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# THE MIDDLE CLASSES IN MIDDLE-SIZED CITIES\*

## The Stratification and Political Position of Small Business and White Collar Strata

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*Guggenheim Fellow, 1946*

THE PROBLEMS which the middle classes pose for the social scientist are typically metropolitan in character and nation-wide in scope. White-collar workers in particular, are thought of in connection with big cities, and most recent discussions of the Middle classes as a whole focus either upon the nation or upon the metropolis. The sociology and politics of these strata in middle-sized<sup>1</sup> cities may nevertheless be worthy of study.

Such cities are convenient units for empirical analyses; they offer a point of contrast for information and theory dealing with nations or with big cities, and despite the fact that many large problems may be more sharply posed in national and metropolitan areas, some of the issues of politics and social structure take on fresh meaning and reality when translated into the con-

crete terms of smaller and more readily understood units.

If one keeps in mind the "place" of the middle-sized city in the nation and in relation to various city-size groups, it is a convenient point of anchorage for more extensive analysis of stratification, politics, and ideology. The position of the U. S. middle classes cannot be fully determined without attention to those living among the 15 million people who in 1940 resided in the 320 middle-sized cities.

### STRATIFICATION AND POLITICAL MENTALITY

A city's population may be stratified (a) objectively in terms of such bases as property or occupation or the amount of income received from either or both sources. Information about these bases may be confined to the present, or may include (b) the extractions, intermarriages, and job histories of members of given strata. Such "depth stratification" adds a time dimension to the contemporary objective bases of stratification. Subjectively, strata may be constructed according to who does the rating: (c) each individual may be asked to assign himself a position, (d) the interviewer may "intuitively" rate each individual, or (e) each individual may be asked to stratify the population and then to give his image of the people on each level.<sup>2</sup>

Properly designed studies in stratification will use both objective and subjective criteria: indeed, one of the key problems of

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<sup>1</sup> Middle-sized cities include those between 25,000 and 100,000 population. Middle classes include the smaller business and the white-collar people. The small business stratum includes retail, service, wholesale, and industrial proprietors employing less than 100 workers. (In the present data from Central City, the small business men employ far fewer, on the average 2 to 4.) The white-collar strata include families in the salaried professions and minor managerial positions, clerks and stenographers and bookkeepers, salesmen in and out of stores, and foremen in industry.

Materials used in this paper were gathered, in connection with studies having quite other purposes, for the Office of Reports, Smaller War Plants Corporation (6 cities extensively covered), and the Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia University (one city intensively covered). This is publication number A-70 of the latter institution. My colleague, Miss Helen Schneider, has been most helpful in her criticism of this manuscript.

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<sup>2</sup> In the present paper, we are not concerned with the intuitive ratings of interviewers, and space will not permit us to utilize fully the quantitative data available.

stratification theory is to account for such discrepancies as may thus appear.

The general problem of stratification and political mentality has to do with the extent to which the members of an objectively defined strata are homogenous in their political alertness, outlook and allegiances, and with the degree to which their political mentalities and actions are in line with the interests demanded by the juxtaposition of their objective position and their accepted values.

Irrational discrepancies between the objectively defined bases of a stratum, the subjectively held policies of its members and their commonly accepted values do not necessarily point to problems of method. They may indicate the "false consciousness" of the stratum we are examining.<sup>3</sup> Lack of structural unity and of political direction are symptoms of the many problems covered by this term that have as yet only been touched by modern empirical research.

Political mentalities may or may not be closely in line with objectively defined strata, but a lack of correspondence is a problem to be explained—in terms of the homogeneity of the situation of the stratum, the social relations between its members, the reach and content of the mass media and of the informal networks of communication that lie along each stratum, etc.

In examining the stratification and politics of the white collar and small business strata in middle-sized cities, we are concerned with whether or not each of them is a homogeneous stratum, with the degree and the content of political consciousness that they display, and with whether they reveal any independence of policy, or are politically dependent upon the initiative and ideologies of other strata.

<sup>3</sup> "False consciousness," the lack of awareness of and identification with one's objective interests, may be statistically defined as the deviant cases, that is, those which run counter to the main correlations in a table: for example, the rich who vote Socialist, the poor who vote Republican. "Objective interests" refer to those *allegiances and actions* which would have to be followed if the *accepted values* and desires of the people *involved in given strata situations* are to be realized.

The objective stratification of the U. S. middle-sized city has fallen into a rather standardized pattern. It will naturally vary from one city to another in accordance with the degree and type of industrialization and the extent to which one or two very large firms dominate the city's labor market. But the over-all pattern is now fairly set:

When the occupations of a cross section of married men in Central City<sup>4</sup> are coded in 24 groups and ranked according to average family income, five strata are crystallized out: between each of them there is a "natural" break in average income whereas the average income of the occupations making up each income stratum are relatively homogeneous. These strata, with their average weekly income (August, 1945), are as follows:

(1) Big Business and Executives . . . . .	\$137.00
(2) Small Business and Free Professionals . . . . .	102.00
(3) Higher White-collar <sup>5</sup> . . . . .	83.00
(4) Lower White-collar <sup>6</sup> . . . . .	72.00
(5) Wage Workers <sup>7</sup> . . . . .	59.00

These strata fall objectively into the "old" (1 and 2) and the "new" middle classes (3 and 4). Both these classes, however, are definitely split by income, and this split, as we shall see, is also true of other variables.

There is one point on which both objective and subjective methods of strata construction give similar results: Of all the strata in the middle-sized city, the small businessmen and the white-collar workers occupy the most ambiguous and least clearly defined social position: (a) The images which observers on other objective levels of

<sup>4</sup> A mid-western city of 60,000 population selected as "the most typical" on the basis of 36 statistical indicators gathered on all mid-western cities of 50-80,000 population. On the over-all index for all cities of 100, Central City was 99.

<sup>5</sup> Salaried professional and semi-professional, salesmen, government officials, minor managerial employees; income range: \$80.00 to \$87.00.

<sup>6</sup> Government protection and service, clerks, stenographers and bookkeepers, foremen; income range: \$71.00 to \$76.00.

<sup>7</sup> Due to wartime "up-grading" there are in this sample very few "manual laborers"; these make about \$14.00 less than the skilled and semi-skilled average.

the city ascribe to these occupational groups seem to vary the most widely and to be the least precise; (b) Correspondingly, in terms of a great many attributes and opinions, the white-collar people and, to a lesser degree, the smaller businessmen are the least homogeneous strata. Both in the subjective images held of various strata and in their objective attributes, the city is polarized; the small businessmen and the white-collar workers make up the vaguer and "some-where in-between" strata.

#### I. THE SMALL BUSINESS STRATUM

##### *Its Social Composition and Prestige.*

When we ask people in the several objectively defined strata to discuss the position and rank of the small businessman, a fundamental difference occurs between the ranking given him by upper-class and that given him by lower-class observers.<sup>8</sup>

To the lower-class observer, little businessmen are very often the most aparent element among "the higher-ups" and no distinctions are readily made between them and the "business" or "upper-class" in general. Upper-class observers, on the other hand, place the little businessmen—especially the retailers—much lower in the scale than they place the larger businessmen—especially the industrialists. Both the size and the type of of business influences their judgment.

In fact, two general images are held of small businessmen by upperclass people. They correspond to two elements of the upper class: (a) The socially new, larger, industrial entrepreneurs rank small business rather low because of the *local* nature of these little businessmen's activities. Such upper-class people gauge prestige to a great extent by the scope of a business and the social and business "connections" with members of nationally known firms. These criteria are opposite to the status-by-old-family-residence frequently used by the

second upper-class element: (b) The old family rentier ranks the smaller businessmen low because of his feeling about their background and education, "the way he lives." And, as we shall see, the smaller businessmen cannot often qualify with these standards.

Both upper-class elements tend to stress a Jewish element among the smaller business stratum (although there are very few Jewish families among the smaller businessmen in Central City) and both more or less agree with the blend of "ethical" and "economic" sentiment expressed by an old-family banker: "The independent ones are local operators; they do a nice business, but not nationally. Business ethics are higher, more broadminded, more stable among industrialists, as over against retailers. We all know that."

But wage-worker families do not know all that. They ascribe power and prestige to the small businessman without really seeing the position he holds within the upper strata. "Shopkeepers," says a lower-class woman, "they go in the higher brackets. Because they are on the higher level. They don't humble themselves to the poor."

(a) The social composition and (b) the actual power position of the small business stratum help us to understand these ambiguous images.

(a) Since they earn about the same average income as the free professionals, the small businessmen are in the Number Two income bracket of the city. But they are not at all similar to the other high income groups in occupational, intermarriage and job histories. In these respects, the free professionals are similar to the big business owners and executives, whereas the smaller businessmen crystallize out as a distinct stratum different from any other in the population.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> These remarks are based on 45 open-ended interviews in Central City, a baby sample within the parent sample; and some 60 random interviews in 6 other middle-sized cities.

<sup>9</sup> The figures on small businessmen which are given below are quite small: in an area sample of 882 homes we caught 37 small businessmen. No per cents from such a small base are given unless they are significant according to critical ratios. Nevertheless, the results should be taken with a grain of

Almost three-fourths of the small businessmen are derived from the upper half of the occupational-income hierarchy. Yet this relative lack of mobility is not the only, nor necessarily the most relevant point at hand: when we compare small business with other occupations of similar income level, we notice that they contain the greatest proportion of ascending individuals now in the higher income brackets: 18% of those who are urban-derived had wage-worker fathers and 9% had low-income white-collar fathers. Thus 27% come from the lower groups. The free professional and big businessmen, on the other hand, do not include any individuals who derive from wage-worker or low income white-collar.

Slightly more than half of these small businessmen have married girls whose fathers were in the upper-half of the income-occupation ranks. About 40% of them married daughters of wage workers; the remaining married into the lower income white-collar stratum. This 40% cross with wage workers is well over three time greater than for any other of the occupational groups in the higher income brackets.

The job histories of these little businessmen reveal the same basic pattern. Only one out of five of them were in a job as high as small business at the time of their marriage (their average age is now around 48) whereas almost half of them were working for wages at that time. Well over half (57%) did wage work for their first full-time job.

In contrast, all the free professionals were professionals by the time they married, and three-fourths of the salaried professionals—who make on the average \$13.00 a month less than the small businessmen—were in their present jobs when married. At the bottom of the society we find the same type of rigidity: 9 out of 10 of all grades of labor were wage workers at their time of marriage.

There is rigidity at the bottom and at the top—except among small businessmen who,

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salt, and caution exercised in any further use made of them: in reality, we are here dealing with qualitative materials.

relative to comparable income groups, have done a great deal of moving up the line.

Almost twice as high a proportion of the big business and free professional men have graduated from high school as is the case for small businessmen, despite the fact that the small businessmen are slightly younger. Moreover, the wives of small businessmen rank fourth in education, just above laborer's wives, in our five-fold occupation-income strata; over half of their wives never finished high school, as compared with only one-fourth of the wives of men in comparable income groups.

The small businessmen are of the generally upper ranks only in income; in terms of occupational origin, intermarriage, job history, and education, more of them than of any other occupational group of such high income are "lower class." A good proportion of them have rather close biographical connections with the wage worker strata. These findings help us explain the difference between the images held of them by members of the upper and of the lower strata. The upper class judges more on status and "background"; the lower more by income and the appearances to which it readily leads.

(b) The ambiguous prestige of small business people has to do with power as well as with "background:" the small businessmen, especially in cities dominated by a few large industrial firms, are quite often "fronts" for the larger business powers. They are, civically, out in front busily accomplishing all sorts of minor projects and taking a lot of praise and blame from the rank and file citizenry. Among those in the lower classes who, for one reason or another, are "anti-business," the small business front is often the target of aggression and blame; but for the lower-class individual who is "pro-business" or "neutral," the small businessmen get top esteem because "they are doing a lot for this city."

The prestige often imputed to small business by lower-class members is based largely on ascribed power, but neither this prestige nor this ascribed power is always claimed, and certainly it is not often cashed in among

the upper classes by small businessmen. The upper-class businessman knows the actual power setup; if he and his clique are using small businessmen for some project, he may shower public prestige on them, but he does not "accept" them and he allows them only such "power" as he can retain in his control.

*Organization Power of Small Business.*

The centers of organizational life for the top are the Chamber of Commerce and the service clubs, and for the bottom, the several trade unions. There are vast differences in their scope, energy and alertness to chances to play the larger civic role. The Chamber of Commerce is more compact and disciplined in its supporting strata and more widely influential in its infiltration and attempted manipulations of other voluntary associations. It is, in many towns, a common denominator of other voluntary organizations. Its hands, either openly *via* "committees," or covertly *via* "contacts," are in all "community" affairs of any political consequence. But the trade unions do not typically reach out beyond themselves, except when their leaders are included in projects sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce.

If both CIO and AFL unions operate in a city, the Chamber of Commerce can very often play them off against one another; usually the old AFL men are quite flattered by being included in Chamber of Commerce committees which thus build them up before the citizenry as representing "labor" in this town. The younger CIO men are confronted with the choice of following this older route of compromised inclusion or of playing the lone wolf, in which case they rest their civic chances entirely upon their strictly union success.

The organization of the Small Business Front is quite often in the hands of the Chamber of Commerce; and many of the hidden wires behind the scene are manipulated by the local bank setup, which is usually able to keep The Front in line whenever this is considered necessary by large industrial firms. The political and eco-

nomie composition of a well-run Chamber of Commerce enables the organization to borrow the prestige and power of the top strata; its committee includes the "leaders" of practically every voluntary association, including labor unions; within its organizations and through its contacts, it is able virtually to monopolize the organizing and publicity talent of the city. It can thus identify its program with the unifying myth of "the community interest."

This well-known constellation of power underpins the ambiguity of prestige enjoyed by small businessmen, and provides the content of their ideology and political efforts.

*Ideologies of Small Business.*

The ideology of small businessmen rests upon their identification with business as such. They are well organized, but "their" organizations are pretty well under the thumb of larger businesses and the banks. The power of big business is exercised by means of threats "to leave town," by simply refraining from participation in various organizations, by control of credit sources, and by the setting up and using of small businessmen as fronts. The small businessmen, nevertheless, cling to the identity: "business is business." They do not typically see, nor try to act upon, such differences as may exist between the interests of big and little business. The benefits derived from "good relations" with the higher-ups of the local business world, and the prestige striving, oriented towards the big men, tend to strengthen this identification, which is organized and promoted by their associations.

One of the best contemporary sources of information on small business ideology is provided by the field hearings of the SWPC.<sup>10</sup> These are "gripe sessions" usually held in local hotels in the presence of a congressman or his delegate. A rough content analysis of these discussions, occurring during the late war, reveals that the bull's-eyes of the small businessman's aggression are labor and government. The attitude toward

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., *Hearings*, Senate Small Business Committee, S. Res. 298 (76th Congress) Part 6.

"labor" magnifies its power: "We know that labor, at the present time, has the upper hand. They tell us what to do." And the resentment is quite personalized: "Think of the tremendous wages being paid to laboring men . . . all out of proportion to what they should be paid . . . a number of them have spoken to me, saying they are ashamed to be taking the wages." And another one says: "I had a young man cash a check at the store on Monday evening for \$95.00 . . . Another case . . . made a total of \$200.00 for 30 days . . . We would not class him as half as good as our clerks in our store . . . Naturally to hire men today to do this common labor we are going to have to compete with (war factories)." "A man has to run short-handed or do the work himself."

Toward government, the attitude is resentment at its regulations and at the same time many pleas for economic aid and political comfort. The only noticeable talk against big business is in such governmental statements, by staff members of Senate committees, as: the definition of a small businessman is one who "hasn't got an office or a representative in Washington." The independent little businessman believes: "We are victims of circumstances. My only hope is in Senator Murray, who, I feel sure, will do all in his power to keep the little businessman who, he knows, has been the foundation of the country [etc.] . . . We all know no business can survive selling . . . at a loss, which is my case today, on the new cost of green coffee."

"Small business . . . what is it?" asks the manager of a small business trade association. "It is American Business . . . it is the reason we have an American Way." Such phrases as "the little businessman who has built up, by sweat, tears and smiles, a business . . ." underline the importance placed by this stratum on its own virtue. The ideology of and for small business thus carries self-idealization to the point of making it the content of nationalism.

The attitude towards "government" is blended with a self-estimate of virtue: the criterion of man is success on Main Street:

"Another thing that I resent very much is the fact that most of these organizations are headed by men who are not able to make a success in private life and have squeezed into WPA [sic] and gotten over us and are telling us what to do, and it is to me very resentful. And all these men here know of people who head these organizations, who were not able to make a living on Main Street before."

This ideology apparently rests to some extent upon a sense of insecurity. For example, in Central City, the wives of low income businessmen worry about "how the postwar situation will affect you and your family" more than any other strata, although they are followed closely by the lower white-collar people. Sixty per cent of the low income business people worry a great deal, as against 45% of those of higher income. The small business families are apparently aware that they make up the margins of free private enterprise. And—in view of their ascent—perhaps they remember that everything that goes up can come down.

It is also of interest to notice that the wives of smaller businessmen are not nearly so sure as one might expect that "any young man with thrift, ability and ambition has the opportunity to rise in the world, own his own home, and earn \$5,000 a year." In Central City<sup>11</sup> only 40% of them believe it, as against 68% of the higher income business people. They are still, however, a good deal more optimistic than the low income white-collar people (26%) who are the most pessimistic stratum in the city. About 37% of the wage workers' wives, regardless of income, are optimistic of the climb.

## II. THE WHITE COLLAR STRATA

### *Social Composition and Images of White-Collar People.*

The lower classes sometimes use the term, "white-collar," to refer to everybody above

<sup>11</sup> We first asked this ascent question in general; then we followed it up with: "Could he do it in (Central City)?" The optimism of all strata dropped greatly when the question was brought closer home to them.

themselves. Their attitude varies from the power-class criterion: they are "pencil pushers" who "sit around and don't work and figure out ways of keeping wages cheap," to the social-pragmatic criterion: "The clerks are very essential. They are the ones who keep the ball rolling for the other guy. We would be lost if we didn't have the clerks." This latter attitude may be slightly more frequent among those workers whose children have become clerks.

The upper classes, on the other hand, never acknowledge the white-collar people as of the top and sometimes place them with laborers. An old upper-class man, for instance, says: "Next after retailers, I would put the policemen, firemen, the average factory worker and the white-collar clerks." Interviewer: "You would put the white-collar people in with the workers?" "Well, I think so. I've lived in this town all my life and come to the bank every day but Sunday, and I can't name five clerks downtown I know."

The white-collar people are split down the middle by income, extraction, intermarriage, job history, and education. Of the men in the higher of the two white-collar income classes, 61% are derived from the upper-half of the extraction-income hierarchy, as compared with 49% of the lower white-collar men who are from the upper half by extraction.<sup>12</sup>

The *urban* origins of the several occupations of the higher white-collar stratum are homogeneous as regards extraction; but the lower white-collar stratum of urban origin contains occupations of quite different extraction which cancel out into a misleading average: The clerks are closer in origin to the higher white-collar as a whole, about 50% being from the upper half, whereas the foreman are quite like labor,<sup>13</sup> only 25% being from the upper half.

In intermarriage, job mobility and educa-

tion similar situations exist: members of the higher white-collar bracket are homogeneous in intermarriage: about half of them have married women whose fathers were in the upper half of the hierarchy. The lower white-collar stratum is split: the women whom clerks marry are similar in background to the wives of the upper white-collar. Foremen, on the other hand, show a tendency to marry more along the lines that the labor strata follow; yet they marry small businessmen's daughters in about the same proportion (27%) as clerks, minor managerials and salaried professionals, thus forging another link between small businessmen and the laboring class.

The salesmen and the salaried professionals have not experienced much job mobility: 6 out of 10 of them were in higher white-collar at the time of their marriage. In the lower white-collar, again foremen stand out as exceptions: 67% of them were wage workers at their time of marriage and 75% worked for wages in their first full-time job.

Whereas the formal education of the clerks is similar to that of higher white-collar (only 5 to 11% of high white-collar and clerks never going beyond grade school), 40% of the foremen have never gone beyond grade school; this places them educationally only a little above skilled workers.

The lower white-collar is thus not a homogeneous stratum by extraction, intermarriage or job history: some of the occupations in it are sociologically affiliated with labor and some with the occupations we have ranked by income as higher white-collar.

The white-collar people are, as we have seen, split by income. But the images held of them as a whole seem to be drawn from the occupations belonging to the lower half of the white-collar income level. The upper white-collar people, especially the salesmen, tend to merge with the sponge term, "business," and are thought of as "businessmen" by many members of the upper class. Most upper-class people derive their images of the white-collar people largely from stereotypes of "the clerk."

The ambiguous rank of the small business-

<sup>12</sup> There are 117 families in our higher white-collar group, and 92 in the lower. In the general origin table, farm owners are put with upper half, farm tenants and laborers with the lower half.

<sup>13</sup> The cases of government protection and service were too few to permit a reliable calculation.

man is explained by his social origin and by the "power" which is ascribed to him by the lower but denied to him by the upper. The ambiguous position of the white-collar worker, on the other hand, rests less upon *complications* in, and pressures on his power position than upon his absence of power. They have no leaders active in civic efforts; they are not, as a stratum, represented in the councils; they have no autonomous organizations through which to strive for such political and civic ends as they may envision; they are seldom, if ever, in the publicity spotlight as a group. No articulate leaders in these cities appeal directly and mainly to white-collar people or draw their strength from white-collar support.

The few organizations in which white-collar employees predominate—the Business and Professional Women's Clubs, the Junior Chamber of Commerce, and the YWCA—are so tied in with business groups as such, that they have little or no autonomy. Socially, the lower white-collar is largely on "the Elk level" and the higher white-collar usually is in the No. 2 or 3 social clubs; in both these situations they form part of a "middle-class mingling" pattern. They are "led," if at all, by salesmen and other such "contact people" who are themselves identified with "business."

The organized power of the middle-sized city does not include any autonomous white-collar unit. Which way the unorganized white-collar people will swing politically and which of the two civic fronts they will support seems to depend almost entirely upon the strength and prestige of autonomous labor organizations within the city, a point to which we shall return.

#### *White-Collar Ideologies.*

The ideology of the white-collar people rises rather directly out of their occupations and the requirements for them. They are not a well defined group in any other readily apparent sense. This ideology is not overtly political, yet by political default, it is generally "conservative" and by virtue of the aspects of occupation which it stresses, it

sets up "social" distinctions between white-collar and labor and makes the most of them.

Those white-collar people in middle-sized cities, for example, who "contact the public" exhibit the psychology of people working a small and personally known market from within small and moderate-sized firms. In this respect, they are the typological opposites of salesgirls in metropolitan department stores who work a mass public of strangers. Fifty-three small merchants and salespeople in Central City,<sup>14</sup> almost unanimously knew personally the people they served and were very "happy" about their work. Their attitude towards this work is seldom material. It rests upon a communalization between buyer and seller: 63% spontaneously mentioned enjoyment at contacting their public, which is twice as high as for any other single reason for liking their work.

This general ideology has four discernible contents: (a) the idea that they are *learning about human nature*, which is mentioned by about one-fourth of them; (b) the feeling that they *borrow prestige* from their customers; sometimes the prestige source includes the merchandise itself or the store, but its center is normally the customer; (c) the opposite of prestige borrowing: the feeling of *power in manipulating the customer's appearance and home*; this is more apparent, of course, among cosmetic and clothing sellers; (d) The idea of *rendering service*: about one-fourth speak explicitly in terms of an ideology of service, which is interwoven in various ways with the other contents.

These key elements in the occupational ideology of salespeople in medium-sized cities, (1) rest upon the facts of a small and personally known market; (2) in emphasizing just this contact aspect of their work,

<sup>14</sup> Twelve were small business operators; 2/3's are women; about 1/2 of the total have finished high school. The implicit contrast with metropolitan salesgirls is anchored on quotational materials gathered over several years by Mr. James Gale, "Types of Macy Salesgirls," seminar paper, University of Maryland, Graduate School.

the white-collar people seize upon precisely an occupational experience which wage workers do not and cannot have; they make a fetish of "contacts"; and (3) the ideology, as a whole and in its parts, is either neutral or pro-business in orientation.

Similar ideological analysis of other occupations making up our two white-collar strata reveal similar tendencies. Nothing in the direct occupational experience of the white-collar people in middle-sized cities propels them towards an autonomous organization for political or civic power purposes. The social springs for such movements, should they occur, will be elsewhere.

The direct appeal to higher wages, through collective action, which the trade unions hold out, is in tension with these occupational ideologies.

"I can't understand why they don't organize," says a business agent for an old-line union. "They got a high school education or more. Looks to me like they'd be the ones to organize, not the man in the ditch with fourth grade education. But it seems to work out just the other way . . . The solution is to come down to earth and realize that the prestige of this would-be manager and assistant manager is camouflage for cheap wages. The glory of the idea of the name takes the place of wages . . . that's all I can figure out."<sup>15</sup>

Such a contrast between status and class interest, which is rather typically known by alert trade union men, leads us to expect that only if labor gets civic power and prestige will the white-collar people in these cities string along. So long as their occupational ideology and status claims remain as they are, they will not make a "class fight," although they will try to share in the results, if those who make it for them win out.

#### *White-Collar Politics.*

In the general polarization of the middle-sized city's stratification, the top and the

<sup>15</sup> There are of course other reasons, besides status claims and occupational ideologies for the difficulties of unionizing white-collar workers; see C. Wright Mills, "The White Collar Unions: A Statistical Portrait and an Outline of Their Social Psychology" (forthcoming).

bottom are becoming more rigid: 73% of the upper half of the income-occupation scale is descended from the upper half. There is also a rather distinct polarization in organization life, in ideological loyalty, and in political tendency.

There are no available symbols which are in any way distinctly of the white-collar strata. Contrary to many expectations, these middle groups show no signs of developing a policy of their own. Neither in income nor mentality are they unified. The high white-collar are 40% more Republican than their lower white-collar colleagues.

They do not feel any sharp crisis specific to their stratum. They drift into acceptance of and integration with a business-run society punctuated by "labor troubles." In these cities, it may be pretentious to speak of "political tendencies" among white-collar workers. And such problems as the relations of party, trade union, and class cannot even be posed: The white-collar people are not a homogeneous class; they are not in trade unions; neither major party caters specifically to them, and there is no thought of their forming an independent party.

Insofar as political and civic strength rests upon organized economic power, the white-collar workers can only derive such strength from "business" or from "labor." Within the whole structure of power, they are dependent variables. They have no self-starting motor moving them to form organizations with which to increase their power in the civic constellation. Estimates of their political tendencies in the middle-sized cities, therefore, must rest upon larger predictions of the manner and outcome of the civic struggles of business and labor.

Only when "labor" has rather obviously "won out" in a city, if then, will the lower white-collar people go in for unions. If the leaders of labor are included in compromise committees, stemming from Chamber of Commerce circles, then such white-collar groups as exist will be even more so.

Lenin's remark that the political consciousness of a stratum cannot be aroused within "the sphere of relations between

workers and employers" holds doubly true for white-collar employees in these cities. Their occupational ideology is politically passive. They are not engaged in any economic struggle, except in the most scattered and fragmentary way. It is, therefore, not odd that they lack even a rudimentary awareness of their economic and political interests. Insofar as they are at all politically available, they form the rear guard either of "business" or of "labor"; but in either case, they are very much rear guard.

Theories of the rise to power of white-collar people are generally inferred from the facts of their numerical growth and their indispensability in the bureaucratic and dis-

tributive operations of mass society. But only if one assumes a pure and automatic democracy of numbers does the mere growth of a stratum mean increased power for it. And only if one assumes a magic leap from occupational function to political power does technical indispensability mean power for a stratum.

When one translates such larger questions into the terms of the middle-sized American city, one sees very clearly that the steps from growth and function to increased political power include, at a minimum, political awareness and political organization. The white-collar workers in these cities do not have either to any appreciable extent.

## FREEDOM AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

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THE problem of freedom is an old one, but for free men its importance is such that it can bear periodical re-examination. The term itself is ambiguous, for it has been used in many senses, not only by the philosophers but by practical statesmen as well. The discussion of freedom has often been involved with the idea of free will; at other times it has referred more concretely to freedom of action within society. The questions connected with free will and determinism are primarily problems for metaphysics and ethics and, in the main, only normative answers can be given to them. The conditions which are conducive to freedom of social action, however, are more amenable to historical and sociological investigation, and it is this relationship which will provide the basis for discussion.

From the sociological standpoint the problem of freedom is primarily a problem of social structure. This means that it is a legitimate task for the sociologist to inquire into the socio-historical conditions, particularly the structure of power relationships present in various types of societies, which are most closely correlated with freedom of social action. A thorough study would, of course,

require an intensive historical research into the fluctuation of freedom under the impact of changing forms of political, economic and social organization. But even a preliminary presentation of the question requires some working definition of freedom that will lend itself to some degree of objectivity of treatment. The problem therefore resolves itself into two main topics for analysis: the nature of freedom, and the consideration of the forms of social structure which are conducive to freedom.

It may be said that the amount of freedom that an individual possesses is measured by the number of things he can do without interference from others. In this sense his freedom is a function of someone else's freedom, for this other person's concrete freedoms may be such that they tend to inhibit the freedom of action of the first individual. If Van Wyck has the freedom to levy assessments on the produce of Jones, then Jones does not have the freedom to dispose of the product of his labor as he sees fit. If Jones joins with Smith and Muller and Larski, then he may be able to limit and institutionalize the amount of assessments so that the economic relationship to