THE MAKING OF THE U.S. WORKING CLASS

by HARRY BRAVERMAN

What do we mean by working class? Anyone who is inclined to use that term obviously has in mind an immense mass of people—in fact, most of the people of the country. But at first glance the divisions among these tens of millions seem more important than anything that can unify them under a single heading.

First of all, they’re divided by sex. Then, when one speaks in terms of genetic origin, they’re divided once more among black and white, the Hispanics, the Asians and the Indians, that is, those who were native to the Americas before the coming of Europeans and who contributed heavily to the working class chiefly by way the populations of sub-Rio Grande America.

The population of European origin forms another great mass. Numerically, perhaps the greatest. But this population is again divided according to the nations and regions of Europe from which they or their forebears came, and even more importantly, according to when they came to this continent.

Then, this mass of workers is also divided according to the industries and occupations in which they work, and especially by whether they work in factories or offices, transport or warehouses, or retail stores or banks (to name only some of

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the most important divisions of this kind). And finally, they are divided according to their organizations, their opinions, their moods, their sentiments, and their attitudes toward their own place in society.

But while a description of this diversity is thus of the greatest importance, it seems to me that one must start with its opposite: not with the diversity but with the unity. In other words, we must try to understand what it is that this great mass of people has in common that causes us to call it a class, as we all do in common parlance, and as many of us do in scientific or analytical terms. The discussion of the diversities will then make much more sense.

The single feature that's common to the many people who make up this class is that they do not own the business enterprises in which they work, but are hired to labor there for a stipulated pay. It doesn't usually occur to us to call, for instance, the man and wife who own a small family farm members of the working class, even though they work for long hours and at manual labor at that. Why? Because these farmers are the proprietors of small businesses of a special kind. Their labor is thus not hired to others. We see here at once that it is not just the fact that people work which makes them part of the working class, but the fact that this work is done within the framework of certain relations.

Consider again, for example, an excavating and earth-moving contractor who owns or leases a few bulldozers and backhoes and employs a few men on and off, alongside of whom he himself works as a machine operator. To the casual observer he seems to spend his days doing much the same thing as the men in his employ. But it wouldn't enter our minds to call him anything but a contractor and the others workers.

Here again, the difference is not in the physical activities in which we may see them engaged, but in their social relationships, in which the contractor represents the hirer of labor and the others the labor hired. Being a worker, therefore, is a condition which originates not primarily in some form of work activity but rather in a social relation. The worker
is the hired hand by which capital accomplishes its work, no matter what the particular form of work that may be.

Now we speak tonight of the formation of a class of people of this kind as a process which has been going on throughout U.S. history. The first thing to notice is that it would hardly occur to us to organize a discussion around the formation of many other such social groupings that we know exist in this country. For example, we wouldn’t organize a discussion around the formation of the modern class of farmers in the United States, or the formation of a class of retailers, shopkeepers, and artisans—of petty capitalists, in other words. That’s not because there are no farmers or no petty capitalists in the countryside and in the cities; it is rather because we all understand—even those of us who know history only from the daily newspapers we have read in our own lifetimes—that these classes are not in process of formation but in process of liquidation, and that what still remains of them is not the special product of capitalism but merely the remnants of formerly numerous classes destroyed by capitalism.

In place of a population consisting, as it did in the past, of people with a fixed and defined place in the economy and with a certain relation to the land, to the artisan guilds, or to commerce, we have today a floating population of separated molecules which are combined and recombined according to the needs of capital. This population exists to serve, as interchangeable parts, a limited number of ever larger corporate enterprises, which in turn exist for the purpose of expanding their capital (and alongside of which exist governmental or semi-governmental organizations having an auxiliary role which are organized in a similar fashion).

The organizing group which owns, controls, and manages these corporations is a small layer of a few percent of the population, and the national structure exists for the benefit of this class of people and to carry out their purposes and designs. The largest part of the remainder of society exists merely to serve these organizations and lives only by striking wage bargains with them—in many cases as individuals, and
in many other cases with the aid of organizations which somewhat ameliorate their conditions of life and labor without gaining for them any substantial measure of power or control.

For all of us who have grown up and lived within such a society, it seems to us a natural condition. And in fact, it is probable that most people believe, if they've ever thought about the matter, that things have always been pretty much this way. This entirely false belief is encouraged not only by the tendency of the human mind to accept the appearances presented to the senses (after all, what is science but an attempt to get behind such appearances?), but also by the bias of our educational institutions and the other instruments of information and education.

The educational system, as a rule, is prevented from entertaining and teaching any but the narrowest views on this subject. And the views which both our schools and the other instruments of information accept are those which stress not the very recent appearance and thus possibly transitory character of these social relations, but rather their supposed naturalness, permanence, and of course, superiority to all others.

But the most important single thing to grasp about a society of a tiny owning class and a vast working class is the very recent date of its appearance and the extraordinary swiftness with which it has developed. In the United States, for example, it is only a little more than a century since hired labor became the lot of the majority of the population. At the start of the nineteenth century, at least four fifths of the non-slave population was self-employed, chiefly in farming.

The slave population again was not hired labor in the modern sense, but rather labor owned outright, in a barbaric throwback to the social relations of antiquity. But the working class was very small, so far as we can judge from all available information, and moreover consisted in large part of household servants rather than workers in capital-expanding enterprise.

Apart from these and from the slaves, most of the population was self-employed in one form or another. And
although the United States was exceptional in the matter of the availability of land and other so-called frontier conditions, much the same was true of Europe despite this difference of condition.

If we turn now to the last census of the U.S. population, taken in 1970, we find that only some 10 percent of the working population of the country was self-employed. That’s 10 percent as against 80 percent at the beginning of the last century. Now I must caution that this doesn’t mean that all the other 90 percent of the population was working class. It’s one of the peculiarities of the modern corporate structure that all persons within it share the same formal relation to it. They’re all on the payroll, whether managers or production line workers, engineers or sweepers, department heads or clerks, the chairman of the grievance committee or the chairman of the board. All are carried on the payroll as employees. This has a marked effect on the census figures that I’ve just mentioned.

Thus, from the 90 percent of the population who are not self-employed, we must remove the officials and the managers perhaps down to the level of foreman, in order to remove from the working class the controllers and organizers of the enterprises and their managerial agents.

Now, one must also take account of the middle layers of employment, those who exercise professional planning, organizing, and other staff functions, because these layers occupy a special position in the social structure which must be analyzed separately. But when one has done this and when one leaves behind only the mass of labor at the truly working-class level (the highest stratum of which, in terms of pay, training, and responsibility, are the skilled craftsmen and craftswomen of the factory and the office, and whose lowest level is made up of the immense mass of people employed in other clerical, production, service, and trade occupations), then there remains, according to one calculation that I attempted in *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, no less than two thirds and probably closer to three quarters of the entire employed
population. Now, I must emphasize that this estimate includes no teachers, no nurses, and no office workers above the level of secretary or bookkeeper.

In 1970 this embraced, as I have said, close to three fourths of the population counted by the census as economically active. Only seven censuses earlier, in 1900, an estimate made according to the same principle shows just about half of the population in the working-class category. From this we can see how swiftly the working class grows and how powerful is the tendency of the capitalist mode of production to convert every form of independent work into hired or wage labor.

Thus it's clear that the formation of the working class is by no means a mere matter of population growth. It involves the ruination of other classes and their conversion into raw material for exploitation by capitalist enterprises. In the first instance, at the beginning of the process in the United States, it is the ruin and the urbanization of the farming population that supplies the recruits for the working class. We have already noted that the largest part of the population was, at the beginning of the last century, made up of farmers and farm families. If we now note that all farm employment in this country, including owners, managers, and hired farm labor, is at present below 4 percent of the employed population, we can see how immense this change has been.

I think it is hard for people of the present student generation to understand what an upheaval the United States has gone through in this respect and how recent that upheaval was. When my generation was growing up, this wholesale destruction of a way of life was still going on. Even as recently as thirty or forty years ago, we still thought of the farming population as one of the great classes of modern society. Now, it's a mere remnant of its former self; dominated—in the main—by great corporate farms and embracing a total workforce that is far exceeded even by the number of college students.

The farming population is virtually all gone now. The special farming population of the south, the black popula-
tion—which after the end of slavery supplied the labor of the whole southern portion of the United States as plantation workers and sharecroppers—converted in large measure into wage labor, in urban industries of all kinds. Almost all the rest of the farm population similarly converted into urban labor of various kinds.

Next we must speak of the ruined and dispersed peasant populations of Europe, especially southern and eastern Europe, which have also, in considerable measure, gone into the formation of the U.S. working class. It is interesting to note that the peasantry of these same portions of Europe is today contributing large masses of workers to the urban labor of northern Europe, particularly Germany, England, to some extent France, the Scandinavian countries, and Switzerland (almost the whole working class of Switzerland is imported labor). These same masses served as the principal reserve army of labor for the United States in the years of the tremendous immigration to this country, especially from roughly 1890 to the First World War. Today, they serve as one of the principal reserve armies of labor for the northern European continent.

Then there are the peasant populations of Puerto Rico, of Mexico, of other countries on our Caribbean and Latin American rim, as well as portions of those trans-Pacific populations in the Philippines, Hawaii, Japan, China, and other areas which have been washed over by the tide of U.S. capital accumulation. All of these have also contributed more or less heavily to the working class of the United States. Especially in the case of Latin America and the Philippines, we see here a typical capitalist world process at work. The penetration of imperialism disrupts age-old ways of life and produces a surplus population which is dispersed from the land and reassembled in the cities of the colonial regions in great poverty and misery.

Next, the overseas capitalist countries draw upon this labor power as raw material for exploitation by importing this labor into the metropolis. Puerto Rico is an almost textbook
example of this process. A similar dynamic can be seen in northern Europe, starting with Hitler’s Third Reich, which is really the beginning of the period of the imports into Germany of the working population of southern and eastern Europe. Beginning under Hitler and continuing in the post-Second World War period, northern Europe has raised this arrangement to a fine art and even has the legal means of regulating the flow of labor not only into their countries but also back home again, in accordance with the varying needs of capital accumulation.

This the United States is trying to emulate today, not by legal but by extra-legal means, simply by winking at the arrival of large masses of Latin American labor power when it is needed and starting a campaign to send it back the moment the natural reserves of surplus labor (reserves which are produced by the capital accumulation process at home) grow big enough.

Finally, and in some ways most importantly, still speaking of the populations that went into the formation of the U.S. working class, there is the other sex. Women made up only 18 percent of the so-called labor force at the beginning of this century; they now make up just short of 40 percent. There appears to be no slackening of the trend, and it is clear that it will not be long before women make up half the labor force, or as near to such a situation as makes no difference.

The largest single reason for the vast increase of working women is the same for both waves of feminization of the labor force: the earlier factory wave and the office-trade service wave of more recent decades. In both cases the drawing upon women for mass labor was associated with the opening up of new kinds of jobs and thus accompanied an occupational shift in which new mass occupations were established as so-called women’s jobs. The typing of these jobs as jobs for women enabled employers to draw upon a vast pool of low-wage labor—a fact which, more than any other, is responsible for the assignment of these new occupations to women.
For example, clerical work in the United States and in England started out almost entirely as a male occupation. There were hardly any women. It was a much different kind of stratum then. The word clerk meant something different; it meant almost a semi-manager, certainly an assistant manager of some sort. And clerks were in line for promotions. As clerical labor was transformed into a mass occupation, however, although it didn’t start out as a female occupation, it was rapidly transformed into one. Today it is overwhelmingly female except for certain types of workers who are listed as clerks, like receiving clerk, postal clerk, and so on, who are mainly men.

The earlier, factory wave of feminization did not in the end stick, except in certain industries. But the present wave obviously is sticking, with the resulting creation of a giant new feminized working class, the future of which is a matter of the greatest interest to the future of unionism and social struggles in the United States.

Let me add, also, another reason for the feminization of the working population, and that is the cycle of capital accumulation in the household-related industries. I’ll explain what I mean by that. Capital, as we have seen, is extraordinarily jealous of every work activity which is not carried on under its banner and which does not pay tribute to capital. As we’ve seen in the case of farming—and it’s also true in the case of a variety of businesses, like retail trade—capital tends to destroy these as areas of independent entrepreneurship and recreate them as areas for the profitable investment of capital. In the case of retail trade, the elimination of the small retail store and the growth of the supermarket is the prime instance.

Just so with household work. On the one side, various household aids are developed which shorten the time spent in cleaning, the preparation of food, and so on. On the other hand, these activities are moved outside the household and re-created in profitable form as manufacturing, retailing, and service industries. Thus millions of women now clean, make beds, prepare food, wait on tables, and wash clothes in can-
neries, restaurants, food shops, hotels, motels, commercial laundries, etc.—doing the same sorts of work that they did in the home in the past, while at the same time much of the cooking, baking, canning, washing, and hospitality formerly done in the home has been moved into such commercial enterprises. Apologists will tell us that this is a more efficient way of doing things, which may or may not be the case. But whether it’s the case or not, efficiency is not the reason this shift has taken place.

The reason is that this has enabled capital to divert millions of hours of daily labor to its own purposes; that this labor, formerly done privately and outside the grip of capital, is now done within its grip and, therefore, pays its tribute of profit to capital. This is another important part of the feminization of the labor force over the past three quarters of a century, and one which has not yet run its course.

In the past, therefore, the U.S. standard of living, whatever it was, was typically sustained by one working adult in the family. Today the same standard of living typically requires the wages of two adults. When we consider the effect of this on family life and on child-rearing under the conditions of the cities today (where no real facilities are provided for such a situation), we may say that in addition to the ruined and dispersed peasant population which formed a source for the U.S. working class, more recently the ruined and dispersed U.S. family also forms a major source for the modern working class.

So much for our discussion of the sources of the working-class population. Let us now consider the nature of its work. The nature of its work must be considered under two headings. First, there’s the change in the work processes themselves, brought about by capitalist management. And second, there’s the shifting of the working population from some occupations into other different occupations, which of course also represent the change in the nature of the work being done.

Until the capitalist era, that is, for thousands and thousands of years up to only two centuries ago, the history of work was, with certain specialized exceptions, the history of crafts-
manship. Throughout human history, and until it was changed by capitalist management, work was accomplished by men and women who spent the entire early part of their lives learning the traditional processes of transforming raw materials into useful objects. The smith fashioned tools, implements, and hardware of iron. The carpenter framed buildings and the cabinet maker created furniture of wood. The potter made clay vessels; the cobbler or cordwainer, footwear; the weaver, cloth; the tailor, clothing; and so on. Of course, the most widespread craft of all was that of farming.

The typical craft apprenticeship lasted from four to seven years—in pre-capitalist times, more commonly seven. The farming apprenticeship, which began in earlier childhood, was much longer even than that.

The practitioners of each craft worked independently, that is, they organized their own tools, materials, and processes according to their own judgment. And their own judgment was presumed to be the final authority on the right way to do a job, since they themselves were the repositories of craft knowledge and experience. In this organization of work, both the conception and the execution of the tasks of production are united in the same individual.

In the hands of the capitalist employing a mass of labor under his control, however, all of this has been rapidly changed and, where it has not yet been changed, is rapidly being changed. The capitalist, at first by himself and later with the assistance of a managerial and technical staff, takes over all of the knowledge, the standards, the principles of the labor processes of society, which now become mysteries to the workers. And he parcels out these duties and operations of the process in bits and pieces, a small piece to each individual worker who is now presumed to need no real knowledge or skill other than that required to follow directions and perform one or several special tasks with rapidity and diligence.

The worker now becomes truly that which I defined him or her to be early in this talk, the hand by which capital performs the tasks necessary to make a profit. The ideal
organization toward which the capitalist strives is one in which the worker possesses no basic skill upon which the enterprise is dependent and no historical knowledge of the past of the enterprise to serve as a fund from which to draw on in daily work, but rather where everything is codified in rules of performance and laid down in lists that may be consulted (by machines or computers, for instance), so that the worker really becomes an interchangeable part and may be exchanged for another worker with little disruption.

This may be seen most clearly in such a job as automobile assembly, where, as the technology projects of Yale University found in a study, the average operation at one major company takes three minutes, and the learning time for this operation varies from a few hours to a week. Nor is this true only of factory jobs.

Charles Silverman, the Fortune editor, cites a recent study (what was called in the jargon of government and sociology, a manpower survey) by the New York State Department of Labor, which concluded that two thirds of all the jobs in New York State can be learned in a few days, weeks, or at the very most months of on-the-job training.

Now, you will recall that at the outset we saw that the entire working class embraced some two thirds to three quarters of all jobs. And thus this survey means that almost all jobs on a working-class level have been reduced to a state of insignificance of content so that those who do them—all the operatives, the laborers, the clerical workers, sales workers, service workers, even many of those who are still called craftsmen—are expected to make a working life of forty or fifty years out of these scraps of duties which, when put together with what everyone else is doing, give the capitalist a result which he and his staff have planned, which they alone understand, and which satisfies only them (by expanding their capital), but satisfies no one else, whether as worker or as consumer.

In the present organization of industry and trade, an increase of knowledge makes the mass of workers not more but less fitted for their jobs, because they enter industry not
in order to work (over the years) toward a decent and rewarding mastery over that branch of work into which they've come, but merely in order to serve the production process in limited routines which they've learned quickly, after which their growth as citizens of the world of work comes to an end.

This method of work organization has as its goal the extraction of the largest possible surplus product—that is, product over and above what the worker is paid—from an unwilling working population. That this population is unwilling goes without saying in a capitalist or in any other hierarchically organized society, because the working population has been in advance divested of its stake in the process of production, as it has been stripped of ownership of the means of producing, stripped of ownership of the product, and has no direct interest in the outcome of the process.

That's the starting point of the capitalist organization of production and when, as a result, the workers are next stripped of knowledge of the process as a whole and control over it and are reduced to the performance of simplified tasks, their alienation from the process is still further increased. The capitalist organization of society makes necessary the capitalist organization of production, and the capitalist organization of production then in turn intensifies the need for ever stricter controls over the performance of the worker until the worker ceases to be an autonomous human being in any recognizable sense and becomes a mere instrument.

It is only by such an organization of production, abominable though it may be, that large masses of surplus product may be wrung from an indifferent or hostile mass of people. And it feeds on itself, becoming by its very nature always worse and worse.

This is an abbreviated statement of the tendency of labor processes in our society. I must interpolate here, since I noticed as you went around the room that the incidence of craftsmen and craftsmen in this gathering is probably high (those of you who work as electricians, carpenters, and so on), and maybe you recognize in your own working lives only some
of the beginnings of these things. But insofar as craftsmen
continue to practice their crafts as autonomous mechanics,
true mechanics, they are thus far and to some extent exempt
from this tendency, but that’s not true of all the rest of the
working population and I’m sure it will become increasingly
less true of craftsmen, because the story of the tendency of the
labor process in capitalist society is the story of the destruction
of craftsmanship.

Now, having dealt with this, even if briefly, we’re in a
position to turn to our second aspect which I’ve already
mentioned, that is, the evolution of work, which is the shift to
new occupations. There are many aspects to the rapid occupa-
tional shifts which have formed part of the development of
capitalism, especially during the past hundred years, and it’ll
be impossible to cover all of them in this discussion. For this
reason, I’d like to take a look at these shifts from a single point
of view and only one, because it seems to me the most import-
ant single organizing principle.

This is the movement from occupations which are pro-
ductive to those which are unproductive. By productive, I
don’t mean anything fancy. There are technical definitions. I
simply mean organizations which produce useful objects or
use-values, or useful services, not necessarily objects.

I must caution that this definition isn’t meant in any
narrow sense of separating so-called manual labor from so-
called nonmanual labor. As we’ve seen, it’s the tendency of
the capitalist mode of production to remove from the shop all
the functions of record-keeping, calculation, planning, and
so on, in order to reduce labor to its simplest elements, and
to perform these tasks in the office. This brings into being
small armies of clerks who do things which are necessary for
production and which were formerly done on the shop floor
as part of production.

So a great variety of clerical work, transportation work,
and the like is part of productive labor, even though these
workers do not put their hands directly to the product. Nev-
evertheless, and leaving aside these forms of productive work,
there has been a tremendous shift of work to unproductive labor in the United States.

Now, the first requirement of such a shift is that the productivity of those who do produce useful things or services must rise enormously. As we all know, this has been happening. Since each capitalist combines the resources of science and technology with the resources of management to extract from his workers an ever greater surplus, the effect is the lessening of the working population required to produce useful things and services consumed by the entire society.

Let me give you some indications of the extent to which this has been going on. In manufacturing, mining, and construction industries of the United States (which are, of course, the prime productive industries), employment has risen consistently during the entire period for which records have been kept: from 1820, when the first occupational census was taken, to the present. But the rate of increase has slowed until in recent decades this growing number of workers represents an ever smaller proportion of the working population.

Thus, from 1820 to 1920, the censuses consistently showed about half or perhaps a little less than half of all nonagricultural workers as being engaged in those industries. But after 1920, this percentage began to go down until by 1970 no more than one third of all nonagricultural workers were occupied in the fields of manufacturing and associated industries.

If we compare employment with output in a variety of manufacturing and transportation industries, this tendency of a growing output and a relatively declining number of workers is illustrated even more graphically. I use here a set of figures that deal only with the years 1947 to 1964. Even for this very short period of years, the change is very striking. In these seventeen years of constantly rising production, very small increases of labor or no increases at all typically suffice to produce a much larger output. In those few cases where production actually fell slightly for special reasons, the results for employment were catastrophic.
For example, in bituminous coal mining during that period, production showed a decline of some 20 percent. But in the same period two thirds of the coal miners were eliminated. In the case of the railroads, there was a very slight decline in ton-miles hauled, a decline of less than 10 percent, but this was accompanied by an employment cut of almost half. In these two industries alone the employment decline was almost 1 million workers. But even those industries which registered moderate increases in production registered declines in employment. The largest industry of this category, the textile mill, increased its output by more than 40 percent, but employed one third fewer workers at the end of the period than at the beginning.

Other industries in this category, including iron and steel foundries, malt liquors, lumber and wood products, and footwear, showed production increases of 15 to 40 percent, accompanied by employment drops of 10 to 25 percent. Even some industries which increased their output by as much as two thirds, up to a doubling of output, had difficulties in maintaining their employment. It was only the industries that had enormous increases in output—for instance, telephone communications, instrument manufacture, electrical equipment and machinery, motor freight, electric power and gas, aluminum and air transport—that showed any increase in employment; but the increases in employment were typically far smaller than the additional output. For example, the electrical machinery and motor freight industries roughly tripled their production, while adding respectively no more than 50 and 70 percent to their employment. The electric power and gas industry roughly quadrupled its output but added only some 25 percent to its employment.

I don't want to throw too many figures at you, but let me just add what will interest a great many of you because you probably work in construction. In the construction industry, the reduction of the number of workers while output is going up is, of course, harder by virtue of the nature of the processes employed. It's not like a factory process. But even there
something of the same sort happened. That is, in these years I've been talking about, the construction industry doubled its output but didn't double its employment; it increased its employment only by half as much, by 50 percent.

Now, all this raises the question, where is all this labor going? What's the outcome of all this increased productivity? It would be easy enough to guess what sort of an outcome such rapidly increased productivity would have, let's say, in a cooperative society of associated producers, who would feel the pressures of work lessening as productivity rose, and who could improve society, improve work itself, the easier it became to turn out the required goods and services. But we are not dealing here with such a society of cooperating associated producers. We're dealing with a capitalist society which has laws of its own according to which it evolved.

In such a society, the pressures of work, of the drive to increase productivity, become more intense the more productivity rises and the huge masses of labor thrown off by the productive industries are absorbed into unproductive labors of a variety of sorts.

What sort of unproductive labors? Let me give you these examples: the banking, the insurance, the investment, the brokerage, the real estate industries; the advertising and other marketing industries; the accounting and control industries, including those operated by the government in the form of regulatory or tax agencies; the relief industries, such as those which deal with unemployment compensation or welfare. The relief industries, by the way, are virtually the only ones which are having a boom in employment right now, while employment in all others or almost all others is going down.

These are some examples of unproductive industries, but furthermore, even manufacturing industries—whose total employment, as we have seen, is shrinking in relative terms—have an increasing number of unproductive jobs on their payrolls. For instance, all manufacturing industries now have swollen marketing sections which employ labor of all sorts and armies of clerks as they compete to enlarge sales of
their products. Or as another example, even a good deal of labor that actually goes into working on products can be unproductive, insofar as it is made necessary by marketing considerations rather than by the actual requirements of a solid and useful product. In this class are the model changes in automobiles and other products, as well as various means of shoddy and useless ornamentation, which the demented styling departments proliferate in order to pile up selling points against their competitors.

We must also take into consideration the fact that large amounts of so-called manufacturing labor are really carried on entirely for purposes of marketing. As a prime instance of this, let me cite the printing industry, which produces immense amounts of advertising material in the form of giant newspapers and magazines which alternate one column of editorial matter with 10 tons of advertising matter, or the radio and television industry, which is organized according to the same principle even if it cannot be carried to the same extremes.

What we see in all these examples is that the capitalist system has special needs of its own which guide labor into channels that make sense only from the capitalist point of view, not from the point of view of useful labor. These needs are:

(1) The marketing struggle of the corporations to divert consumer dollars to themselves.

(2) The immense accounting needs of a society based not on production but on profits, where the end product is thus not useful objects but money and credit.

(3) The rise of industries which themselves produce nothing (the chief examples are banking and insurance), and which occupy the labors of millions of persons in diverting the surplus to the capitalists who supply capital.

The result of all this is clear, and anyone who has studied the occupational statistics and the way they've been evolving can't come to any other conclusion unless his mind is always working toward making an apology for the way things are, rather
than facing the facts. The result is that society increasingly takes the form of an inverted pyramid and rests upon an ever narrower base of productive labor, so that the productive workers are driven ever harder to produce an ever greater product.

This is the end result of a system which regards all labor expended upon production as an intolerable drain on the pocketbook, while labor expended on speculation, marketing, and all such means to divert the surplus products from the hands of one set of capitalists into the hands of another is the real purpose of society.

Now, by all this I don't mean to say that all those in the nonproductive enterprises occupy a privileged position in society and live at the expense of productive workers. The workers who have been shifted into enterprises of this kind were not shifted there by their own will but by the evolution of capitalist society, and they're in no better position than the workers in productive enterprises. In fact, since they are still largely unorganized, these workers are, generally speaking, much worse off than workers in productive enterprises. Workers in finance, real estate, and insurance or in retail and wholesale trade are generally paid on a scale below those in manufacturing, mining, and construction.

And if we look at the matter from the occupational standpoint, clerical workers are again more poorly paid than factory operatives, on the average. We've come a long way since a bank, for instance, consisted of a banker with his brother-in-law as the teller. These industries employ great armies of labor organized in a way similar to factory organization—workers who are increasingly used as interchangeable cogs in an increasingly mechanized process and subjected ever more to the same pressures that have long been familiar to the factory worker.

Finally, we must deal with unemployment. Is not another result of the rapid shrinkage of productive labor the growth of unemployment? Well, to the extent that this shrinkage is not compensated by the growth of new industries, either
of a productive kind or the unproductive kind we have been
describing, an inevitable result is the rise in unemployment.
Now, that's not always the case: during rapid upswings of the
business cycle, unemployment may be and has been kept
down. But I must emphasize that even during a very successful
period of growth and capital accumulation, such as we have
lived through from the beginning of the Second World War
until just recently, the rate of unemployment which fluctuated
in every business cycle still showed a steady and persistent rise
throughout the period as a whole. Thus we came out of each
recession with a larger pool of unemployment than when we
entered, until we arrived at the point where we had higher
rates of unemployment in prosperity than we used to have in
recession.

A 5 percent unemployment rate, which economists now
pronounce themselves absolutely tickled with, and which they
would consider a happy prosperity rate today, used to be re-
garded (in the late 1940s) as an intolerably high recession rate.
Moreover, I'm among those who believe that the rise of unem-
ployment even before the present recession has been grossly
understated by official figures. But this is another story . . .

[Following a brief passage that could not be transcribed because
of a technical difficulty, Braverman summarizes the main factors in
the formation of the U.S. working class.]

(1) The rapid ruination and dispersal of the earlier
classes of U.S. society (farming, small proprietors in the cities,
and slaves), and the recruitment of most of this mass into the
wage working population.

(2) The recruitment of further great masses into the
working class from abroad, in part through the ruination and
dispersal of peasant masses of several continents—a process
which has been aided in recent years by the penetration of
imperialism, especially in Latin America.

(3) The recruitment of still further masses, especially in
the most recent decades, from within the household, where a
previous social stratum of housewives is in large measure being remade and redistributed so that they may be of direct service to capital.

(4) The reorganization of the productive processes—the work of society—under the control of capital, which aspires to control every process down to its smallest element at the expense of the traditional knowledge, skill, and expertise of the worker, who is given nothing in return except a wage, which in the great majority of occupations is now insufficient to support a family except as it sinks below the poverty level, thus bringing about a tremendous increase in multiple job-holding within families.

(5) Upon this basis, the creation of a vastly increased productive power of society, which utilizes the resources of science and technology and a military-type organization of labor in order to increase the surplus that flows into the hands of capital.

(6) The shifting of occupations to other employments required for the protection, accounting and allocation of this surplus among competing capitals, so that society rests on an ever smaller base of productive labor, while at the other pole there is the growth of wasteful employment.

(7) The persistent enlargement of the reserve army of labor, so that along with the growth of one pole in our society, a wealth which is shared only by a limited number of people, there grows at the other pole the misery of outright pauperization, as well as the torment of unsatisfying labor.

Now this, it seems to me, is an outline of the making of the U.S. working class in its basic features, although it is subject to much enlargement and modification. But it is only an outline of social and economic forces. It needs to be embedded in history and thereby enriched with the entire story of the working class, not only the way it is formed by capital, which is all that I have discussed here tonight, but also its culture, its struggles, the manner in which it has fought back in the arenas of unionization and politics, its heroes and its villains, its great times and its bad times, and especially the
manner in which this class has often been the bearer of the most majestic dream of the betterment of all humanity. And finally, the conviction that it can once again have such a dream and struggle to make it a reality.

Alienation in work means that the most alert hours of one's life are sacrificed to the making of money with which to "live." Alienation means boredom and the frustration of potentially creative effort, of the productive sides of personality. It means that while men must seek all values that matter to them outside of work, they must be serious during work: they must follow the rules and not violate the fetish of "the enterprise." In short, they must be serious and steady about something that does not mean anything to them, and moreover during the best hours of their day, the best hours of their life.—C. Wright Mills, White Collar, 1951, p. 286.