

Classes and class struggle (Ernesto Díaz)

Marx never wrote an exact definition of classes. He had planned to do so in Book III of Capital, but he died just before beginning that chapter. Throughout his work the definition of classes oscillates between economist or subjectivist definitions.

The former defines social classes solely because of the position that individuals occupy within economic relations: if you are deprived of means of production (property) and you have to live on a wage, you are part of the working class. If on the other hand you possess means of production and you live from the exploitation of others, you are capitalist. This position, although correct, raises questions: Does the term 'class' mean anything more than links made by objective interests? Does class not have a political dimension - beyond the economic dimension?

The subjectivist definitions define classes in a form of that is detached from economic relations. They do so by focusing exclusively on factors such as the level of consciousness, politicization and action. In this category we can place, for example, E.P. Thompson. In his vision, one can only fit within the working class if this person has a certain consciousness, organization ... But what about the worker who does not mobilize? Is this person no longer part of the working class? This double way of approaching the class is partly wrong. The majority of Marxists after Marx are affected by this to double, and non-closed definition of class.

And for that reason they make the same mistakes. The economic definitions elude the question that social classes are also defined by the level of consciousness, organization .. While subjectivist definitions avoid the fact that beyond the degree of politicization, classes are also defined by objective social relations. Beyond consciousness, there is class.

Surely it is more interesting to approach the subject another way. It would be necessary to put in relation the objective social conditions while also taking into account the degree of politicization, struggle... According to such an approach, there would be on the one hand the "class itself", or the set of objective social conditions; and on the other the "class for itself", or everything that has to do with subjectivity: politicization, consciousness, struggle .. This double definition allows us to approach a class definition in a non-reductionist way and analyse the classes in a complex way. In this tradition we can frame, for example, Marx himself, Bucharin, Lenin and Ernest Mandel. This would be best way to address today, for example, the fact that the working class exists even if it does not recognize itself as such. It is different with the bourgeoisie, a class which has very clear interests.

Class struggle

Bourgeois and proletarian are classes that are noticable even in our days¹. Classes continue to exist in the 21st century. But classes do not exist apart from the struggle. Either with or without conscience, these two blocs have conflicting interests, and from time to time they enter into conflict. This is when class struggle happens. From this "one can foresee" scientifically "only the struggle, but not the concrete moments of this", as Gramsci said.

Just as we can not anticipate the moments of the struggle, we can not perfectly anticipate their forms. In this sense we think like Lenin that; "Marxism (...) does not link the movement to a single predetermined form of struggle. In addition, it does not invent class struggle, but it generalizes, organizes and makes conscious the forms of class struggle"². Those 'below' structure their struggle

1 We leave out here the debate on the 'middle classes', which is very difficult to tackle. For this topic see "Classes" by Erik Olin Wright.

2 From the text 'On guerilla warfare', by Lenin

in very different ways at different moment. Both trade-unionism and the parliamentary struggle or the Indignados express in different ways the class conflict that is still latent in our society.