

CLASS



what does it all mean?

Le Capitalisme

CAPITALISM

Nous vous gouvernons

WE RULE YOU

Nous vous trompons

WE FOOL YOU

Nous vous fusillons

WE SHOOT AT YOU

WE EAT FOR YOU
Nous mangenons pour vous

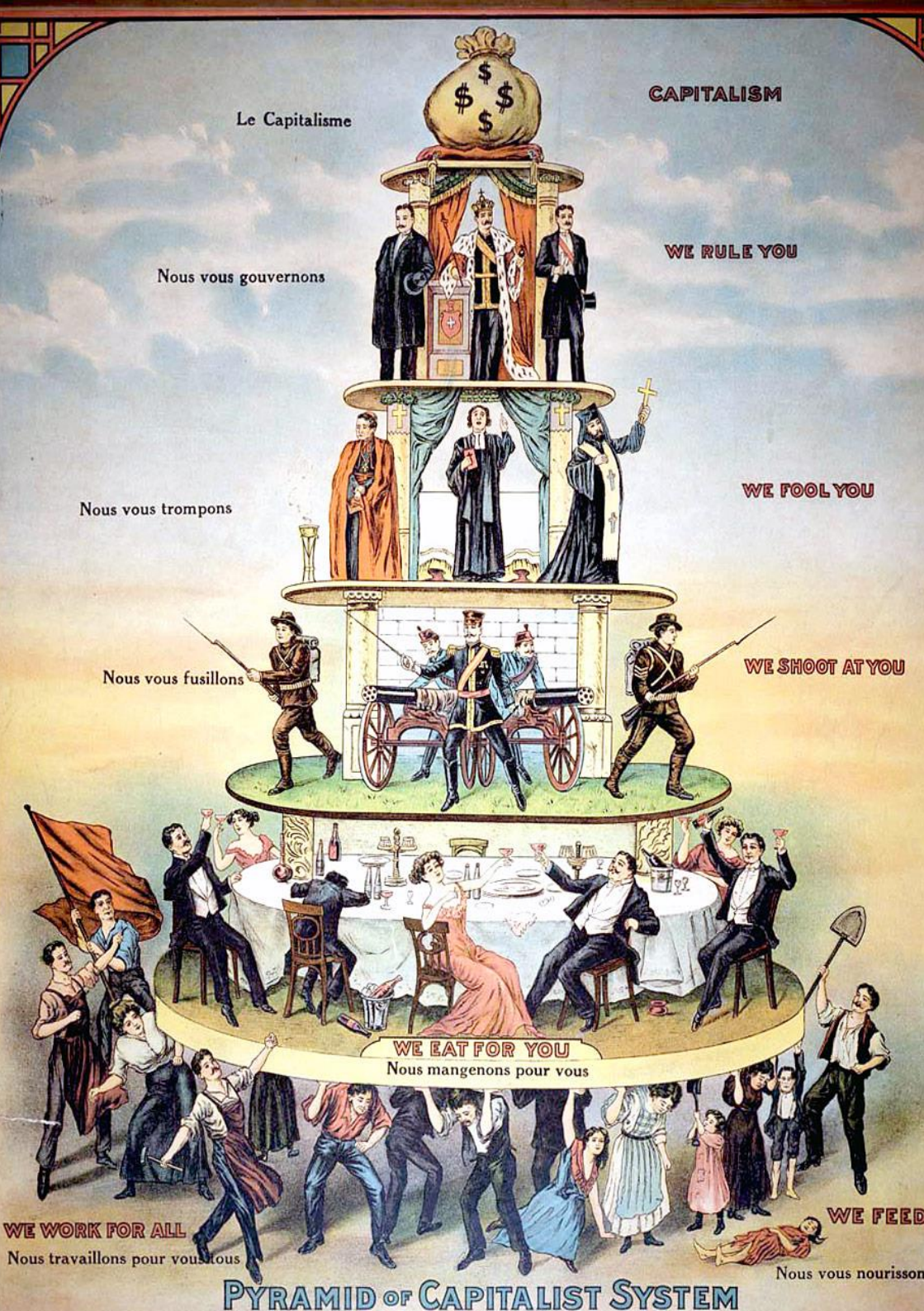
WE WORK FOR ALL

Nous travaillons pour vous tous

WE FEED

Nous vous nourrissons

PYRAMID of CAPITALIST SYSTEM



An introductory explanation of what anarchists mean by the word "class", and related terms such as "working class" and "class struggle".

Introduction

The first thing to say is that there are *various ways of referring to class*. Often, when people talk about class, they talk in terms of cultural or sociological labels. For example, middle-class people like focaccia bread and investment news, working class people like football, upper-class people like top hats and so on. This sociological way of looking at class is not what we're interested in.

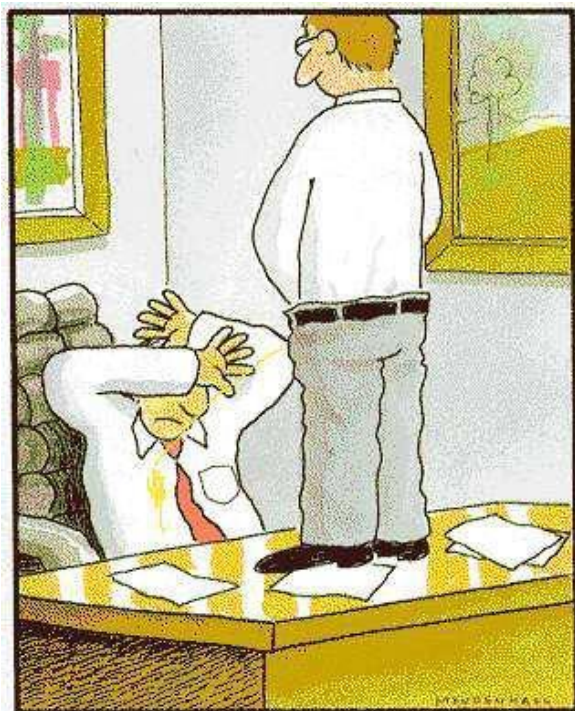
Another way to talk about class, however, is a spectrum based *economic positions*. We talk about class like this because we see it as **essential for understanding how capitalist society works, and consequently how we can change it**.

It is important to stress that our definition of class *is not* for classifying individuals or putting them in boxes, but **in order to understand the forces which shape our world. Class is about understanding how capitalist social relationships shape us - why our bosses, representatives and politicians act the way they do, what to be wary of, and how we can effectively act to improve our conditions**.

Class and capitalism

As mentioned earlier, the economic system which dominates the world at present is called capitalism. Capitalism is essentially a system based on the self-expansion of *capital* - basically commodities and money making *more commodities* and *more money*.

This doesn't happen by magic, but by human labour. For the work we do, we're paid for only a fraction of what we produce. The difference between the value we produce and the amount we're paid in wages is the "*surplus value*" we've produced. This is kept by our boss as profit and either reinvested to make more money or used to buy things.



Dissatisfied with his recent raise, Jeff was prepared to show his boss his OWN idea of trickle-down economics.

In order for this to take place, a class of people must be created who don't own anything they can use to make money i.e. offices, factories, farmland or other means of production. This class must then sell their ability to work in order to purchase essential goods and services in order to survive. This class is *the working class*.

So at one end of the spectrum is this class, with nothing to sell but their ability to work. At the other end are those who do own capital to hire workers to expand their capital. Individuals in society will fall at some

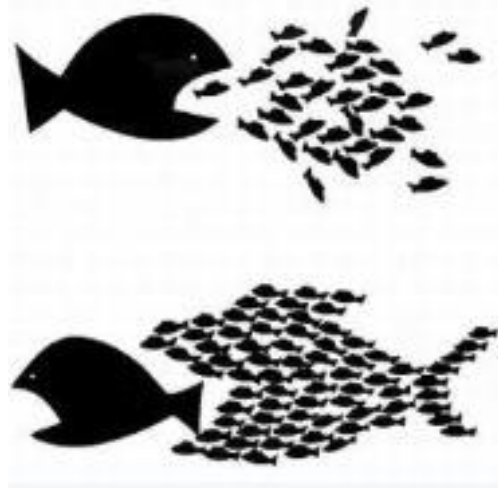
point between these two poles, but what's important from a political point of view is not the positions of individuals but the **social relationship between these classes**. When we talk about a landlord, a boss etc, we're not so much referring to them as an individual, but how they act as a **class**.

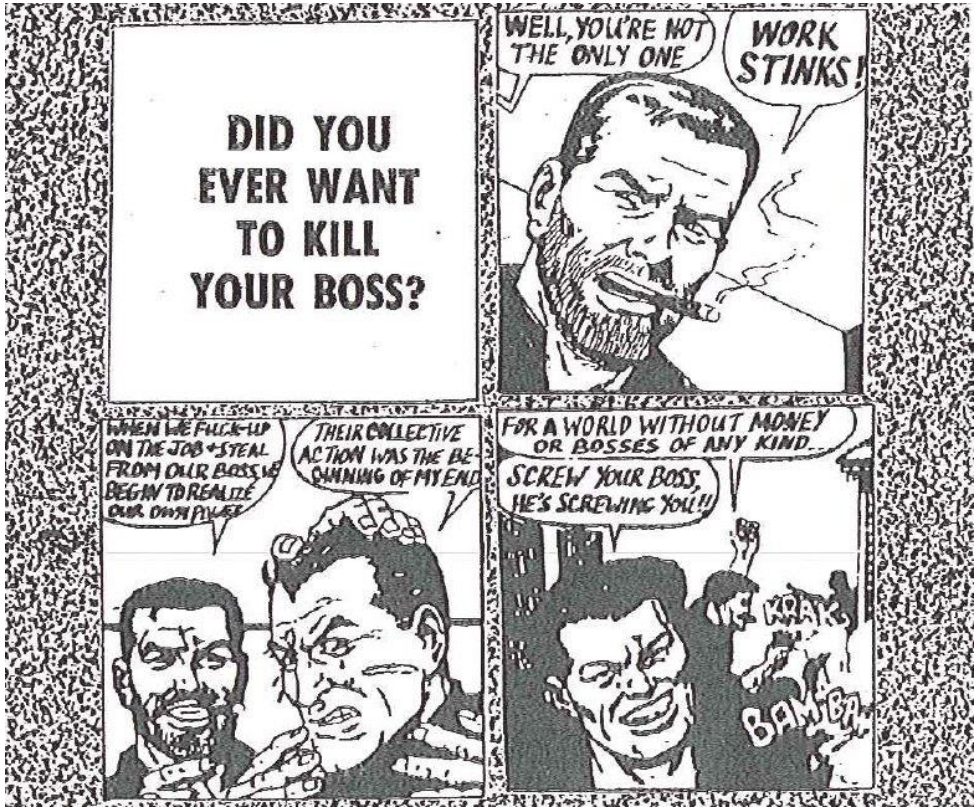
The working class

The working class (or 'proletariat' in jargon) is the class which is forced to work for wages (work being alienated labour), or claim benefits if we cannot find work or are too sick or elderly to work, to survive. We sell our time and energy to a boss for their benefit. Being 'working class' is **not an identity** – it has nothing to do with how much you earn, or what

colour your collar is. *It is naming a relationship to the means of production which we are **forced into** under capitalism.* It is a ‘we’ – (‘the multitude’, ‘the people’ etc.) in the loosest sense - our shared economic conditions.

Class should not be seen as an identity to be pitted off against others, but rather an attempt *to locate what we have in common.* We all breathe capitalist air, do capitalist work, drink capitalist water, use capitalist energy. It is an attempt to construct greater affinity out of an incredible heterogeneity. The centrality of class struggle is not to suggest that organising against forms of oppression (eg: gender discrimination, racism, sexism, transphobia etc) is somehow less important than say a strike, or a struggle around purely economic demands. ***Both are vital, linked and equally important parts of a whole.*** For example, you cannot have queer liberation while apartheid, patriarchy, capitalism, racism and other oppressions exist. You cannot have an effective class movement when it is riddled and divided with racism, sexism, colonial mentalities and other exclusionary or homogenising practices. Class is about targeting the ***connections of these oppressive forces***, as well as the oppressive forces themselves. It is an open orientation towards struggle.

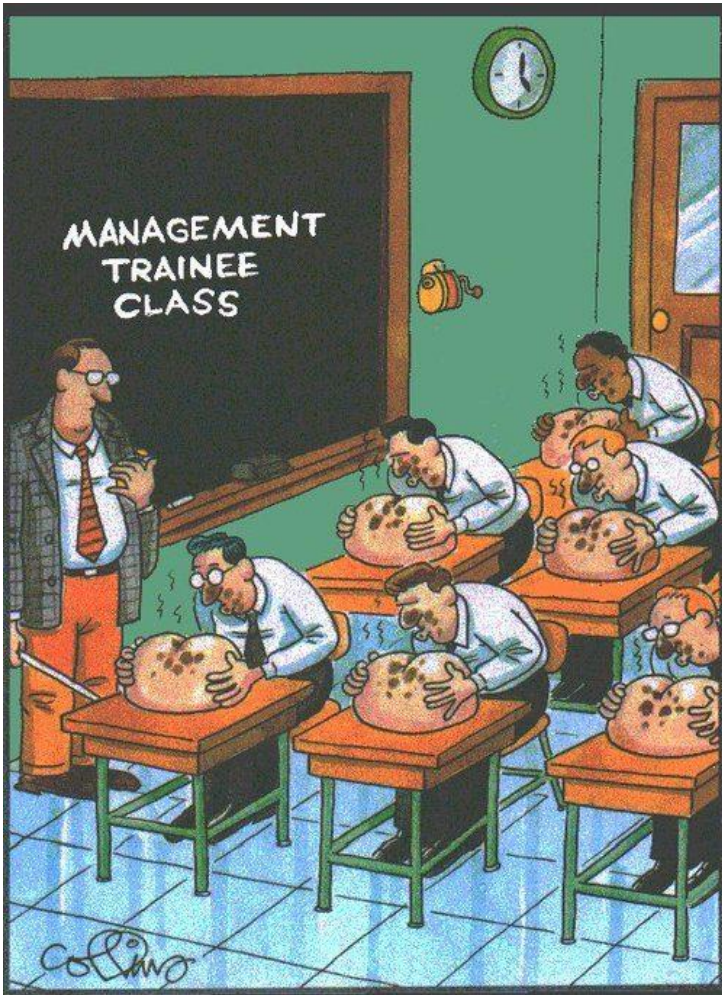




Class struggle

It is the fact that this society relies on the work we do, while at the same time always squeezing us to maximise profit, which makes it vulnerable. When we are at work, our time and activity is not our own. We have to obey the alarm clock, the time card, the managers, the deadlines and the targets.

Work (alienating wage-labour) takes up the majority of our lives. We may see our managers more than we see our friends and partners. Duty to our boss often comes before our relationships of obligations to our closest friends and others in the community. Even if we enjoy parts of our job we experience it as something alien to us, over which we have very little control. This is true whether we're talking about the nuts and bolts of the actual work itself or the amount of hours, breaks, time off



etc. More than any other social order capitalism has made of work the centre of human activity, and more than any other social order capitalism makes of work something that is **absurd**. Work being forced on us like this compels us to resist.

Employers and bosses want to get the maximum amount of work from us, from the longest hours, for the least pay. We, on the other hand, want to be able to enjoy our lives: we don't

want to be over-worked, and we want shorter hours and more pay (and the end of work!).

If a household gets a washing machine, you never hear the family members who used to do the laundry by hand complain that this “puts them out of work.” But strangely enough, if a similar development occurs on a broader social scale it is seen as a serious problem — “unemployment” — which can only be solved by inventing more jobs for people to do.



Proposals to spread the work around by implementing a slightly shorter workweek seem at first sight to address the matter more rationally. But such proposals do not face the fundamental irrationality of the whole social system based on market relations. While reacting to one manifestation of this irrationality (the fact that some people work long hours while others are jobless), they tend at the same time to reinforce the illusion that most present-day work is normal and necessary, as if the only problem were that for some strange reason it is divided up unequally. The absurdity of 90% of existing jobs is never mentioned.

A sane society, would not only abolish of all these absurd jobs (not only those that produce or market ridiculous and unnecessary commodities, but the far larger number directly or indirectly involved in promoting and protecting the whole commodity system). We don't want "full employment," we want full lives!

Between these two sides is a push and pull: employers cut pay, increase hours, speed up the pace of work. But we attempt to resist: either covertly and individually by taking it easy, grabbing moments to take a break and chat to colleagues, calling in sick, leaving early etc. Or we can resist overtly and collectively with strikes, slow-downs, blockades, occupations etc. **This antagonism is central to capitalism & shapes/underlines all other forms of oppression.**

By resisting the imposition of work, we say that our lives are more important than the bosses' profits. This attacks the very nature of capitalism, where profit is the most important reason for doing anything, and points to the possibility of a world without classes and privately-owned means of production.

It should be pointed out again that we use these class definitions in order to understand *social forces* (at work, in the community etc), and not to label individuals or determine how individuals will act in given situations. A union official, for example, may order striking workers to cease, or accept a deal that wasn't agreed upon. Although the union official may be a worker - they would be acting on the side of **capital**, not on the side of **labour**. This is where an anarchist understanding of class comes in handy; the nuts and bolts of organising our struggles in such a way so that our movements can't be demobilised or sold out

from above, or used as trampolines for political careerists, NGO's and those who seek to rule over and above the people

Beyond the workplace



Class struggle does not only take place in the workplace. Class conflict reveals itself in all aspects of life.

For example, affordable housing is something that concerns all people. However, affordable for *us* means unprofitable for *them*. In a capitalist economy, it often makes more sense to build luxury apartment blocks, even while tens of thousands are homeless, than to build housing which we can afford to live in. So struggles to defend social housing,

occupying empty properties to live in, protecting our natural environment from destruction or fighting a dodgy landlord are all part of the class struggle.

Healthcare provision can be a site of class conflict. Governments or companies attempt to reduce spending on healthcare by cutting budgets and introducing charges for services to shift the burden of costs onto the working class, whereas *we* want the best healthcare possible for as little cost as possible.



THE FIRST LAND SALE.

Similarly, capitalism desires a certain type of body and mindset; one that is useful for production & can adjust to the competitive rugged-individualism that is the basis of capitalist society. The history of colonial imperialism & patriarchy usually means this equates to white and male. Bodily autonomy & decolonisation are all part of the class struggle.

The effects of colonial-capitalism and the extension and imposition of western rule have created economies that displace and compel people to move, yet which at the same time denies culpability and accountability for displaced migrants. The material structures which 'secure the economy' have killed, tortured, occupied, raped, incarcerated, sterilised, robbed land from, pillaged, stolen children from, introduced drugs into, sanctioned vigilante violence on, denied public services to, and facilitated the hyper exploitation of broad sections of the globe.

Capitalism is social war: It destroys certainties capable of giving any measure of meaning to existence on this earth. It is the first truly Total war; not a war on all fronts – a war with No front. Anything that allows us to identify ourselves as existing independent of capital must be destroyed, or reduced to the quantifiable exchangeability of the world

market. Cultures, languages, histories, memories, stories, songs, ideas and dreams must all undergo this process; For the capitalist market the ultimate goal is to make the entire world a desert of indifference populated only by equally indifferent and exchangeable consumers and producers...”

The "middle class"



While the economic interests of capitalists are directly opposed to those of workers, a minority of the working class will be better off than others, be more privileged, or have some level of power over others. When talking about history and social change it can be useful to

refer to this part of the proletariat as a *middle class*, despite the fact that it is not a distinct economic class, in order to understand the behaviour of different groups.

The middle class is a subjectivity within the working class; it is a *sociological* label rather than an *economic* one. It is an ideology among

the working class – upholding bourgeois values, identifying with the ruling elite, buying hook line and sinker myths like ‘anyone can make it’, ‘the australian dream’ etc. Though they may have more money, for example through shares, property subsidising a wage etc, their relationship to production and wage labour is essentially no different.

Class struggle can sometimes be derailed by allowing the creation or expansion of the middle class – Margaret Thatcher (UK Prime Minister) for example encouraged home ownership by cheaply selling off social housing in the UK during the big struggles of the 1980s, knowing that workers were less likely to strike if they had a mortgage, and allowing some workers to become better off on an individual level, rather than as a collective. There are all sorts of ways used by bosses to divide the class – through racism, sexism, salary etc.

Conclusion

Talking about class in a political sense is not about which accent you have but the basic conflict which defines capitalism. 'Class' is a relationship inherent in all forms of oppression; it is not itself another form of oppression. By figuring out how we can come together, through working towards solidarity against all forms of oppression, fighting for our own interests and needs against the dictates of capital and the market, we lay the basis for a new type of society.



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FRED WRIGHT

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