in Conservative election victories; affluence was held to be associated with a process of *embourgeoisement*, of which increased Conservative voting among manual workers was an important part. However, a study of what might be regarded as a critical sample of affluent workers reveals little evidence of changes in the direction of 'middle-classness'. In order to achieve a high level of income, many of these men must experience greater deprivation in their working lives than do most white-collar employees; they also differ from the latter in having little chance of occupational advancement. In their home lives, they are largely 'privatized'. They no longer share in traditional patterns of working-class sociability, yet few have adopted middle class life-styles and fewer still have become assimilated into middle-class society. Finally, these workers are found to be at least as strong in their support of the Labour Party as manual workers in the country generally.

THE theme of 'the affluent worker' is not new: it has been a recurrent one from the earliest years of Western industrial society. It antedates, in fact, the Marxian themes of 'proletarianisation' and the growing impoverishment of the industrial labour force. For example, around the year 1790, John Millar of Glasgow, one of the great Scots forerunners of modern sociology, made the following observations on the society of his day:

When a country . . . is rapidly advancing in trade, the demand for labourers is proportionately great; their wages are continually rising, instead of soliciting employment, they are courted to accept of it; and they enjoy a degree of affluence and importance which is frequently productive of insolence and licentiousness.

That the labouring people in Britain have, for some time, been raised to this enviable situation is evident from a variety of circumstances, from the high price of labour; from the absurd attempt of the legislature to regulate their wages, and to prevent them from deserting particular employments; from the zeal displayed by the lower orders in the vindication of their political, as well as of their private rights; and, above all, from the jealousy and alarm with which this disposition has, of late, so universally impressed their superiors.¹

This passage is of interest, and is quoted, not only because of its date. It is also significant because it provides the basic pattern for most subsequent discussion on the matter of the affluent worker. This pattern is as follows. First, reference is made to aspects of economic progress—in Millar's case, the rapid growth of trade

and rising demand for labour—which are directly responsible for the spread of prosperity. Secondly, certain consequences of this affluence are postulated for workers' social consciousness and conduct—for Millar, increasing awareness of their social importance, the decline of deference, independence vis-a-vis employers, and so on. Then finally, these developments are in turn related to certain significant features of the current *political* situation—in 1790, the concern of the lower orders to claim political as well as civil rights. In other words, underlying Millar's observations there is a theory—which he in fact develops more explicitly elsewhere in his work²—of the primarily economic determination of political behaviour and institutions, with changes in the objective and subjective aspects of social stratification being seen as a crucial mediating process.

A broadly comparable theory is, of course, central to the work of Marx and Engels. Indeed Millar may well have been an important influence in the development of Marx's sociological thinking.³ However, on the particular question of the affluent worker, the interesting point is that this theoretical affinity co-exists with a complete reversal of perspective. Millar, as we have seen, regarded the growing affluence of the labouring population as a threat to the established hierarchy of social ranks and to the political system associated with this. For Millar, the affluent worker was a potentially dynamic factor in a relatively stable social order. For Marx and Engels, on the other hand, the more prosperous stratum of the working class was an essentially conservative element, hindering the growth of true working-class consciousness and of a revolutionary working-class movement, and thus holding back the inevitable crisis of capitalist society.

Engels, in particular, gave a good deal of attention to this problem of working-class conservatism in his writings of the 1870s and 1880s.⁴ In this he was activated chiefly by the failure of the industrial workers of Great Britain to exploit the new franchise of 1867 and to secure working-class dominance in Parliament. Engels' explanation of this failure emphasized the British worker's craving for 'respectability' and enhanced social status which thus led to a willingness, indeed eagerness, to accept bourgeois social values, life-styles, and political ideas. But Engels then went on to argue further that this process of the *embourgeoisement* of the British working class had itself to be explained by reference to Britain's exceptional economic position in the mid-nineteenth century as the world's leading industrial nation. Only because of this national economic supremacy was it possible for the theory of working class 'immiseration' to be controverted and for a sizeable section of the British labour force to enjoy living standards which were such as to encourage their bourgeois aspirations. In this way, then, in spite of their radically different standpoints, Engels' analysis is very similar to Millar's in its basic form. In their discussion of the affluent worker, both are ultimately interested in a certain political situation; and this they seek to understand in terms of the dynamics of social stratification, which they in turn relate to the secular trend of economic development.

From the end of the nineteenth century, a Marxian, or more accurately, a para-Marxian perspective on the question of the affluent worker has been the dominant one; that is to say, it has been generally argued (or assumed) that affluence is conducive to *embourgeoisement* which itself leads to political conservatism, or at any rate to political apathy, within the working class. During certain periods of labour unrest and socialistic fervour, such arguments may have been somewhat subdued; but, unfailingly, they have re-emerged with conditions of greater economic and political stability. However, one basically important development from the original Marxian position should be noted. With the decline in faith in the predictive aspects of Marx's thought, *embourgeoisement* has ceased to be regarded as a purely temporary process which would sooner or later be checked and reversed as part of the logic of the auto-destruction of the capitalist system. Rather, it has come to be seen as a permanent and progressive process which is inherent in the 'affluent society' of the modern West and which reflects, in fact the logic of the long-term evolution of *industrialism*. The industrial society of the future, it has been claimed, will be an essentially 'middle-class' society; as the age of scarcity gives way to the age of abundance, the idea of a working class with its own distinctive way of life, values, and goals is one which becomes increasingly obsolete.⁵

So far as Great Britain is concerned, this new version of the *embourgeoisement* thesis came to particular prominence in course of the last decade. The circumstances which lent it force are now part of the familiar history of these years and we need refer to them here only very briefly. Economically, the 1950s were characterized by a relatively rapid rise in living standards and, most significantly, by a marked growth in the number of 'middle-range' incomes. This resulted in an increasing overlap, in terms of income, between those in white-collar and manual occupations; and, concomitantly, former differences in patterns of consumption were also much reduced as manual workers considerably increased their ownership of consumer durables and, in a growing number of cases, began to buy their own homes. Politically, these same years were ones of undisputed Conservative dominance. The three successive electoral victories of the Conservative party, with rising majorities, were without historical parallel, while the Labour vote showed ominous signs of secular decline. Moreover, there were indications that in the areas of the country which were economically most progressive, this fall in the Labour vote was due to some significant extent to loss of support from among the industrial working class, either through defections or through new voters failing to follow in the traditional pattern.

In these circumstances, then, it can scarcely be regarded as surprising that the thesis of the progressive *embourgeoisement* of the British working class should prove to be an attractive one. The argument that British society was becoming increasingly middle-class provided the obvious means of linking together the outstanding economic and political developments of the period. It was, in fact, an argument

accepted by spokesman of both the right and left, by numerous journalists and social commentators, and by not a few political scientists and sociologists. However, the existence of this general consensus of opinion did not alter the fact—though it may have served to obscure it—that the thesis of ‘the worker turning middle-class’ lacked any satisfactory validation. It remained merely as an assumption, or at best an inference, which it seemed reasonable to make in interpreting the socio-political situation in Britain at the end of the 1950s. Although the circumstantial evidence might be persuasive, very little *direct* evidence could be presented to support the specific proposition that manual workers and their families were in the process of being assimilated on a relatively large scale into middle-class ways of life and middle-class society.⁶

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This situation may be regarded as the point of departure of the research project on which this paper gives a preliminary report. Primarily, the aim of the project was to investigate the thesis of working-class *embourgeoisement* in an empirical way, and with it the generally accepted view of the relationship between working-class affluence and working-class politics in contemporary British society. From the outset we felt, on theoretical grounds, that this view was a highly questionable one. Thus, in planning our project we decided to seek a *locale* for the field research which would be *as favourable as possible* for the validation of the arguments about which we were doubtful. In this way, we gave ourselves the possibility of providing a test of the *embourgeoisement* thesis which might be critical in the sense that if it were to be shown that a process of *embourgeoisement* was *not* in evidence in the case we studied, then there would be strong grounds for arguing that such a process was unlikely to be occurring to any significant extent within British society at large.

This strategy involved, therefore, first, an attempt to specify theoretically what a *locale* of the kind in question would be like; and then, secondly, discovering some adequate real-life approximation. These proved to be no easy matters. Eventually, though, it was decided that the town of Luton would come nearest to meeting our requirements, and for the following major reasons: (i) it was a prosperous and rapidly growing industrial centre in an area of the country now experiencing general economic expansion; (ii) in consequence of this, the town’s labour force contained a high proportion of geographically mobile workers; (iii) also in consequence of the town’s rapid growth, a high proportion of its population lived in relatively new housing areas; and (iv) the town was somewhat removed from the older industrial regions of the country and was thus not dominated by their traditions of industrial relations and of industrial life generally.⁷

We thus based our research primarily upon a sample of 229 manual workers drawn from the hourly-paid employees of three progressive manufacturing firms sited in Luton.⁸ All these firms had advanced personnel and welfare policies and were noted for their good industrial relations records. Our sample was limited to men who were (i) between the ages of 21 and 46; (ii) married; (iii) earning regularly

at least £17 per week (October 1962); and (iv) resident in the town of Luton itself or adjacent housing areas. The sample was also constructed so as to enable comparisons to be made between workers at different skill levels and involved in different types of production system.⁹ For further comparative purposes, we also took a sample of 54 lower-level white-collar workers based on two of the firms. The manual workers were interviewed twice; once at their place of work and then again, together with their wives, in their own homes. The white-collar workers were interviewed at home only.¹⁰

Our manual workers proved to have a broadly comparable range of incomes to the white-collar workers and also differed little from the latter in their ownership of various high-cost consumer goods and in house ownership. Other characteristics of the manual sample which should be noted were the following: (i) a majority (55 per cent) lived outside of typically working-class localities such as those in the centre of the town or the council estates; (ii) 71 per cent were not natives of Luton or of the Luton district; and (iii) only 13 per cent had ever had the experience of being unemployed for longer than a month. We would then claim that such a sample could be regarded as one that was reasonably appropriate to our purposes.

We cannot here present anything like a full account of the findings of our research; for apart from obvious limitations of space, the analysis of our material is still incomplete.¹¹ What we aim to do is to set out some general results which have a direct bearing on what we believe must be regarded as major elements in the *embourgeoisement* thesis. In an earlier paper distinctions were made between the economic, normative and relational dimensions of change in class structure;¹² and it is in terms of these that the following discussion proceeds. First, we shall be concerned with some basic features of the work situation of the men in our sample. This is a most important aspect of their class situation viewed in economic terms—although one which has tended to be neglected because attention has been focussed on ‘affluence’ in the sphere of consumption. However, from our standpoint, it is not enough to know that certain manual workers can earn high incomes: what must also be known is under what conditions this affluence is achieved, and their human and social implications. Secondly, in regard to both the normative and relational aspects of class, we present data on the nature and extent of our workers’ participation in community life; including data on the further vital but again often neglected question of the extent to which the manual-nonmanual division in work continues to coincide with a major line of status-group demarcation. Then finally, and again under the normative heading, we concentrate on the political attitudes and behaviour of our sample. As we have already observed, political orientations have been the matter of ultimate interest in most discussions of ‘the affluent worker’ thus far; and it is for this reason that they are singled out for special attention in this paper.

(i) *Employment and the work situation.* An obvious but basic fact about the men in our sample is that they are ‘affluent’ primarily because of their employment in large-scale, technologically advanced manufacturing enterprises. Their role as

wage workers in such enterprises is indeed fundamental to the understanding of their entire social existence. On the one hand, it is through filling this role that they are able to achieve a level of income which makes a 'middle-class' standard and style of living available to them. On the other hand, however, it can be shown that, as rank-and-file industrial employees, their typical life experiences and life chances are in several ways significantly different from those of most workers in distinctively 'middle-class' occupations.

To begin with, it could be said that many of the workers with whom we were concerned appear to experience their work as little more than mere *labour*; that is, as an expenditure of effort which offers no reward in itself and which is motivated primarily by the extrinsic reward of payment. It is true that the men performing the more skilled jobs—toolmakers, millwrights, setters—could derive some degree of satisfaction directly from their work. But for the large number of those in the less skilled jobs—in particular, the machinists and assemblers—it was rather the case that their work, as experienced, involved various kinds of *deprivation*; for example, lack of variety, lack of challenge, lack of autonomy and often too relatively unpleasant physical conditions.

This situation was indicated by the answers we received to a number of questions in our interview schedule. For instance, of the machinists and assemblers, 60 per cent reported that they found their work monotonous, 84 per cent that it did not command their full attention, and 47 per cent that it was physically tiring. Moreover, we also asked our respondents in a quite general way: 'Did you like any of your other [i.e. previous] jobs more than the one you have now?' In the case of the machinists and assemblers 62 per cent said that they had, as too did 47 per cent of the more skilled men and 44 per cent of the process workers. And the reasons given revealed that overwhelmingly these men assessed previous jobs as being preferable on the grounds of the greater *intrinsic* rewards which they had offered when compared with their present work or, at any rate, because the deprivations they had entailed were less severe. The kinds of jobs most frequently referred to in this respect were either ones at a higher skill or status level than the individual's present work, or jobs in agriculture, transport, services, and other forms of employment which do not usually involve the physiological or psychological rigours of mass-production industry. Over a quarter of the more skilled workers and over three-quarters of the semi-skilled men has held jobs in one or other of these two categories at some earlier time in their working lives.

The implication of these findings is, then, that for a sizeable proportion of the workers in our sample, their attachment to their present employment is mainly of a pecuniary kind. In other words, it would appear that these men have in some way arrived at a decision to abandon work which could offer them some greater degree of immediate satisfaction in order to take a job which enables them to gain a higher level of monetary reward. Confirmation that such an instrumental view of work was in fact the prevalent one, within all groups in the sample, was provided

by the answers we received to a further question of a more direct kind. After enquiring of our respondents if they had ever seriously thought of leaving the firms for which they now worked—just under half said they had—we went on to ask: ‘What is it, then, that keeps you here?’ From the replies which were made, it was clear that by far the most important consideration was the high level of pay which could be earned. This was mentioned by 65 per cent of the more skilled men and by 69 per cent of the semi-skilled workers. Moreover, of the latter 1 in 4 (24 per cent) stated that ‘the money’ was the *only* reason why they remained in their present employment.¹³ By contrast, less than 1 in 3 (29 per cent) of the skilled men and only 1 in 7 (14 per cent) of the semi-skilled made any mention of staying in their present job because they liked the work they did.

When this same question was put to the men in our white-collar sample, a significantly different pattern of response was produced. Only two men out of the 54 said that they stayed in their present jobs simply because of the level of pay, and only 30 per cent made any reference to pay at all. On the other hand, liking the work they did was the reason which was most frequently mentioned, being given by 2 white-collar workers out of 5 (39 per cent).¹⁴

It would appear, then, that for many of the affluent workers we studied, affluence has been achieved only at the cost of having to accept work as an activity largely devoid of immediate reward—as an activity which is chiefly a means to the end of a high level of income and consumer power. In this respect, the more skilled men may be regarded as fortunate in being able to find high-paying jobs which can also offer some opportunity for fulfilling more expressive needs—even though they too, it would seem, still view their work in a largely instrumental way. For the men lacking in skills—or, more accurately, skills in high demand—the road to affluence has often been a much harder one. Most commonly, on our evidence, it has meant taking and holding down jobs which offer higher pay than do most other types of manual work *because of* their inherent strains and deprivations. In this way, therefore, a ‘middle-class’ standard of income and consumption has been brought within reach; but only through a kind of work which is not typically part of white-collar experience.¹⁵

Moreover, it may also be observed that the nature of the work they perform is not the only cost of affluence to the men in our sample: the amount of work they do and when they do it are also important considerations. Even with the relatively high rates of pay which they enjoyed, the workers we studied could rarely earn wage packets of upwards of £20 for a normal week’s work. For the majority, overtime formed a regular part of their employment and was an essential element in their high standard of living. During the period, in which our interviews were being carried out, we estimate that the men in our sample were averaging around 5½ hours overtime per week. This would imply an average working week of from 48 to 50 hours. Furthermore, three-quarters of those in our sample were also permanently on shift work, which is, of course, an increasingly common aspect

of employment in modern capital-intensive plants. The majority of the men on shifts were required to do regular periods of night work, while the remainder were on some kind of double day-shift system. In this latter group, those who were favourably disposed towards shift work and those who disliked it were roughly equal in number. But among the men who had to work 'nights', unfavourable attitudes were twice as frequent as favourable ones. The most common complaints of these men were to the effect that night working impaired their physical or psychological well-being, that it led to the disruption of family living, and that it interfered with their leisure and 'social' pursuits.

Systematic overtime and shift working must then be seen as an integral part of the way of life of most of the affluent workers we studied. Not only are these characteristic features of their employment, but they also have consequences for workers' activities outside the factory—consequences of a constraining kind. Moreover, in the particular form in which our workers experience them, such constraints could not be said to figure prominently in the social life of those in white-collar occupations.

Finally, on the theme of employment, there is one other way in which the manual workers with whom we are concerned remain significantly differentiated from most varieties of white-collar man. This is in terms of their chances of advancement—of making a career—within the enterprise in which they work. In general, opportunities for rising from the ranks, whether of manual or non-manual employees, are known to be contracting in most kinds of business organization. But still, the prospects for office workers, technicians, sales personnel, and so on are appreciably better than are those for men on the shop floor. For the latter, even where their firms follow policies of 'promotion from within'—as our Luton firms attempted to do—the chances of being promoted must inevitably be slight, if only because of the small number of openings which exist in relation to the large number of possible candidates.

Among the manual workers we studied, the fact that advancement within the enterprise was unlikely was fairly well recognized. In reply to a question on our interview schedule, only two men out of our sample of 229 were prepared to rate their chances of promotion even to foreman level as being 'very good'; 37 per cent of the skilled men and 30 per cent of the semi-skilled though their chances in this respect were 'fairly good', but 37 per cent of the former group and 41 per cent of the latter felt they were 'not too good' and 19 per cent and 25 per cent respectively regarded the position as being 'hopeless'.¹⁶ We also put the following question to our respondents: 'If a worker of ability really put his mind to it, how far up this firm do you think he could get in the end?' The answers we received were clearly influenced by the different 'myths and legends' of the three firms from which our workers came; but overall less than half (45 per cent) believed that such a man would achieve managerial level; 40 per cent thought he would reach a supervisory grade, and most of the remainder (13 per cent) said that he would get nowhere at all.

When comparable questions were put to our white-collar sample, a notably different picture emerged: 63 per cent believed that their chances of promotion to the next highest grade were 'very good' or 'fairly good', as against 37 per cent having more pessimistic views; and similarly, 65 per cent of the sample believed that a rank-and-file white-collar worker with ability and determination would be able to make his way into a managerial position.

These varying assessments of chances of promotion are not only significant in reflecting, as they do, differences in objective life situations: they are important also in the way in which they are associated with marked differences in the entire pattern of aspirations between the two occupational groups in question. For example, among the white-collar workers the greater optimism about promotion coexists with a general desire to achieve advancement within the firm. When asked how they would like the idea of promotion, 87 per cent of the white-collar workers responded positively. By contrast, when the manual workers were asked how they would like the idea of being made a foreman, a positive response was forthcoming from 62 per cent of the more skilled men and from only 43 per cent of the semi-skilled.¹⁷ On the other hand, though, one alternative means of 'getting ahead' had more often been hopefully thought about by the manual workers: nearly two-fifths of the latter (37 per cent) as opposed to one fifth of the white-collar sample (19 per cent) had seriously considered starting up in business on their own account; and in fact there were 28 men in the manual sample (12 per cent) who were actually trying to do this at the time or who had tried in the past.

However, undoubtedly the greatest difference of all in this respect lies in the fact that for manual wage workers—whether affluent or not—the main hope for the future cannot be in 'getting ahead' in any of the more usual 'middle-class' senses. Rather, it must rest in the progressive increase of the rewards which they gain *from their present economic role*. Individually, they can certainly help to realize this by being occupationally and geographically mobile—by being prepared to 'follow the money'. And it was clearly in this way that many of the men in our sample had achieved their affluent condition. But even then, to a greater extent than with most white-collar employees, in industry at least, the economic future of these workers still remains dependent upon *collective* means; that is to say, upon trade-union representation and trade-union power.

In this latter connection, two basic points may be anticipated from the fuller treatment of unionism among our affluent workers which we shall present elsewhere. First, our research provides no indication that affluence diminishes the degree of workers' attachment to unionism—although it may well be important in changing the meaning of this adherence. The factories with which we were concerned were, in effect, quite valuable recruiting grounds for the unions in that they attracted a high proportion of workers who were not union members but who subsequently became enrolled; 38 per cent of the men in our sample had become unionists only after taking up their present employment. Secondly, while

the large majority of the workers we studied could not be said to be men committed to their union as part of a great socio-political movement or even as a 'fraternity', they nonetheless recognized well enough the practical importance of the union and of union strength in regard to the day-to-day issues of industrial relations—and at shop and factory levels in particular. In brief, one could say that for most of the men in question a union was, at least, an organization to which, as wage workers, it paid them to belong; it had definite instrumental value. The fact that the same could now also be said of an increasing number of non-manual employees, notably in commerce and administration, cannot be denied. But this, of course is not so much evidence of *embourgeoisement* as of a reverse process in which the work situation of many white-collar employees is becoming in various ways closer to that of their blue-collar counterparts.

(ii) *Community life.* As we have already noted, the majority of our sample of affluent workers were not natives of Luton. They were, rather, men who had migrated to the town during the last two decades in search chiefly of higher wages and better housing. We have also observed that more than half now live in areas which could not be described as typically working-class. This is closely associated with the fact that a similar proportion (57 per cent) own or are buying their homes. These characteristics of the sample are then perhaps sufficient in themselves to indicate that many of the men we studied do not share in what is thought of as the 'traditional' pattern of community life among urban industrial workers and their families; that is, a pattern based upon residential stability and social homogeneity in which kinship and various forms of communal sociability play a dominant part.¹⁸

On the matter of kinship, this conclusion can be supported more directly by other of our data. For example, as a result of their geographical mobility, a high proportion of the men in our sample had become physically separated from their kin to a degree which made day-to-day contact impossible—and so too had many of their wives. Thus, of those who still had parents alive, only 13 per cent of the men and 18 per cent of the wives had parents living within ten minutes' walk of themselves; and in the case of 56 per cent of the men and 48 per cent of their wives, their parents were all living entirely outside the Luton area. The degree of separation from siblings was slightly less marked, since sometimes they too had moved to Luton. But, even so, only 36 per cent of the couples we studied had a majority of their closer kin (parents, siblings, and in-laws) living in the Luton area. The remaining couples were almost equally divided between those with the majority of their kin living within a 50-mile radius of Luton and those whose kin were for the most part yet further afield.

Given, then, that many of the couples we studied were not members of largely kin-based communities of the traditional working-class kind, the question arises of whether this situation was associated with any shift towards patterns of community life which were more typically middle-class and at the same time with any substantial degree of social mixing with recognizably middle-class persons. For

if *embourgeoisement* is a likely concomitant of working-class affluence, then one would expect that middle-class life styles and society would be most readily sought after among those manual workers who, as well as being affluent, have also been freed from the social controls of an established working-class community and, in particular, from the essentially conservative influence of the extended family. The findings of our research which bear on this point are, in detailed form, rather complex: nonetheless, in general terms they are clear enough and they tend to give little support to the thesis of *embourgeoisement*, at least in the crude form in which it has usually been advanced.

The first point to be made is that in spite of the limits set by physical distance, kin were still relatively prominent in the social lives of the couples we studied. As might be expected, for those couples whose closer kin were for the most part in the Luton area, social contacts with kin were far more frequent than those with persons in any other comparable category, such as neighbours, workmates, or other friends. However, even in the case of the other couples—almost two-thirds of the sample—whose kin were mostly outside of Luton, the part which kin played in their social lives was far from negligible. For example, we asked our respondents, both husband and wife: 'Who would you say are the two or three people that you most often spend your spare time with [apart from spouse and children]? For those couples whose kin were largely in the area, kin made up 41 per cent of the persons named; but still with the remaining couples, 22 per cent of those mentioned were kin nonetheless. Similarly, when we asked wives about the persons they had visited, or had been visited by, during the past week, kin accounted for 52 per cent of the total for wives in the former group but still for 20 per cent for those in the latter. In the case of those couples who were largely separated from their kin, these findings would, then, suggest one or both of two things: first, that the few kin which these couples had in the Luton area tended to be seen quite often and, second, that fairly close contact was kept with other kin regardless of their distance.¹⁹

However, what is perhaps of greatest significance about the couples in question is the way in which their relative isolation from kin is compensated for. Primarily, it would seem, the place of the absent kin is taken not by friends chosen from among the community at large but, rather, by *neighbours*, roughly defined as persons living within ten minutes' walk. For instance, in answer to the question on the two or three people with whom spare time was most often spent, neighbours represented 47 per cent of those mentioned but other friends only 12 per cent.²⁰ Again, on the question of wives' visiting and visitors, neighbours accounted for 54 per cent of those involved and other friends for only 26 per cent. In this connection, a comparison with the white-collar sample is instructive. The white-collar couples, being less mobile, were somewhat less likely to be separated from their kin than the manual sample as a whole; and kin were a clearly more important element in their pattern of sociability than in that of the manual couples who had

moved away from the centres of their kinship networks. But the further interesting difference between these two groups was that the white-collar couples, *in spite of* their greater amount of contact with kin,²¹ also has far more contact with friends who were not neighbours or workmates. Thus, of the persons with whom the white-collar couples spare time was mostly spent, 29 per cent were friends of this kind, and such friends also accounted for 31 per cent of the persons the white-collar wives visited or were visited by.²²

What this suggests to us is, then, that among the affluent workers we studied, middle-class norms had, as yet at least, only a very limited influence on patterns of sociability. In cases where kinship could not provide the basis of social life, these workers and their wives appeared to turn most readily for support and companionship to those persons who, as it were, formed the next circle of immediate acquaintance—that is, persons living in the same neighbourhood. Making numbers of friends from among people with whom their relationships were not in some degree ‘given’, in the way that relationships with kin and neighbours are, was still not a highly characteristic feature of their way of life. Compared with the white-collar couples, they were apparently lacking in motivation, and probably also in the requisite skills, for this kind of social exercise.²³

One further finding from our interviews supports this interpretation. It is a typical feature of middle-class social life that couples entertain each other in their own homes. We therefore asked our respondents how often they had other couples round and who were the people who regularly came. Briefly, what emerged was that the couples in the manual sample did not entertain at home anything like so frequently as did the white-collar couples and, further, that they were more likely to confine such entertaining to their kin. Workmates and neighbours, as well as other friends, were all less often invited than in the case of the white-collar couples.²⁴ In other words, it would seem that among our affluent workers middle-class styles of sociability remain less influential than the ‘traditional’ working-class belief that the home is a place reserved for kin and for very ‘particular’ friends alone.

Finally, there is the question of how far our affluent workers and their wives were actually involved in what might be regarded as middle-class society. To what extent did white-collar persons figure in their social lives? In this respect, the interpretation of our findings is not very difficult. They point fairly clearly to a considerable degree of status segregation. For example, to revert to our question on persons with whom spare time was mostly spent, 75 per cent of those named by couples in the manual sample were also manual workers and their wives, and only 17 per cent were persons of clearly higher status in occupational terms. Moreover, of the latter, 29 per cent turn out to be kin. We can in fact say that 20 per cent of the couples in our sample find their chief companions entirely among their kin and a further 47 per cent entirely among kin or persons of similar occupational status. On the other hand, only a very small minority—about 7 per cent of the sample—appear to associate predominantly with unambiguously middle-class people.

A similar picture also emerges if we turn from informal relationships to examine participation in formal organizations. Such participation was not at a high level among our affluent workers or their wives, and was significantly lower than in the white-collar sample. For the men, the average number of organizations belonged to (not counting trade unions) worked out at less than 1.5 and for the wives was as low as 0.5. However, more relevant than their number for present purposes was the character of these organizations: they were not of a kind likely to lead to association with middle-class people, or at least not in any intimate way. Predominantly, they were ones either almost entirely working-class in membership—such as working-men's clubs, angling or allotment societies—or, if more mixed in their social composition, organizations which had some fairly specific purpose—religious, charitable, sporting etc.—and a well-defined internal hierarchy. What was largely lacking among couples in the sample was participation in organizations with some middle-class membership but with primarily diffuse, 'social' functions—such as, say, drinking or recreational clubs—or participation in organizations of any kind in which other manual workers and their wives were not in a large majority.

In general, then, one may say that there is little indication that the affluent workers we studied are in process of being assimilated into middle-class society. Nor, in the great majority of cases, do they even appear to see in this a style to be emulated. On our evidence there is thus little need, and little basis, for the hypothesis that non-traditional norms and status aspirations accompany these workers' enjoyment of a relatively high standard of living. Furthermore, the small number of cases where some degree of *embourgeoisement* does appear to be in train suggests that many other factors are involved here apart from that of affluence itself. For the most part, those ways in which the social lives of the men and women in our sample do most obviously diverge from a more traditional working-class pattern are, in our view, largely to be explained as the consequences of job and residential mobility, and also perhaps of the constraints imposed by overtime and shift working; that is, as the consequences of certain objective conditions of their relatively prosperous existence to which these workers and their wives have been obliged to adapt. And the *direction* of these changes, we would suggest, is not towards 'middle-classness', but rather towards what might be termed a more 'privatized' mode of living.²⁶ In contrast with the communal and often kin-based sociability of the traditional working-class locality, the characteristic way of life among the couples we studied would appear to be one far more centred on the home and the immediate family; a way of life in which kin and neighbours, although still relatively important, figure in a more selective and limited way, and in which friends and acquaintances in the middle-class style do not, as yet at least, play any major part.²⁶

(iii) *Political orientations.* It was not the aim of our research to provide a direct test of the argument that growing affluence and the process of *embourgeoisement* were causing national, secular decline in the Labour Party's electoral support among the

working class. For this purpose, a very different kind of research design would have been required. With our relatively small sample of affluent workers, we sought not simply to discover the pattern of their voting behaviour but also to set this in its socio-economic context and to form some idea of the *meaning* which party support held for our respondents. However, in presenting our findings in this section some straightforward voting figures are a necessary starting-point and are in themselves not without interest.

At the General Election of 1959, 212 out of our sample of 229 were eligible to vote. Of these 212, 71 per cent reported voting Labour as against 15 per cent Conservative and 3 per cent Liberal, with the remainder abstaining. Some variations in voting occurred between the different occupational groups within our sample, and thus this overall pattern to some degree reflects decisions made in constructing the sample.²⁷ Nonetheless, even allowing for this and for the fact that our respondents were males in the younger age groups, there can be little doubt on these figures that their level of Labour voting was, to say the very least, not lower than that which has been indicated for manual workers generally on the basis of national surveys;²⁸ and this, it may be remarked, was at the election in which the effects of working-class affluence were supposed to have told most heavily against the Labour Party. In fact, our data show that to a very large extent our affluent workers have been quite stable in their support of Labour: 69 per cent have been regular Labour voters from 1945 onwards or from whenever they first voted as opposed to 12 per cent being regular Conservative supporters. Moreover, among the remainder—the uncommitted or ‘switchers’—there was no trend whatsoever towards greater Conservative voting in course of the 1950s. Finally when our respondents were asked how they intended to vote at the forthcoming general election (1964), the division between the two main parties was again 69 per cent Labour, 12 per cent Conservative. Thus, while the data we are able to produce from our sample may be insufficient in themselves to refute conclusively the thesis which links working-class affluence with a political shift to the right, they are at all events conspicuously at odds with this and show, at least, that such a shift certainly does not occur in any necessary and automatic way.

Furthermore, that no simple relationship exists between affluence and vote is also indicated by our more detailed analyses. It is true that within our sample there is a tendency for the degree of Conservative voting to rise slightly with the level of both the husband's and the family's income. Again, the percentage of Conservative voters in the 1959 election was higher among those who reported that their standard of living had risen during the last ten years than it was among those who reported no such rise. However, in both of these cases, it turns out that the relationship in question is much reduced—and sometimes even eliminated—if one holds constant various other factors to which we shall shortly turn. The same limitation, it may be added, also applies to the relationship between Conservative voting and house ownership to which several writers have attached particular

significance.²⁹ And moreover, in this case, the association was not in fact a particularly stable one: 15 per cent of the present owner-occupiers in our sample had been regular Conservative voters as against 7 per cent of those who were not owner-occupiers; but only 12 per cent of the former group compared with 11 per cent of the latter were intending to vote Conservative at the next election.

It would then seem fairly clear that the voting patterns of the workers we studied cannot be satisfactorily explained as any kind of straightforward reaction to their affluent condition. The evidence cannot be made to fit such an interpretation. Instead, our findings would suggest a view which, sociologically, makes far more sense. It is that in seeking to understand the voting behaviour of the men in our sample, major emphasis must be placed not on variables relating to their income, possessions, or standard of living generally, but rather on the similarities and differences in their social experiences and social relationships within the main milieux of their daily existence. In other words, one must not jump directly from economic circumstances to political action but should focus one's attention, rather, on the social reality which lies, as it were, behind these circumstances and which at the same time makes the political action meaningful.

Consider, for example, the salient fact that, notwithstanding their affluence, the percentage of men in our sample voting Labour is, if anything, higher than one would expect on the basis of national survey data. In the explanation of this, we would suggest, the most relevant considerations include the following: (i) that the men in question are all manual wage workers employed in large-scale industrial enterprises; (ii) that, as such, they are mostly members of trade unions;³⁰ (iii) that, in the vast majority of cases (96 per cent), they have been manual wage workers of one kind or another for most of their working lives; and (iv) that, again in the majority of cases, they were brought up in working-class families (68 per cent) and have married the daughters of such families (63 per cent). Given, then, the typical pattern of past experience and prevailing social relationships which these characteristics imply—and which affluence can scarcely affect—a high Labour vote is no longer very surprising. We can understand it as resulting from a complex of mutually reinforcing traditions and group pressures, exercising their influence at work, in the family and in the local community.

This interpretation, moreover, can be extended and confirmed if we now turn again to the Conservative minority. Our data reveal, as would be predicted, that these Conservative supporters, apart of course from all being wage workers, do not share to the same extent as the rest of the sample the working-class characteristics which have just been set out. Most notably, they are more likely than the Labour voters to be men who have remained outside the union movement (22 per cent against 11 per cent) or who have become union members only in course of their present employment (67 per cent against 39 per cent); and they would also appear generally more likely to have some connection in one way or another with white-collar society—through coming from a white-collar family or having

married into such a family, through having held a white-collar job or having a wife with such a job.³¹ It is, then, factors such as these which can modify—sometimes considerably—the relationship between Conservative voting and the economic variables to which we earlier referred. For example, of the non-unionists in the sample, 20 per cent intended voting Conservative in 1964 as compared with only 11 per cent of the union members; and within these two categories no association between income and vote is any longer apparent. Similarly, if we divide up the sample according to the degree of individuals' 'white-collar affiliation', we find that 21 per cent of those in the 'high' group are intending Conservative voters as against 10 per cent in the 'intermediate' group and only 7 per cent in the 'low' group.³² And once more, income level appears to have no effect on vote when this further factor is held constant. In these ways too, therefore, it becomes evident that the link between affluence and vote is, at most, an indirect and uncertain one. The Conservative voters in our sample illustrate this point no less than the affluent supporters of Labour.

Finally in this section, we turn from the social correlates of party choice to a consideration of the voting behaviour of our respondents from their own point of view. In our interviews, we asked all those who had formed a fairly stable attachment to a party the reason for this; and the analysis of replies we received, in the case of the Labour majority in particular, are an important supplement to the foregoing discussion.

To begin with, the emphasis which we previously gave to certain class characteristics in understanding the high Labour vote in our sample is quite strongly confirmed by Labour supporters' own explanation of their position. By far the most frequent kind of reason given for an attachment to the Labour Party was one phrased in terms of class and of class and family custom: the Labour Party was the party which 'stands for the working class', which 'looks after ordinary working people like us' or, simply, the party which 'working-class people vote for'. In fact, 70 per cent of the 147 regular Labour supporters supplied answers giving reasons in this vein. In the way, therefore, these men would appear to differ little from the mass of Labour voters in the country as a whole. Abrams, for example, has reported on the basis of a national survey, carried out in 1960, that Labour is regarded by the large majority of its adherents as being an essentially 'class' party.³³ To this extent, then, there is again evidence that affluence has, in itself, done little as yet to erode the class basis of Labour support.

At the same time, though, it is worth noting that the only other kind of explanation which Labour voters at all frequently provided was one which indicated an attachment to the party of a somewhat less affective and more calculative nature. Just under a quarter (24 per cent) gave reasons for their support in terms of particular material advantages which they expected to gain from certain aspects of Labour's policy—in relation, for instance, to social services or the management of the economy. Such a position is not, of course, in any way inconsistent with a

sharp awareness of 'class' interests: nonetheless, where an outlook of this kind prevails, the tie to the Labour Party is one which could quite conceivably be broken—even if only temporarily—given circumstances which make Conservative policy appear the more attractive in economic terms. And there are other data from our interviews which suggests this same possibility.³⁴

However, it should be added here that it was among the Conservative voters that calculative attitudes of the sort in question were most strongly in evidence. Exactly half of the 24 'stable' Conservative voters stated that they supported this party because they believed that they personally were better off economically under Conservative government or because they felt that the Conservatives had the better men and policies for creating general prosperity. On the other hand, instances of a more traditionalistic attachment to the Conservatives of a 'deferential' kind were rare; and more relevantly from the point of view of the *embourgeoisement* thesis, we were able to find no evidence at all of the 'socially aspiring' Conservative—that is, of the manual worker who votes Conservative because of the higher status which he feels this action serves to symbolize. In this connection, it should be remembered that the Conservative supporters in our sample, to a greater extent than the Labour voters, were likely to be cross-pressured—with white-collar relationships and experience set in opposition to their present role and status as industrial workers. In their case, thus, a largely instrumental view of politics is perhaps to be more expected than any tendency to regard party choice as an attribute of class or status group membership.

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Our conclusion to this last section may, we believe, usefully serve as our conclusion to this paper as a whole. The point emerging from the foregoing discussion which carries most general significance is, in our view, the following: that the dynamics of working-class politics cannot be regarded as forming part of any inexorable process of social change deriving from continually rising standards of living. Certainly, the sequence, assumed in much previous discussion, of affluence—*embourgeoisement*—Conservative voting is generally unsupported by our findings. The acquisition by manual workers and their families of relatively high incomes and living standards does not, on our evidence, lead to widespread changes in their social values and life-styles in the direction of 'middle-classness'; neither would it appear to be conducive to a political shift to the right, or in any way incompatible with a continuing high level of support for Labour. 'Middle-classness' is not, after all, simply a matter of money; and politics has never been reducible to a mere epiphenomenon of economic conditions. The position of a group within a system of social stratification is not decisively determined by the income or possessions of its members, but rather by their characteristic life-chances and experiences and by the nature of their relationships with other groups. And it is in this context that their politics must be understood—a context which changes much more slowly than the relative levels of wages and salaries or patterns of consumption.

Our affluent workers remain, in spite of their affluence, men who live by selling their labour power to their employers in return for wages; and, in all probability, they will still be so at the end of their working days. Again, although they and their families enjoy a standard of living comparable to that of many white-collar families, their social worlds are still to a large extent separate from those of the latter, except where bridges of kinship, or to a lesser degree of neighbourhood, can span the social distance between them. Nor is there much indication that affluence has encouraged the desire to *seek* acceptance in new social milieux at higher status levels. Thus, we would suggest, there is, as yet at least, little basis for expecting any particular change in the political attitudes and behaviour of these workers, apart perhaps from the spread of the more calculative—more rational—outlook to which we have referred.

We do not, of course, seek in this way to rule out the possibility that at some future date, when working-class affluence is more general and of longer standing, it may prove to have political implications of major importance. But in this case, we would argue, what still remains entirely uncertain is what these implications will be. The assumption that they will necessarily favour the Right, and social and political stability, has no firm basis: it may equally well be that by 1990 a latter-day John Millar will be again invoking the affluent worker as the source of social dissent and of political radicalism.

Notes

1. John Millar, 'The Advancement of Manufactures, Commerce, and the Arts, since the Reign of William III; and the Tendency of this Advancement to diffuse a Spirit of Liberty and Independence', an essay appended to *An Historical View of the English Government from the Settlement of the Saxons in Britain to the Revolution in 1688*, London: Mawman, 1803.
2. See John Millar, *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*, London: Murray, 1779; cf. also W. C. Lehmann, *John Millar of Glasgow*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960, Ch. XI esp.
3. Cf. R. L. Meek, 'The Scottish Contribution to Marxist Sociology' in John Saville (ed.), *Democracy and the Labour Movement; essays in honour of Dona Torr*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1954.
4. See, in particular, 'The English Elections', 1874 and 'Trades Unions', 1881; cf. also Engels' letters to Marx, 7 October 1858; to Marx, 18 November 1868; to Kautsky 12 September 1882; to Kelley-Wischnewetzky, 10 February 1885; and to Sorge, 7 December 1889. All the above are reprinted in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *On Britain*, Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953.
5. For a critical discussion of theories of this kind, see John H. Goldthorpe, 'Social Stratification in Industrial Society' in P. Halmos (ed.), *The Development of Industrial Society*, Sociological Review Monographs, No. 8, Keele, 1964.
6. For an elaboration of this argument, see David Lockwood, 'The "New Working Class"', *European Journal of Sociology*, Tome I, 1960, No. 2, 248–259, and John H. Goldthorpe and David Lockwood, 'Affluence and the British Class Structure', *Sociological Review*, n.s. 11 (1963), 133–163.
7. The theoretical basis for our choice of Luton will be given in full in our final report on the research. However, further relevant discussion of factors favourable to *embourgeoisement*

can be found in David Lockwood and John H. Goldthorpe, 'The Manual Worker: Affluence, Aspiration and Assimilation', paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the British Sociological Association, 1962.

8. Vauxhall Motors Ltd; The Skefko Ball Bearing Co. Ltd; and Laporte Chemicals Ltd.
9. Three different skill levels were represented: 56 men were craftsmen (toolmakers, millwrights and other maintenance men from Skefko and Laporte); 23 were setters (from Skefko); and 150 were semi-skilled production workers. This latter category comprised men in jobs which were characteristic of the main type of production system operating in each of our three firms: viz. Vauxhall assemblers (86) Skefko machinists (41) and Laporte process workers (23). In effect, then, our sample was one of a population made up of men who met the criteria referred to above and who were employed in certain selected occupations in the three firms with which we were concerned. Caution must be exercised in regard to data relating to the sample as a whole in cases where there are marked differences between the occupational groups on which the sample is based; for in these cases 'overall' figures will reflect the weight given to particular groups through variations in our sampling ratios. Where references are made in the text to the sample as a whole without qualification, it may be assumed that inter-occupational differences are not, so far as we can discover, of any great significance.
10. The response rate for the manual workers (i.e. on the basis of the 229 agreeing to both interviews) was 70 per cent and for the white-collar workers, 72 per cent.
11. We would emphasize the preliminary nature of all the findings reported in this paper. The detailed results of our research will be presented in monographs dealing with different aspects of the study—industrial, political etc.—and these monographs will then, it is hoped, provide the basis for a final report aiming at a *vue d'ensemble*.
12. Goldthorpe and Lockwood, 'Affluence and the British Class Structure', pp. 135–6. In general, the 'Note on Concepts and Terminology' appended to 'Affluence and the British Class Structure' has been followed throughout the present text.
13. The factor next most frequently referred to—by 47 per cent of the more skilled men and 33 per cent of the semi-skilled—was that of security; and in many cases it was made clear that the main concern here was with long-run income maximization rather than with the minimum requirement of having a job of some kind. Also worth noting is the fact that those men who said they *had* thought of leaving gave reasons for this in preponderantly *non-economic* terms; less than 1 in 12 (7 per cent) referred to any dissatisfaction with pay. On the other hand, in the reasons given by semi-skilled men, the nature of their work and working conditions figured more prominently than any other source of discontent.
14. Of the 35 white-collar workers who had thought of leaving, poor pay was given as a reason by 9 (26 per cent) and together with the desire for wider job experience was the reason most often mentioned.
15. For a more detailed discussion of the working lives of the assemblers in our sample, see John H. Goldthorpe, 'Attitudes and Behaviour of Car Assembly Workers: a deviant case and a theoretical critique', *British Journal of Sociology*, 17 (1966), 227–244.
16. We asked: 'One way a worker might improve his position is by getting promotion, say, to a foreman's job. If you decided to have a go at this how would you rate your chances of getting to be a foreman? Would you say they were very good, fairly good, not too good or hopeless?' There were 4 'Don't knows'.
17. The white-collar workers were asked: 'What about the idea of promotion? Would you like this very much, quite a lot, not very much, not at all?' The manual workers were asked: 'How about the idea of becoming a foreman? Would you like this very much, quite a lot not much, not at all?'

18. For a useful survey of the research on the basis of which some generalized picture of the 'traditional' working class way of life may be formed, see Josephine Klein, *Samples from English Cultures*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965, vol. I, ch. 4.
19. Even in the case of the third of the sample the majority of whose kin were located more than 50 miles from Luton, the proportion of kin among the persons with whom spare time was most often spent remained at 22 per cent, and kin also accounted for 16 per cent of the wives' visiting partners.
20. The remaining 19 per cent (after adding in the 22 per cent who were kin) were workmates or ex-workmates. The 'neighbours' category includes 'ex-neighbours'; i.e. persons whom the respondents first came to know when they were living within ten minutes' walk.
21. Kin accounted for 31 per cent of the persons with whom the white-collar couples reported most often spending their spare time, and for 28 per cent of the wives' visiting partners.
22. As against 15 per cent and 41 per cent respectively who were neighbours. The remaining persons mentioned by the white-collar couples as leisure time companions were workmates.
23. In regard to the comparisons which we have made both between the white-collar couples and the manual couples who are largely separated from their kin and between the latter group and the other manual couples, it should be noted that no great differences occur in the actual numbers of persons mentioned either as leisure time companions or as wives' visiting partners. Thus, to think in terms of the 'substitution' of neighbours (rather than of other friends) for absent kin would appear appropriate.
24. The questions asked were: 'How about having other couples round, say for a meal, or just for the evening: how often would you say you do this, on average?' and then 'Who is it you have round—are they friends, relatives or who?' 15 per cent of the manual sample as against 7 per cent of the white-collar sample said that they never had couples round, and 54 per cent as against 76 per cent said they entertained in this way once a month or more. Of the couples entertained by the manual workers, 57 per cent were kin compared with 45 per cent in the case of white-collar workers.
25. Cf. Goldthorpe and Lockwood, 'Affluence and the British Class Structure', pp. 150–155.
26. As evidence of the degree of 'privatization' within the sample it may be noted that on the question of the two or three people with whom spare time was most often spent, 7 per cent of the couples could not mention even one person in this connection and 21 per cent could only mention one between them. The average number referred to by husband and wife together was under three. Again, in the case of visits made by and to the wives, the range of persons involved appears much narrower than that suggested in most studies of the 'traditional' worker. Only 3 per cent of the wives mentioned seeing more than 6 people in this way during the past week, and 51 per cent mentioned only one person or none at all.
27. The Labour vote in the five main occupational groups was as follows: craftsmen, 76 per cent; setters, 52 per cent; process workers, 77 per cent; machinists, 76 per cent; assemblers, 68 per cent. Similar variation occurs in all other voting data referred to subsequently.
28. See, for example, the data presented in Robert R. Alford, *Party and Society*, London: John Murray, 1963, ch. 6 and Appendix B.
29. See, for example, Mark Abrams *et al.*, *Must Labour Lose?*, London: Penguin Books, 1960, pp. 42–43.
30. Overall, 87 per cent of the sample were union members. All the setters and machinists belonged to a union and so too did 88 per cent of the craftsmen, 78 per cent of the process workers and 79 per cent of the assemblers.
31. Of the Conservative voters, 45 per cent had white-collar connections in at least two of these ways—through both their parents or parents-in-law and through their own or their wives' occupational experience. The corresponding figure for the Labour voters was 23 per cent. (These figures and those in the text relate to intended vote, 1964.)

32. The 'high' group comprized men with white-collar connections through both their parents or parents-in-law and through their own or their wives' occupational experience; those in the 'intermediate' group had connections in one or other of these ways; and those in the 'low' group had no such connections.
33. Op. cit., pp. 12-14.
34. For example, in reply to a question on whether it would make any difference which party won the next election, a third of the intending Labour voters felt that it would not. And when attention was in this way directed to proximate and current issues, even those who felt that the election result would make a difference tended to see this largely in terms of social welfare and other economic 'pay-offs' which they might expect from a Labour victory, rather than in terms of 'the working class in power' or the implementation of socialist ideas.

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