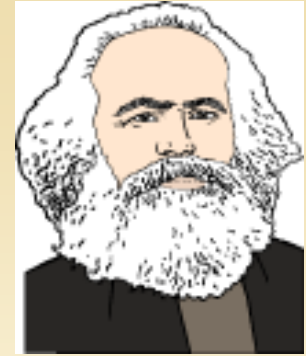


Embourgeoisement

And the Affluent worker

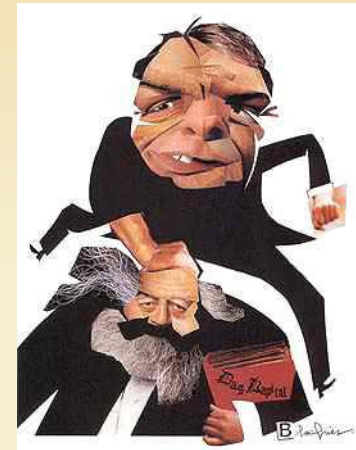
Embourgeoisement



- **Karl Marx:**
- The exploited proletariat will revolt and abolish capitalism.
- The socialist revolution will be prompted by (among other things):
 - Crisis of capitalist economy
 - Deteriorating conditions of the workers
 - Proletarianisation of the petit bourgeoisie (the middle class).

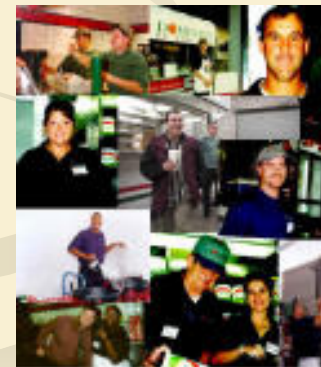
Embourgeoisement

- But Marx's predictions did not materialise.
- The socialist revolution did not take place nor does it look as if it is going to in the foreseeable future.
- What are the reasons why the working class seem to be content with the capitalist system?



Embourgeoisement

- One of the suggestions that some sociologists and political scientists came up with is the process of **embourgeoisement**.



Embourgeoisement

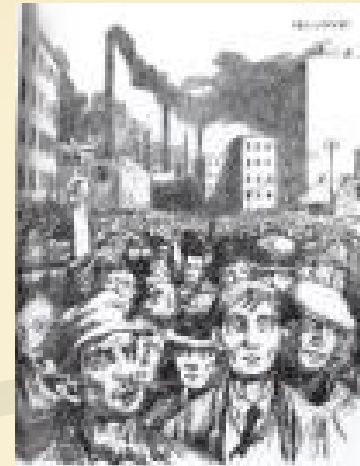
- **Goldthorpe:**
- “The ‘proletariat’ did not ‘absorb’ the middle class but rather the other way round”.

Embourgeoisement

- The post war years witnessed a steady economic growth.
- This was accompanied by significant improvement of working conditions.

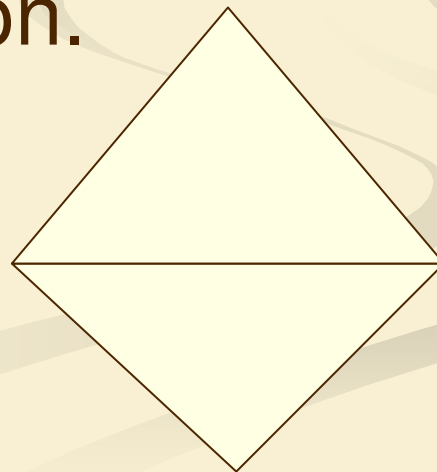
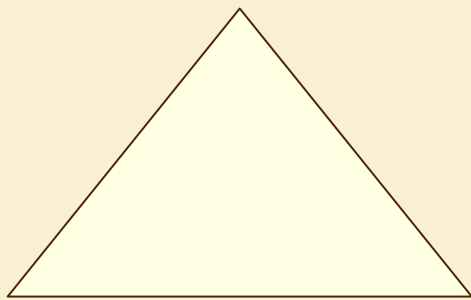
Embourgeoisement

- Working conditions at the beginning of the 20th century:
 - Long hours
 - Poor pay
 - Few breaks
 - Few holidays and other related benefits
 - No job security
 - Few promotion prospects
 - Minimal safety in the workplace



Embourgeoisement

- But things changed and so did the nature of the class structure.
- The improved conditions meant that increasing proportion of the population were falling into the middle classes.
- From a triangular shape social structure to a diamond or a pentagon.



Embourgeoisement

- The traditional working class is shrinking:
 - 1911: 79% of all workers in manual occupations.
 - 1971: under 50% of all workers in manual occupations.
 - 1991: 32.7% of all workers in manual occupations
 - 2002: 25% of all workers in manual occupations
- The Registrar General:
 - 1951: 75% of the population defined as WC
 - 2000: 32% of all employment was in manual work.
- Jobs in manufacturing: 1966- 8.6 millions
 - 1997- 4 millions
- 1947: 740,000 working in mining or quarrying
- 1997: 56,500 working in mining or quarrying
- Savage (1995): there are now more university lecturers than coal miners

Embourgeoisement

- The supporters of the embourgeoisement thesis argue that middle range wages created middle-class life style among the affluent workers.
- The affluent worker is even adopting a middle class norms, values and attitudes. E.g. privatised family-home-centred, vote Conservative, less trade unionists.

Embourgeoisement

- Sociologists/authors associated with the embourgeoisement thesis:
- Bell
- Lipset
- Galbraith

Embourgeoisement

- Goldthorpe et al (1969): The Affluent Worker .
- Interviews (and observations) in the 1960s with affluent workers in Luton

Embourgeoisement

- Findings:
- Economically:
- Luton workers were earning more than traditional workers but still considerably less than the middle class.
- Middle class groups also enjoyed greater job security, benefits and promotion prospects.

Embourgeoisement

- Socially:
- Goldthorpe found very little evidence for middle class lifestyle among the affluent worker.
- Workers there did not mix with the middle class. They lived in different neighbourhoods and spent their leisure time in different places.
- The affluent workers looked for friends and neighbours from working class background and in this respect they do not differ from the traditional working class norms.

Embourgeoisement

- Values and attitudes:
- a) ***Politics*** : Most workers voted for the Labour Party (80% in 1959- which is more than the working class as a whole) and supported the unions.
- However, unlike the traditional working class, this support was conditional and they were willing to move to the Conservatives providing that a better standard of living is offered.
- Relationship with the trade unions too was not an alliance based on principle and tradition. It was rather based on calculation that the trade unions could help them obtain better deal.

Embourgeoisement

- Values and attitudes:
- b) **Careers**: unlike traditional workers the affluent ones did not have much pride in their work nor did they have much job satisfaction. It was mainly routine and did not require skill and craftsmanship.
- Unlike the middle class, they also did not envisage promotion or prospects for professional development.

Embourgeoisement

- Values and attitudes:
- c) **Community:** The affluent worker differs from traditional workers.
- They had few close friends at work and rarely socialised with them outside work.
- Rarely visited social clubs provided at their firms.
- 'Privatised' family- privatised life style. Home/family centred.

Embourgeoisement

- **Conclusion:**
- Goldthorpe et al found that the embourgeoisement theory did not find much support in their study.
- **The affluent workers had *not* undergone embourgeoisement.**
- The fact that they earned a bit more than traditional workers did not turn them into middle classes.

Embourgeoisement

- However, in two ways -the new working class differed from the traditional working class 1) privatisation of the family
 - 2) conditional / instrumental support for Labour/unions.
- In this respect they become slightly closer to the middle class.
- This is why Goldthorpe et al were critical of the Marxist argument for a unified working class.

Embourgeoisement

- **Fiona Divine** (1992), 30 years later, and had a research of her own. Her findings were even more conclusive in rejecting the embourgeoisement theory and the idea of a 'new' working class.
- Unlike Goldthorpe she found that
 - 1) The workers were not necessarily instrumental in their attitudes towards the unions and the Labour party.
 - 2) The affluent workers did not become privatised
 - 3) The affluent workers still supports egalitarian society and did not accept capitalism.

Embourgeoisement

- Hill (1976), on the other hand, found that dock workers (clearly a traditional WC group) in London have similar attitudes to the 'affluent workers'
- They had similar instrumental (conditional) attitudes towards their union.
- They also led a privatised/home-centred lifestyle.
- In other words, traditional and new workers do not differ considerably.

Embourgeoisement

- Marxists, (e.g. **Westergaard**) argued that the so-called affluent workers were in some respects even *worse off* than the traditional workers.
- Although they earn slightly more but they are deprived of the creativity and community life that traditional workers normally have.
- He *predicts* that these workers will be easily radicalised if their working conditions worsen.
- In fact, shortly after the study, there was a strike at the Vauxhall factories although Goldthorpe observed that it was relatively short.

Embourgeoisement

- All in all, the Luton study helped to discredit the embourgeoisement theory although more sophisticated developments of the theory later developed.
- After the Tories won 4 successive elections in the 1979, '83 '87 and 1992, the old theory of embourgeoisement resurfaced again after many workers voted for the Conservative Party.