

Unit 26

Class

Contents

- 26.1 Introduction
- 26.2 The Concept of Class
- 26.3 Theories of Class Structure
- 26.4 Class Struggle
- 26.5 Social Mobility
- 26.6 Classlessness
- 26.7 Conclusion
- 26.8 Further Reading
- 26.9 References

Learning Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to discuss the

- sociological perspective on class
- interrelationship between classes
- movement between class positions

26.1 Introduction

Prior to the French Revolution, the term 'class' was used in a general sense as in the writings of Adam Smith, Madison and other scholars of the eighteenth century. Several of them used it interchangeably with 'group' or 'estate'. It was in the nineteenth century that class as a category came to be recognised as a relevant concept in explaining social theories, ideologies, social movements, social structure, and social change. The heuristic potential of 'class' was particularly important in the context of social stratification. In fact, class was identified as one of the most significant basis of stratification in society. Several sociologists have proposed theories of class structure and explained the phenomena of mobility between class positions. In this unit, we begin with the meaning and concept of class and class society and then explore the sociological perspective on class and the theoretical approaches crucial to understanding class and classless society in sociological writings. We also discuss the issue of struggle between classes and mobility between classes.

26.2 The Concept of Class

According to Ossowski (1967), the following three assumptions are common to all conceptions of 'class' society.

- 1) Classes constitute the most comprehensive groups in the social structure. While classes are differentiated groups in society, they are not independent of each other. It is not possible to speak of one class without reference to other classes.
- 2) Division of people into classes concerns social status connected with a system of privileges and discriminations not determined by biological criteria. This implies that each class is accorded certain privileges and discriminations that have a bearing on its social status. Now, the social

status, in this case, has nothing to do with sex or any other criteria that is biological in nature. Evidently, some classes receive more privileges. They occupy higher status in comparison to those who receive more discrimination and occupy lower status. The differentiation and disparity constitutes the basis of social stratification and determines inter-class relations.

- 3) The membership of individuals in a social class is relatively permanent. This does not, in any way, rule out the possibility of transition from one class to another. What is stressed here is the fact that such transition is made by some individuals only. Often, one remains in a particular class throughout one's life.

Against this backdrop, it may be noted that while some classes are treated as superior on the basis of social status, privileges, and discriminations, others are treated as inferior. These socially relevant privileges and discriminations may be of different kinds. In a specific sense, however, the concern here is with wealth and power. This is notwithstanding the fact that Marx identified the privilege of exploiting other men's labour as the fundamental basis of class differentiation. Again, each class occupies a distinct place in the class hierarchy. The awareness of the place of one's class in the class hierarchy is referred to as class-consciousness. Class-consciousness is usually entwined with class interests and class solidarity. The other characteristic of class society is social isolation that refers to social distance and absence of close social contact between classes. One needs to understand that social isolation or lack of interaction between classes fosters class-consciousness and class solidarity that perpetuates class structure. In fact, Marx asserted that consciousness or awareness of class interest and feeling of class solidarity are the guiding basis of identifying a group as class. People belonging to a particular class exhibit distinctive behaviour and make use of specific vocabulary or pronunciation or speech. This implies that, among others, behaviour and speech also sets one class apart from another. These differences as also differences in access to wealth and power together with social distance and isolation of one class from another deepen cleavages between classes. As cleavages deepen and class distance increases, conflict in class interests emerges and conflict between classes becomes common.

There are two fundamental perspectives from which the concept of class may be understood. The first is the nominalist perspective that is identified with the American school of thought; the second is the realist perspective that is identified with the European school of thought. The nominalist perspective treats the class as an ensemble, a conglomeration of people who share common status. The emphasis is on the social status of each individual in terms of respect that others bestow on him/her. In the words of Aron (1969: 71), "Each person enjoys a certain position of esteem or prestige which results from the totality of situations in which he exists, and each situation can be analyzed from three points of view: in relation to property, occupation and power." Surely the place of an individual in the social domain is subjective and dependent on the judgment of the other people. There is, however, agreement on the notion that different individuals hold different positions in society. The position of an individual in hierarchy, as mentioned earlier, is a play of three elements: relations of property, occupation, and power upon which his/ her position is determined in the class structure. It may be understood as this stage that no single element determines the class to which an individual belongs. The emphasis rather is on the sum total of

social considerations. Individuals with similar prestige and status belong to one class. The realist perspective, on the other hand, treats social class as a real ensemble that is determined by material facts and by the collective consciousness of the people. Two ideas emerge from this approach. One is that a class is characterised by collective unity which is real, and the second is that people belonging to a particular class share collective consciousness.

Let us distinguish between the nominalist school and the realist school more clearly.

- 1) The nominalist school lays emphasis on individuals and interpersonal relations while the realist school lays emphasis on collective realities in explaining class.
- 2) The nominalist school postulates that people who have similar status or social prestige constitute a class. When social status changes, the class of a person also changes which means that it is easy to move from one class to another. There is no conflict between classes because the limits and boundaries of classes are not rigid and clearly defined, and more importantly classes are not associated with seizing of power. In simple terms, power is held and exercised by upper classes while the workers are never able to use it. The realist school, on the other hand, asserts that the conflict of power is inherent in relations between the classes. This is due to collective unity and collective consciousness of people belonging to each class. The people of a particular class seek to foster the interests of its own class that are often in conflict with those of other classes and in doing so each class tries to consolidate its own position in society.
- 3) The nominalist school upholds that the collective reality which the realists of boast of does not exist or hardly exists or, if it all, exists unequally while the realists school emphasises that by ignoring collective consciousness in explaining class, the nominalists have missed the essence of what constitutes the class.

The distinction between the American concept of class and the European concept of class proposed by Aron roughly corresponds to the hierarchical view of class and the dichotomous view of class proposed by Ossowski. The hierarchical view is associated with the nominalist position, and the dichotomous view is associated with the realist position.

Box 26.1: Denotation of the Term 'Class'

Ossowski (1967:90) identifies three meanings of the term class each of which has been used in sociological theories and in different accounts of the system of social relations.

- 1) "In the general sense each group which is regarded as one of the basic components of The social of the social structure may be called a 'class' of the social structure,..... In any case such a comprehensive concept includes both estate and caste, and also class in the second and third meanings distinguished here.
- 2) Of the two specifying versions of the concept of class that I should like to consider here, the first shows us a social class as a group distinguished in respect of the relations of property,...

..... Some caste or estate-systems can at the same time be economic class systems, but such a coincidence can only be empirically established. In cases where such a coincidence does apply one can speak of the "class" aspect of caste relation or the "estate" aspect of the class-system.

In a somewhat different meaning it is also possible to speak of the "class" aspect of an estate-system or a caste-system even when the coincidence does not occur, if we assume that between an estate-system and a class-system there holds some more or less complicated causal dependence...

- 3) In the second version specifying the concept of class, the class-system is contrasted with group-systems in the social structure in which an individual's membership of a group is institutionally determined and in which privileges or discriminations result from an individual's ascription to a certain group. In contradistinction to such groups of a caste or estate type, a class in this version is a group of which membership is not assigned by a birth-certificate nor any official document, such as a title of nobility or an act of manumission, but is the consequence of social status otherwise achieved.

The privileges and discriminations, which in this case require no sanction from any source, are not the effect but the cause of the individual's placement in the capitalist or proletarian class: one is reckoned among the capitalists because one possesses capital, and one belongs to the proletariat because one possesses no other source of income than the capacity to hire out one's labour".

26.3 Theories of Class Structure

a) The Classical View: Aristotle

Aristotle (1943) maintained that people are differentiated into three 'elements': one class is very rich; the other class is very poor. The third class occupies a position between the two in being neither very rich nor very poor. Those who are very poor feel too degraded and find it difficult to follow rational principle there is a possibility that they "grow into petty rogues and rascals". Those who are very rich are not willing to submit to authority. They also find it difficult to follow rational principle and are likely to grow into great criminals who commit offences from violence. The poor are not able to command so others often rule them. The rich are given to despising. They demand unquestioning subservience from others and make good masters. The people of middle class follow the rational principle and obey rules. They do not eye others' goods, others do not eye their goods; and they do not make plans against others, others do not make plans against them. They are free from factions and disputes. The presence of a large middle class ensures a well-governed state and safe democracy. Democracies are safer and more permanent than oligarchies because they have a large middle class that has a substantial share in the government.

When there is no middle class, the poor and the rich quarrel with each other and the class that is able to get an upper hold, regards political supremacy as the reward for victory. The result is that it sets up either democracy or

oligarchy that is geared to its own interests and advantage and not of the public rather than a just or popular government.

b) Capitalism and Social Classes: Karl Marx

Here we will critically discuss Marx's views on social classes. We begin with his perspective of social classes in detail and then go on to its critical appraisal.

i) Marx's perspective on social classes

Three periods in history are identified: ancient civilization, feudalism, and capitalism. Each period is marked by a predominant mode of production. Some of the predominant means of production identified by Marx are: primitive communism, ancient empires, feudalism, capitalism, and advanced communism. He clarified that class relations are characteristics of those means of production in which a section of population controls the means of production while others are excluded from it. Those who control the means of production exploit those who transform the means of production into finished products. The mode of production constitutes the basis of class structure. The capitalist or ruling class and the wage labour or the oppressed class makes up the class structure. In Marxian sense, a social class is an aggregate of people who perform the same function in the production process. These classes occupy different positions in the economy. The position that a person occupies in the social organisation of production determines the social class to which he/she belongs. The basic determinant of class is the way in which an individual cooperates with others in the satisfaction of basic needs of food, clothing and shelter. Cooperation implies division of labour and organisation of production. Marx propounded that the first concern of human beings is to satisfy basic needs which forms the basis of production of material life. Once a need is satisfied, new ones emerge. Rising needs create new social relations. Social relationships enfold cooperation of several individuals. The relation between them is governed by struggle because the ruling class owns and controls the means of production. It also exercises control over the moral and intellectual life of the people. The entire law and governance machinery, art, literature, science and philosophy serve the interest of the capitalist class (or the bourgeoisie). This is typical in capitalist mode of production. A vast majority of Marx's writings are concerned with class relations in capitalism. In the capitalist mode of production, the raw material for production, the tools, the land and all that is necessary for production belongs to the capitalist class as its private property. Those who are actually engaged in the production process do not own the means of production. They work for the bourgeoisie by selling their labour, their ability to work, and their expertise for wages by which they subsist. They constitute the non-owning class, the wage labour, or the proletariat. The sale of finished products in the market fetches money that is more than the cost of production. This is the net profit to the capitalist class. It is often reinvested and in this way more and more profit gets generated for the capitalist class. Now, while the labour process and means of production (what Marx calls 'constant capital') does not change quickly, the labour-power (what Marx calls 'variable capital') is pressed hard to maximise the output so that more and more returns from finished products are accrued. 'Surplus value' is the balance between the investment in the labour process and the returns from it (that are appropriated by the capitalist class).

There is no denying that the relationship between the bourgeoisie and the

proletariat is that of antagonism, hostility and strife since the capitalist class tries to exploit the wage labour class while the wage labour class tries to bring about an end to exploitation. Marx believed that class struggle was an important means through which social change could be effected.

Income, consumption patterns, educational attainments, or occupations are clues to the distribution of material goods and of prestige symbols. Income or occupation cannot be a determinant of class position because class is determined by the position of a person in the social organisation of production. Consider the case of two blacksmiths— one running his own shop, the other working in a factory. The two men belong to the same occupation but different social classes. Marx cited several conditions which were crucial for the development of social class: conflict over economic rewards, physical concentration of masses of people and easy communication among them, the development of solidarity and political organisation in place of competition between individuals and organisation for purely economic needs (Bendix and Lipset, 1967). It may be understood at this stage itself that the setting up of large industry brings together several people at one place. It is only natural that there will be competition between them. Common interest against their superior who exploits them for his\her advantage keeps, however, them united. They enter into strife with the capitalist rather than among themselves.

Workers are seen to sacrifice a part of their wages in favour of associations that are constituted of enterprising people representing the wage labour class who put up a strong resistance to exploitation by the capitalist. There is often the possibility that the association takes up a political character. Marx felt that the conflict between the workers and the capitalist class was not born out of struggle for economic advantage only. He emphasised the role of machine production under capitalism too. As machines made way into the production process, the social relations underwent major transformation and human beings came to be mere appendages of the machines. The machines did most of the work of men would only operate them. This deprived the workers of all opportunities to derive psychological satisfaction from their work. Marx referred to the lack of satisfaction as 'alienation of human labour'.

In the words of Bendix and Lipset (1967: 10), "Marx believed that the alienation of labour was inherent in capitalism and that it was a major psychological deprivation, which would lead eventually to proletarian revolution Marx contrasted the modern industrial worker with the medieval craftsman, and — along with many other writers of the period — observed that under modern conditions of production the worker had lost all opportunity to exercise his 'knowledge, judgment and will' in the manufacture of his product". To Marx this deprivation seemed more significant than the economic pauperism to which capitalism subjected the masses of workers.

ii) Appraisal of Marx's Perspective on Class

Marx's ideas on class were subsequently re-considered by later writers many of whom were convinced that the reality of the system of exploitation gets obscured to a great extent in the course of everyday life. This is because in everyday life the process of exploitation is not always obvious and identifiable as it was in slavery or feudalism in which the slave or the serf who worked for the whole day for a meal to fill his belly or the serf who tilled

the land of his lord the whole day to be given a strip of land for his use, could see the clearly that the product of his labour was being kept away from him. The worker in the capitalist society who was given wages in return of his services (which was much less than the value of work the worker had produced) could not easily notice the process of exploitation. The other factor that obscures the reality of the process of exploitation in everyday life is that the ideas of the ruling class are reproduced and reinforced in newspapers, electronic media, schools, and other agencies. The working class accepts them innocently and unwittingly as obvious and part of common sense. Often the working class people do not see their situation the way Marx's theory projects. This has been the major reason for the lack of zeal in proletarian revolution.

Lukacs sought to demonstrate that left to its own devices, the working class would never fully understand the necessity of liberating itself through socialist revolution. It needed to be led by socialist thinkers. Louis Althusser blamed 'ideological state apparatuses' such as school and the media for reinforcing the idea that we are individuals in control of our own destiny among the working class people. This shadows the system of exploitation and the position of the working class as victims (Saunders, 1990). A. Gramsci refers to 'class domination' as 'hegemony' known more generally in Marxian theory as the dominant ideology thesis i.e. the existence of a powerful dominant class ideology that stresses the nature of private property and creates an acceptance of the whole capitalist social order among all classes. According to Giddens there are three main sources of class power: the possession of property, qualifications, and physical labour power. These tend to give rise to three-class structure: a dominant/upper class based on property, an intermediate/middle class based on credentials, and a working/lower class based on labour power. What Giddens laid out bears a relationship with the claim of Erik, Wright and Frank Parkin that class relations are determined by access to resources. Frank Parkin was chiefly concerned with the attributes such as race, religions, language and others that serve as the basis by which social collectivities seek to maximise rewards by restricting access to resources and opportunities to a limited group of people whom they treat as eligible. Those who control the 'cultural capital' constitute a 'new class' referred to by Alvin Gouldner as 'cultural bourgeoisie'. The cultural bourgeoisie is in control of cultural capital wherein 'capital' is explained by Gouldner as any produced object that is used to make utilities that can be sold. The processor gets income or claim to income by virtue or the imputed contribution to economic productivity. Gouldner argues that these claims to income are enforced by modifying others' access to capital objects (Wright, 1985). By now, it is evident that there has been a fundamental and conspicuous shift from the thrust on exploitation as the basis of class relations in the capitalist societies to domination as the basis of class relations in the post- capitalist societies.

c) Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society: R. Dahrendorf

The second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century witnessed the legal recognition of joint stock companies in Germany, England, France and the United States. In the present day, joint stock companies have largely replaced the economic enterprises that were owned and managed by a capitalist or his/her family. The stock or the shares of a company are widely dispersed much in contrast to a capitalist set up in which the ownership lies in the hands of a single individual. In the post-capitalist era, the joint

stock companies afford far-reaching implications for the structure of industrial enterprises and for the broader structure of society of which social classes constitute an important component.

In the joint stock companies, the stockholders hold ownership, while the control lies in the hands of managers who are not like the capitalists. This arrangement keeps the owners away from the actual sphere of production and reduces the distance between managers and workers. This is the radical view upheld by Marx himself. The other is the conservative view that asserts that the owners (stockholders) and controllers (managers) are not widely different. They constitute a somewhat homogenous group. The stockholders and managers hold similar outlook and may be treated as similar to the class of capitalists. This view which comes out in the writings of C. Wright Mills (1954) stands out in sharp contrast to Marx's own analysis.

R. Dahrendorf (1959: 95) explained that the, "social structure of joint stock companies as well as co-operative and state owned enterprises differs from that of the classical capitalist enterprise, and that therefore a transition from the latter to the former is a process of social change". He suggested that the separation of ownership and control involved a change in the structure of social positions and also a change in the recruitment of personnel to these positions. This refers to the distribution of the roles of capitalist in two positions the owner, and the manager.

The owners are alienated from production process in the sense that they do not participate in the day-to-day affairs of production enterprise and do not have a defined place in the formal hierarchy of authority in the enterprise. This is so because the workers deal with and are answerable to the managers. It may be recalled that the capitalist exercised authority because he owned the means of production over which the subsistence of the workers depended. The managers on the other hand hold authority by virtue of the property rights delegated to them by the stockholders. Since the managers remain in contact with workers, they seek to exercise their authority with consensus of the workers or else the manual and clerical workers would make their interests felt in many complex and unregulated ways such as by disturbing the process of production significantly. The managers cannot afford to let this happen because the stockholders would reprimand them. Bendix (1956) explained that there are three kinds of entrepreneurs in the post-capitalist era, the capitalist, the heirs, and the bureaucrats. Thus, there is a definite change in the composition of the entrepreneurial class.

Dahrendorf maintained that capitalism has completely eroded and given way to different groups that bear a relationship with each other that is much different from the relationship between bourgeoisie and the proletariat highlighted by Marx. He outlined three effects of this development on class conflict: (i) when managers replace capitalists, there is a complete change in the composition of the groups participating in the conflict; (ii) change in recruitment and composition of the groups participating in the conflict leads to a change in the nature of issues that causes conflict; the managers who are like functionaries without capital do not act, behave and hold attitudes like the all powerful capitalists. Further the interests of the labour towards the new opponents are different; and (iii) the decomposition of capital (referring to differentiation in ownership and control of the means of production i.e. capital) involves a change in the patterns of conflict.

In the course of such developments, the capitalist class and the labour class cease to be homogenous classes. The labour also ceases to be homogenous class (there are unskilled labourers, semi skilled labourers, and skilled labourers, as also those equipped with different skills). The labourers who hitherto treated themselves as a single class with common interests and distinctive class consciousness now become increasingly aware of differences among themselves. This is referred to as decomposition of labour. The twin phenomena of decomposition of capital and decomposition of labour are almost inevitably accompanied with the emergence new middle class both within and outside the industry of modern societies. Lederer and Marschak coined the term 'new middle class'. In post-capitalist societies, the new middle class is constituted of salaried employees in tertiary industries, in commercial firms, in shops and restaurants, in cinemas, as also salaried skilled workers and foremen. The bureaucrats exercise authority and are positionally aligned with the ruling class. While it is true that bureaucrats do not constitute the ruling class, it is widely accepted that they are a part of it and in industrial, political and social conflicts they stand by the side of the ruling class. The other interesting fact is that a large number of salaried employees identify themselves with the interests, attitudes and lifestyles of the higher-ups.

The emergence of the new middle class has a profound impact on the class structure proposed by Marx. Dahrendorf suggested that the bureaucrats add to the bourgeoisie class while the white-collar workers add to the proletariat class. Both the classes become highly heterogeneous in composition, therefore, less united. Like the industrial workers, white color workers, have no property and no authority but they do exhibit many social characteristics that are entirely different from those of the working class. Similarly, though the bureaucrats do exercise authority that the older ruling class did too, they differ from the ruling class in several respects. Much more important than the decomposition of capital and the decomposition of labour, Dahrendorf explained is the question, whether the concept of class continues to remain relevant to the conflict groups of post-capitalist societies. Furthermore, the simplistic dichotomy in class structure in the Marxian framework no longer seems to be valid in explaining the structure and conflict in post-capitalist and advanced industrial societies.

d) Class and Status: Max Weber

Max Weber's major objection to Karl Marx's theory of class was the undue emphasis on the economic aspect. Weber did recognise the importance of the economic aspect of society but he did not rate it as the most important one. He said that specific life chances are created by the way the disposition over material property is distributed among some people who meet competitively in the market for the purpose of exchange. When we talk of disposition over material property, the focus is on owners only who get the monopoly to acquire valued goods while the non-owners are excluded from competing for highly valued goods. In acquiring capital goods and exercising monopoly over them, propertied people get an entrepreneurial function and the chance to share the returns on capital. The non-owners are without property and are able to offer their services, at best their labour while those who have property engage in price wars with them. Now, those who are without property are forced to get rid of their products in order to subsist. Weber explained that 'property' and 'lack of property' are the basic categories of class situation. Those who are propertied, for example, may belong to a

class of renters or entrepreneurs. Those who are without property are differentiated on the basis of services they offer. Thus, neither the propertied or the without property constitute a homogenous category. The former is differentiated on the basis of the kind of property that is usable for returns; the latter is differentiated on the basis of the kind of services that can be offered in the market.

In simple terms, Weber's concept of class has to do with the kind of chance in the market that affords a common condition for an individual's fate. Class situation, therefore, is market situation. It may also be noted that those people whose fate has nothing to do with the chance of using goods or services for themselves in the market such as the slaves do not form a class in the technical sense of the term. They constitute the status group. Weber emphasised that classes are not communities. They represent the basis of communal action (communal action refers to that action which is oriented to the feeling of individuals that they belong together). In Weber's own words (1946:251), "We may speak of a 'class' when (1) a number of people have in common a specific causal component of their life chances, in so far as (2) this component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income, and (3) is represented under the conditions of the commodity or labour markets". The three elements form the class situation that, in more comprehensive sense, is market situation. For Marx, class has to be understood in the framework of an individual position in the structure of production; for Weber class needs to be understood in the framework of the individual's position in the context of the market of exchange.

Other than class, Weber proposed the concept of status groups. Status groups differ from classes in being communities. In place of purely economically determined class situation, status situation assumes importance. Weber said that status situation is determined by social estimation of honour. This honour may be any quality that is shared by the people and held in esteem. Possession of property is not always associated with social honour and, is therefore, not essentially a qualification for acquiring status. Income, family background, education and all those criteria that are valued may be identified as markers of status. People belonging to the same status group may interact with each other on many occasions. Status order refers to the stratification on the basis of honour and lifestyle that characterise status groups. What is interesting to note is the fact that the status honour may be accompanied with honorific preferences such as the privilege of wearing special costume. Furthermore, artistic and literary activity connected with physical labour or used for income generation is treated as degrading work and not held in high esteem. The social honour associated with it declines tremendously. Weber maintained that often status disqualification operates against the performance of physical labour. In Weber's words, (1946, cited here from Bendix and Lipset, 1967: 27), "With over simplification one might thus say that 'classes' are stratified according to their relations to the production and acquisition of goods; whereas 'status groups' are stratified according to the principle of their *consumption* of goods as represented by special 'styles of life'". He further explained that class and status groups are distinguished on another count. Class has a bearing with the market and individual's position in it. There is no order of honour or personal distinctions in the market that is the critical feature of status groups. The status order would get weakened if the same honour were bestowed on people who acquire economic power that bears the stigma of extra-status origin as to those who seek to acquire

status by virtue of their lifestyle. Status however, rises if economic power comes over and above the virtue of lifestyle. It is therefore only natural that those who uphold status order react with peculiar sharpness to pretensions of purely economic acquisition. Status is the predominant and preferable means of social stratification in conditions when acquisition of goods and distribution of goods is fairly uniform and stable. Stratification by status gets pushed into the background and stratification by class becomes important each time economic transformation takes place and technological repercussions set in.

In addition to stratification by class and status, Weber proposed the concept of party as the third element according to which society is stratified. The people who constitute a party are those who have a goal towards which they strive collectively and in a planned manner. The goal may be a cause i.e., a party may seek to realise a programme for ideal or material purposes or the goal may be 'personal' e.g. honour for the leader or followers of the party. Parties may exist in a social club as well. Their action is geared towards acquisition of social power by which is meant the potential to influence communal action.

The existence of a party in a state always presumes the prevalence of rational order and the presence of a staff of persons who are willing to enforce it. In a specific sense, parties may pursue interests that are determined through class situation or through status situation. They may even recruit members from them. They may not, however, be fully class parties or fully status parties. They may be neither of the two. Their means of attaining power may range from violence to canvassing for votes through social influence, bribes, public addresses, or even obstruction in parliamentary proceedings.

Reflection and Action 26.1

Compare and contrast Weber's and Marx's concept of class.

26.4 Class Struggle

As mentioned earlier, competition, strife, conflict, and struggle are inherent among classes in society. Marx propounded that inherent in the structure of classes was the identification of a common 'class enemy' as an entity against which all the members of a class would unite. If there was no class enemy, the people of a class would compete with each other fiercely and there would be no class solidarity or class cohesion. Marx maintained that when a large-scale industry is set up, scores of people come together in the search of avenues for subsistence. Naturally, they compete with each other on several counts. But, their common wages, common interest against their superiors, and other similar conditions keep them united and curtail competition among themselves. The capitalists on the other hand unite in the idea of repression. In the event of united capital, the working class forms associations. The interests that they define are class interests but the struggle of a class against another class is a political struggle. It may be appreciated that the conflict between classes is restricted to the race for economic rewards and resources. It also develops because of psychological suffering that accompanies alienation of labour.

As specialisation and division of labour set in, the labourer gets more and more alienated from the production process. This alienation gets initiated at the time when the 'capitalist represents to the single workman, the oneness and the will of the associated labor. It is developed in manufacture that cuts down the laborer into a detail labourer. It is completed in modern industry, which makes science a productive force distinct from labour and presses it into the service of capital' (Bendix and Lipset, 1966: 10). Marx explained that in a capitalist system, social productiveness, and development of production are carried out at the cost of the laborer. This is done through excessive domination over, and exploitation of the labourers. The labourer is reduced to an appendage of the machine, the work itself loses charm. Labourer loses the motivation to work to his fullest potential. The conditions under which he is made to work are not encouraging. All this is done to accumulate capital. As the urge of the capitalists to accumulate capital increases, the plight of the labourer worsens.

Marx was sure that class conflict under capitalism leading to revolution and consequent overthrow of capitalist class would establish the workers as the major agent of social change. He envisaged that over a period of time, social division would cease to exist and with that would also end the exploitation of one class by another. The change would take place when the dissatisfaction of the workers would convince them completely that capitalism needed to be overthrown and that the way to do it was revolutionary political organisation. The labourer has to emerge as a strong political power and collectively negotiate for power.

Marx's prediction of a proletarian revolution is based on the premise that capitalist society would affirm conditions that establish and consolidate the position of two main classes in society. The bourgeoisie would surrender human values in the "icy waters of egoistical calculation". The proletariat, on the other hand, working in the constraints of factory production given to object degradation that collapses family life, religious beliefs, and national characteristics. They would rise to regain humanity. This prepares conditions for revolution that would usher in a new social order in which the process of material production 'would be consciously regulated by freely associated men'.

Weber, on the other hand believed that relative control over goods and services (that constitute the groundwork for the conception of class), produces income, opens up the possibility of procuring other goods, provides social position, and provisions a certain style of life. Those in common class situation are often led to similar sentiments and ideas but not necessarily to concerted action (Bendix, 1974). Class organisation emerges when there is an economic opponent. Weber (1968) proposed that it becomes important to curtail the competition when the number of competitors increases with respect to the profit span. For doing this, one group of competitors adopts some characteristics of its actual or potential group of competitors. The characteristics are externally identifiable such as language, religion, descent, residence and others. Sometimes associations are formed with rational regulations. Over, a period of time, if monopolistic interests persist, competitors establish a legal order that limits competition through formal bodies. Weber refers to this as domination by virtue of constellation of interest. Monopolisation calls for constitution of a common front against the interests of outsiders and solidarity of those who constitute it. The organisation of the group in defense against the interests of outsiders brings

an end to further competition. The membership to the group is restricted to ensure monopoly; and participation is controlled to ensure solidarity. If the monopoly is rooted in law, and the government enforces restrictions, then it is easy to restrain the competition and exercise control over the members of the organisation. Weber referred to this as domination by 'virtue of authority'.

26.5 Social Mobility

By social mobility is meant transition of individuals from one position in the social hierarchy to another. Here, we restrict the use of the term to mean movement between class positions. The concept of social mobility presupposes that people's position in modern class societies is not determined and fixed by virtue of their birth in a particular class. That an individual has the option to make transition between classes is the very basis of social mobility. The movement from one class to another may occur either in the lifetime of an individual or over a span of a generation or more. When an individual moves from class to another in his/ her own lifetime (for example, a person who joins service as a clerk and through a series of promotions becomes the managing director of a company) the mobility is referred to as 'intra-generational mobility'. On the other hand, when mobility occurs between generations (for example, children carpenters or cobblers become accountants, engineers or doctors and take up higher social positions than those of their parents), the mobility is referred to as 'inter-generational mobility.' Mobility may be both upward (as when the son of a blacksmith adopts the profession of a chartered accountant) or downwards (as when the son of a doctor becomes a typist).

Box 26.2: Social Mobility: Motivation Theory of Veblen

"Those members of the community who fall short of [a] somewhat indefinite, normal degree of prowess or of property suffer in the esteem of their fellow-men; and consequently they suffer also in their own esteem, since the usual basis for self-respect is the respect accorded by one's neighbours. Only individuals with an aberrant temperament can in the long run retain their self-esteem in the face of the dis-esteem of their fellows.

So as soon as the possession of property becomes the basis of popular esteem, therefore, it becomes also a requisite to that complacency which we call self-respect. In any community where goods are held in severality, it is necessary, in order to ensure his own peace of mind, that an individual should possess as large a portion of goods as others with whom he is accustomed to class himself; and it is extremely gratifying to possess something more than others. But as fast as a person makes new acquisitions, and becomes accustomed to the resulting new standard of wealth, the new standard forthwith ceases to afford appreciably greater satisfaction than the earlier standard did. The tendency in any case is constantly to make the present pecuniary standard the point of departure for a fresh increase of wealth; and this in turn gives rise to a new standard of sufficiency and a new pecuniary classification of one's self as compared with one's neighbours. So far as concerns the present question, the end sought by accumulation is to rank high in comparison with the rest of the community in point of pecuniary strength. So long as the comparison is distinctly unfavourable to himself, the normal, average individual will live in chronic dissatisfaction with his present lot; and when he has reached what may be called the normal

pecuniary standard of the community, or of his class in the community, this chronic dissatisfaction will give place to a restless straining to place a wider and ever-widening pecuniary interval between himself and this average standard. The invidious comparison can never become so favourable to the individual making it that he would not gladly rate himself still higher relatively to his competitors in the struggle for pecuniary reputability" (Veblen, 1934:30-32).

It may be understood that in industrial societies, the rate of inter-generational mobility is significant. It is common to find children joining the workforce at a higher position than the one their parents attained when they started work. This happens because, industrial societies lay emphasis on formal qualifications at the time of recruitment. Children of working class parents often gain the qualifications before they set out to look for employment. Further, upward social mobility is more common than downward social mobility because the demand for unskilled manual labour has declined significantly in the wake of technological advancement and the shift from the need for industry workers to service that call for specialisation entail higher position. More and more children find that higher positions are open for them and that opportunities are much more abundant than those available to their parents. Movement across a short range of positions in the social hierarchy is more common than movement across a wide range. People usually find it possible to improve their position marginally than to improve it substantially (Saunders, 1990).

In the context of social mobility in America, Marx noted that the classes have not yet become fixed. There is constant flux of elements between them. Weber emphasised the non-economic forces and the desire for independence among the farm workers in the German economy. In fact, the emphasis on the role of non-economic forces and the differential social mobility of the Catholics and Protestants was the starting point of his thesis on the relationship between the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism. The writings of Marx and Weber greatly influenced Sorokin's study of social mobility in American, English and several other societies.

Sorokin stressed the extent and rapidity of the growth of new middle class of salaried employees in capitalist societies and concluded that large-scale intra-generational and inter-generational mobility occurs in occupational terms. More and more men were found to shift from manual labour non-manual forms of employment. He accepted that children seem to more likely to enter their fathers' occupational groups than any other and that mobility is more likely to occur between occupational groupings within the same class than between groupings in different classes. He maintained that membership of a social grouping consists of two elements, one is the relatively permanent and stable, the other is ever changing with entry into one occupation for a particular span of time then exit from it and entry into another one. Working class cannot be treated as an agency of social transformation for two reasons, (i) there is declining permanent element within the working class and the social democratic and communist affiliations are likely to be rejected by the expanding fluid element, and (ii) the revolutionary capacity of working class gets diminished, since it is made up those who are incapable of socially upward movement on the one hand and the calibre of its leaders on the other hand. Sorokin contents that the mobility rates and mobility patterns do not follow an identifiable design or pattern and even if proletariats

get the opportunity to be dictators, they would not be able to achieve much (Goldthorpe, 1987).

Lipset and Bendix upheld that industrialisation led to high mobility rates. What is more interesting to note is their observation that the overall pattern of social mobility appeared to be the same in the industrial societies of various western countries. This is better known as the Lipset - Zetterberg (or the LZ), thesis (Zetterberg was the co-author of the first paper in which this generalisation was proposed). Lipset and Bendix's study differs significantly from Sorokin's study in that it concentrated on movement from manual to non-manual occupations which they defined as upward mobility despite the fact that they were aware that some white collar positions are lower in income and prestige than skilled manual work. Another crucial study on social mobility in America was that undertaken by Blau and Duncan. They began the study with the assumption that systematic exploration of occupational status and mobility were important in understanding social stratification. They confirmed that the rate of mobility between blue-collar and white-collar occupations was only little among various industrial societies. Their claim was, however, that elite mobility in America was exceptionally high. This was perhaps due to high level of popular education in the United States and lesser emphasis on formal distinctions of social status. They also maintained that most men in America do not attain high occupational status but do get to improve their standard of living hence their social status by way of raising conspicuous consumption. Finally they noted, "The stability of American democracy is undoubtedly related to the superior chances of upward mobility in this country, its high standard of living and the low degree of status deference between social strata for these condition make it unlikely that large numbers of underprivileged men experience oppression, despair of all hope and become so dissatisfied with the existing system of differential rewards as well as with political institutions that they join extremist political movements committed to violent rebellion" (Blau and Duncan, 1967: 439).

Goldthorpe, Llewellyn, and Payne (1987) bespeak of three major theses on social mobility. The first thesis on social mobility is the 'counter-balance thesis' attributed to Westergaard and to Parkin. The counter-balance thesis proposes that opportunities for inter-generational mobility have expanded but these are countered by a decline in opportunities for intra-generational mobility. This has happened because of growing professionalism, bureaucratisation, and technical complexity in work. So, greater social mobility takes place inter-generationally. At the same time, there is lesser possibility of upward mobility in the course of an individual's working life. Goldthorpe, Llewellyn, and Payne contradict the counter-balance thesis through their findings based on older and younger cohorts in the sample. They concluded that it was not more difficult for younger group to work its way up after starting in employment than it has been for the older group. Avenues for upward mobility for the working class have increased due to wider educational opportunities. At the same time, none of the traditional avenues for upward mobility are closed.

The second thesis on social mobility is the 'closure thesis' attributed to Giddens, to Bottomore, and to Miliband. The closure thesis suggests that those who occupy the superior positions seek not only to retain them for their own selves and for their children but also to acquire control over the resources so that they are able to achieve what they want. This means that

social mobility remains confined to lower positions while higher positions are not open to its effects. Goldthorpe, Llewellyn, and Payne refute this claim after studying higher-grade professionals, administrators, managers and proprietors. They demonstrate that while only one quarter of them were born into this class, more than a quarter of them came from manual working class backgrounds. Thus, far from being closed to lower classes, the top class was found to be heterogeneous in composition.

The third thesis on social mobility is the 'buffer zone' thesis attributed to Parkin, to Giddens, to Bottomore and to Westergaard and Resler. The buffer zone thesis holds that the social mobility, in large part, is confined to skilled manual and routine clerical grades which often change places with each other but rarely move much higher and much lower in the system. This short range mobility is restricted to buffer zone which is constituted of manual-non-manual boundary restructuring longer range mobility which would lead to heterogeneous elements on either side. Goldthorpe, Llewellyn and Payne suggest that if there is no buffer effect against upward social mobility, there could be one in the case of downward social mobility. There, is thus, a kind of one - way screen that allows upward mobility and restricts downward mobility flows (Saunders, 1990).

26.6 Classlessness

For long, class relationships have been recognised as an integral component of social structure. Their importance in regulating economic and political domains of life has been well accepted. In academic discourse too, much attention has been laid on the analysis of class and class relationships. Marx emphasised that the overthrow of capitalist class by the revolutionary working class, the abolition of private property and capitalism were the pre-conditions for classless society founded on equality of condition. He projected that once the capitalist class was overthrown, new ruling class now constituted of the proletariat would dismantle capitalism. This could be understood as the conception of 'one-class classlessness'. After this period of transition, the older conditions of production that lay at the root of class conflict would be done away with. It is then that class distinctions would cease to exist and the foundation for a classless society with free development of one and all would be laid. Here, any one social group would not monopolize economic and political power. This is the conception of 'total classlessness'. The third conception of classlessness is that of 'multi-class classlessness' in which equality and fragmentation of class structure exists simultaneously. Weber argued that there was no escape from bureaucratic domination. Socialism, he maintained would aggravate rather than eliminate the problem. Bureaucratisation does involve equality of treatment favouring the leveling of social classes privileges. The socially privileged, however, close opportunities for others. Weber discussed classlessness in terms of provision of equality of opportunities following bureaucratisation. At the same time he expressed reservations against the anti-democratic nature of bureaucratisation itself. While the opportunity to reach the highest position is available to all and the social and economic status of an individual is not determined by birth, everybody may not be able to make use of the opportunities that seem to be available to them in order to enhance their social position. This is the irony inherent in multi-class classlessness.

The three conceptions of classlessness discussed here, viz. one class classlessness, total classlessness, and multi-class classlessness do not ensure

the end of class as a relevant category of sociological analysis, for class is the commonly encountered reality in society.

Reflection and Action 26.2

Can there be a society without classes? Discuss.

26.7 Conclusion

In this unit, we have tried to understand the different conceptions of class beginning with the widest concept of class. It would be clear by now that sociologists have proposed different determinants and criteria for defining class. These range from the economic positions of a group of people to their position in the market situation. Underlying all the theoretical propositions is the understanding that classes constitute the most comprehensive groups in social structure, they are associated with a system of privileges and discriminations (Ossowski, 1967) and that there is scope of mobility between classes. The classes, therefore, cannot be defined as watertight compartments with rigid boundaries.

26.8 Further Reading

Bendix, R. and S.M.Lipset, 1967, 'Karl Marx's Theory of Social Classes', in *Class Status and Power: Social Stratification in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Reinhardt, Bendix, and Seymour Lipset, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London

Goldthorpe, J.H., 1987, *Social Mobility and Class Structure in Modern Britain*, Oxford, Clarendon Press

Saunders, P., 1990, *Social Class and Stratification*, Routledge, London

26.9 References

Aristotle, 1943, *Politics* (trans. by Benjamin Jowett), Modern Library, New York

Aron, R., 1969, 'Two Definitions of Class,' in *Social Inequality*, ed., Andre Béteille, Penguin Books, England

Bendix, R. and S.M.Lipset, 1967, 'Karl Marx's Theory of Social Classes', in *Class Status and Power: Social Stratification in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Reinhardt, Bendix, and Seymour Lipset, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London

Bendix, R., 1956, *Work and Authority in Industry: Ideologies of Management in the of Industrialisation*, Wiley

Béteille, A, (ed.), 1969, *Social Inequality*, Penguin, England

Blau, P.M. and O.R.Duncan, 1967, *The American Occupational Structure*, Wiley, New York

Dahrendorf, R, 1959, *Class and Class Conflict in an Industrial Society*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London

Goldthorpe, J.H., 1987, *Social Mobility and Class Structure in Modern Britain*, Oxford, Clarendon Press

Goldthorpe, J.H.Llewellyn, and P.Catrione Payne, 1987, *Social Mobility and Class Structure in Modern Britain*, Oxford University Press

Lipset, S.M. and H.L., 1967, Zetterberg 'A Theory of Social Mobility', in *Class*,

Status, and Power: Social Stratification in Comparative Perspective, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London

Marx Karl, 1936, *Capital*, Modern Library, New York

Mills, C.Wright, 1954, *The New Man of Power*, New York

Ossowski, S., 1967, Different Conceptions of Social Class, in *Class, Status, and Power: Social Stratification Comparative Perspective*, ed. Reinherdt, Bendix, and Seymour Martin Lipset, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London

Saunders, P., 1990, *Social Class and Stratification*, Routledge, London

Veblen , T, 1934, *The Theory of The Leisure Class*, The Modern Library, New York

Weber, M., 1968, *Economy and Society* Vol.I, II, III, Bedminister Press, New York

Wright, E.O., 1985, *Classes*, Verso, London