



NEO-CONSERVATISM AND THE NEW CLASS: A CRITICAL EVALUATION

NIGEL ASHFORD



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FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY

NEO-CONSERVATISM AND THE NEW CLASS: A CRITICAL EVALUATION

NIGEL ASHFORD

The concept of a New Class, an educated middle class in an adversarial relationship with the economic, political and cultural beliefs of American society, is central to the ideas of the neo-conservatives and their analysis of a crisis in Western societies. This paper will present and examine the neo-conservative view of the New Class, in particular the causes of its creation, its ideology, style, influence and, for the neo-conservatives, detrimental consequences.

The neo-conservatives are a group of American intellectuals, formerly associated with the left or "liberal" spectrum, who have moved in a more conservative direction — although most of them still perceive themselves as liberals. This group has had a considerable influence upon intellectual debate in America, and made an important contribution to the return of conservative ideas to the realm of intellectual respectability. They have been described by their critics as including "many of America's best known and most often quoted members of the intellectual elite" (Etzioni, 1977, p. 431), as "the currently most prominent group of American intellectuals" (Green, 1978), and that "reactionary climate dominating social policy" (Ryan, 1972, p. 55). Although small in number, they include some well-known names in academia and journalism, such as Daniel Bell, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Irving Kristol, Seymour Martin Lipset, Michael Novak, Ben Wattenburg, Norman Podhoretz, Nathan Glazer and James Q. Wilson. Their influence has been achieved mainly through the journals, *The Public Interest* (edited by Kristol and Podhoretz), and *Commentary* (edited by Podhoretz), and supported by a massive output in books, academic journals, 'quality' magazines, pamphlets, seminars and newspapers. Their work has placed the concept of the New Class as central to the debate about the nature of current American society.

I Defining the New Class

The New Class has been defined by most of the neo-conservatives in more or less similar terms. A useful summary of them is contained in Paul Weaver's description of them as "that rapidly growing and increasingly influential part of the upper middle class that feels itself in a more or less adversary position vis-a-vis American society and that tends to seek its vocation in the public and not-for-profit sectors" (Weaver, 1978, p. 59). This definition identifies the main characteristics of the New Class: it is upper middle class by virtue of its education; it is hostile to the basic values of American society; and it is employed primarily outside of business and industry.

Intellectuals, or the intelligentsia, is an alternative description of this group, but intellectuals in a very broad sense, "all those who are considered proficient in and are actively engaged in the creation, distribution and application of culture" (Lipset and Dobson, 1972, p. 137). Peter Berger argued that their distinctive characteristic is that they are concerned with symbols or ideas rather than goods, but in all

stages, at production by the more imaginative and creative thinkers, distribution, by educators and journalists, and consumers, as students, readers of intellectual journals, etc. (Berger, 1979, p. 87).

The emergence of this new class is a consequence of the development of the Post-Industrial Society, as presented by Daniel Bell in his classic study, *The Coming of the Post-Industrial Society* (Bell, 1976). Bell argued that we are now in the first stages of a post-industrial society in which the production and distribution of knowledge would replace the production and distribution of goods as the principal activity of society and the governing principle of its organisation and knowledge as the chief source of power. "Just as the business firm was the key institution of the past hundred years because of its role in organising production for the mass creation of products, the university will become the central institution of the next hundred years because of its role as the new source of innovation and knowledge. If the dominant figures of the past hundred years have been the entrepreneur, the businessman, and the industrial executive, the 'new men' are the scientists, the mathematicians, the economists, and the engineers of the new intellectual technology" (Bell, 1976, p. 343).

Bell believed that these people "are not bound by a sufficient common interest to make them a political class but they do have common characteristics" (Bell, 1976, p. 362). Others, however, felt that the characteristics described by Bell were sufficient to deserve the term 'class'. Firstly, they belong to a common occupational strata, related to knowledge and ideas. Secondly, they share a set of common values, towards economics, politics and culture. Thirdly, they have a common interest in an expanding public sector. These commonalities of occupation, values and interests are sufficiently strong to suggest the existence of a 'class' (Ladd and Hadley, 1978, p. 185; Novak, 1978, p. 29; Berger, 1979, p. 99).

II The Inspiration of Schumpeter and Trilling

The source of the neo-conservative analysis of a new class can be found in their frequent references to the economist Joseph Schumpeter's *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1942) and the literary critic Lionel Trilling's *Beyond Culture* (1965). Schumpeter argued that intellectuals "develop group attitudes and group interests sufficiently strong to make large numbers of them behave in a way that is usually associated with the concept of social classes" (p. 134). He believed that capitalism would inevitably be replaced by socialism, but not through the actions of the working class but by the intellectuals. The intelligentsia were hostile to capitalism partly because "it lives on criticism and its whole position depends on criticism that stings," and partly because the jobs available to the educated would not usually satisfy their expectations with regard to job satisfaction, salary and status. This hostility by

itself was not a great threat, but their ability to articulate and intensify other sources of dissatisfaction “explains why public policy grows more and more hostile to capitalist interests.” “They staff political bureaus, write party pamphlets and speeches, act as secretaries and advisers, make the individual politician’s newspaper reputation, which, though it is not everything, few men can afford to neglect. In doing these things they to some extent impress the mentality of almost everything that is being done.” Capitalists, however, are helpless to deal with this threat because the freedom that the intellectual uses to undermine capitalism is the same freedom the businessman requires from government intervention in the economy — freedom of speech and freedom of enterprise are inter-related (Chapter 13). Thus, for Schumpeter, intellectuals are anti-capitalist, influential and unstoppable.

Trilling’s contribution was in the identification of ‘the adversary culture.’ “Any historian of the literature of the modern age will take virtually for granted the adversary intention, the actually subversive intention, that characterises modern writing — he will perceive its clear purpose of detaching the reader from the habits of thought and feeling that the larger culture imposes, of giving him a ground and a vantage point from which to judge and condemn, and perhaps revise, the culture that has produced him” (Trilling, 1965, pp. xii-xiii). Trilling broadly welcomed the adversary nature of the intellectual, and indeed believed that intellectuals could not be creative without being critical. Their integrity depended upon their resistance to reality, and he welcomed the development of modernism in culture.

For Trilling, the rise of the adversary culture also had its dangers. Firstly, it was of such a size and cohesion that “it is possible to think of it as a class” with “its common interests and presuppositions and a considerable efficiency of organisation, even of an institutional kind.” If the adversary culture “has not dominated the whole of its antagonist, the middle class ... it has detached a considerable force from the main body of the enemy and has captivated its allegiance.” The value of the intellectual lay in his ability to gain a distance from his society, but, with numbers and cohesion, they would be drawn into society and thus lose that distance.

The second great danger was that the intelligentsia would create its own conformity. “We can say of it, as we say of any other class, that it has developed characteristic habitual responses to the stimuli of its environment. It is not without power, and we can say of it as we can say of any other class with a degree of power, that it seeks to aggrandize and perpetuate itself.” In pursuit of this, the intelligentsia will seek to limit the autonomy of its members, while that autonomy is crucial to the role of the intellectual (Trilling, 1965, pp. xii-xvi). For this reason Trilling, while a liberal himself, emphasised the need for an intelligent conservatism. “In the United States at this time liberalism is not only the dominant but even the sole intellectual tradition,” which “is not conducive to the real strength of liberalism.” Using John Stuart Mill’s argument that the intellectual challenge of an opponent forces one to examine the weaknesses of one’s own views, Trilling expressed his call for an intellectual conservatism that will prevent intellectual conformity (Trilling, 1954). According to Podhoretz, Trilling became increasingly unhappy with the adversary culture but, because of his concern to retain the label ‘liberal,’ refused

to criticise it openly (Podhoretz, 1979, pp. 276-284, 295-304).

Inspired by the ideas of Schumpeter and Trilling, the neo-conservatives have developed a complex analysis of a New Class based on their shared ideas of an intellectual class and its adversary nature.

III Who Belongs to the New Class?

Irving Kristol has provided a detailed list of members of the New Class, which includes “scientists, teachers and educational administrators, journalists and others in the communications industries, psychologists, social workers, those lawyers and doctors who make their careers in the expanding public sector, city planners, the staffs of large foundations, the upper level of the government bureaucracy and so on” (Kristol, 1978, p. 27). What all these people have in common is that they make a living from ideas and are influenced by ideas.

The most important members of the New Class are seen as the academics (i.e. people like most of the neo-conservatives). Their centrality arises from their role as the legitimators of society. Rothman argued that “such a stratum has been the creator, guardian and interpreter of the basic symbols of power” (Lipset, 1979, p. 325). The academics have great power because of their direct contact with students, as the chief producers of ideas consumed by the rest of the New Class, and as a reference group for other groups without the time or ability to develop their own ideas.

Academics are obviously not monolithic in their views, but a number of factors serve to undermine the importance of the lack of unanimity among professors. Lipset, in a series of studies conducted both alone and with others, found that the incidence of leftism was associated with being an academic professor, being a social scientist, and being one of the more prominent social scientists (Lipset and Ladd, 1975; Lipset, 1972, pp. 211-289; Lipset and Dobson, 1972; Bruce-Riggs, 1979, Chapter 6). Firstly, professors were far more likely to describe themselves as liberal or radical than any other group in society. Secondly, social scientists, with their potential for a more direct impact upon public policy, were more left than other disciplines. 76% of social scientists voted for George McGovern as President, and 64% identified themselves as liberal or very liberal (Lipset, 1972, pp. 211-289). Thirdly, “the most liberal academics are in the most prestigious and politically influential positions,” the most productive at the most prestigious institutions, and the most in contact with graduate students (Bruce-Riggs, 1979, p. 74). While the diverse nature of the political opinions of academics are recognised, and that conservative and pro-capitalist opinions are more widespread than commonly assumed, the *influence* of academics tends to be in a left-wing direction.

The market for the products of the academics is the New Class. The biggest section of that market is, of course, students. With the explosion in higher education in the post-war period, the student market is immense. About 10 million people are enrolled in degree level programmes in the United States, a sevenfold increase since 1940, and almost 5% of the total population. 40 million Americans have received some college education, 30% of the adult population. About 60% of college graduates have gone to professional or kindred occupations (Bruce-Riggs, 1979, p. 102).

Students and college graduates have moved to a more left position from earlier times. In the 1950s students were more Republican than the general public, while by 1974 only 14% supported the Republicans with 37% Democrats and 49% independents. 54% of students voted for McGovern, 16 points higher than the general public. Graduate students furthermore tended to be more ideologically extreme than the average supporters of their party (Ladd and Hadley, 1978, pp. 253-254, 349). Students have changed very markedly in recent years, and predominantly in a more left direction.

A third section of the New Class, while relatively small, is considered to be extremely important, journalists. The media, i.e. television, radio and newspapers, have changed significantly. Firstly, there has been the nationalisation of the media, with New York as the centre of both television and the cultural magazines and Washington DC as the centre of political journalism. The consequence is that only a relatively small number of influential people interact with each other, read the same newspapers and magazines (*New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *New York Review of Books*), and often come to accept similar ideas and values (Lipset, 1978, pp. 342-344). Secondly, journalism has changed from being a low status, working class profession to one with high status, good salary and attractive to the upper middle class. Most journalists are now college graduates, with less than 0.5% without a college education. This trend became a flood after the success of Bernstein and Woodward's *All the President's Men* (Lipset, 1978, Chapter 12; Lipset, 1979, Chapter 15; Ladd and Hadley, 1978, p. 187). Thirdly, as a result of their college education and their desire to achieve and sustain a high status, journalists looked more and more to academics as a reference group, so that comments from academics are almost obligatory in the quality newspapers and magazines (Ladd and Hadley, 1978, p. 187). Andrew Greeley attributed the feeling in the mass media to guilt "vis-a-vis the full-fledged academic, who presumably knows more and is more morally pure than the media huckster" (Greeley, 1974, p. 259). Fourthly, the media has become more adversarial, more hostile to the basic values of American society. Rothman found in his studies that the media was so hostile to the Presidency that it was in danger of destroying it as an effective institution (Moynihan, 1975, Chapter 17). Samuel Huntington observed that "the national media ... increasingly came to conceive of themselves in an adversarial role vis-a-vis the executive government. At stake were not merely conflicting personalities and differing political viewpoints, but also fairly fundamental institutional interests. The media have an interest in exposure, criticism, highlighting and encouraging disagreement and disaffection within the executive branch" (Huntington, 1974, p. 184). Crucial for the neo-conservatives is that at the same time the media has established a central role in American society and developed an adversarial culture within it.

Lawyers are usually seen as an archetypal conservative committed to the *status quo*. While most lawyers are bourgeois, a significant minority within the profession belong to the New Class. Two groups are Government lawyers, such as those in the regulatory agencies like the Securities and Exchange Commission, and the 'public interest' lawyers, such as those working for the Legal Services Corporation providing legal services to the poor (Bruce-Riggs, 1979, p.

91). Two other groups are rather more significant, teachers in the Law Schools and federal judges. The law professors have great influence over generations of law students and over judicial opinion in their commentaries on judicial decisions. Federal judges have become more and more influenced by social scientists since the famous school desegregation decision, *Brown vs. School Board of Topeka* in 1954, was supported by reference to social science findings. Glazer argued in his attack on affirmative action programmes in housing, education and employment that judges followed the weight of educated opinion created by experts favouring government intervention (Glazer, 1978, p. 218). The Courts are a useful instrument for the New Class because of their emphasis on rights rather than the balance of conflicting interests, moral absolutes rather than compromises, the deference accorded to it by public opinion, and its isolation from public opinion and openness to educated opinion. The Courts establish "the distribution of morality, or rightness, as it is felt by the best-educated and most enlightened parts of the community" (Glazer, 1978, p. 205). The New Class believe that when government will not act in a particular situation, it is the job of the Courts to actively intervene, but Glazer complains that government often does not act for good reasons, because it does not know how, it can't afford it or the people don't want it (Glazer and Kristol, 1976, Chapter 5). Federal judges and other elements of the legal profession belong to the New Class.

Members of the New Class will also be found among bureaucrats, the churches and even businessmen. Middle class public sector employees, such as teachers, social workers and planners, are educated and have a vested interest in state expansion. Berger believed that, as religious values have become undermined, so clergymen have turned to academics for justification, and become secularised and adversarial (Lipset, 1979, p. 66). Even corporations and business are influenced by New Class values through their advertising and public relations departments with their orientation to ideas and symbols rather than material goods.

The New Class thus represent a substantial number of people in modern Western societies, but even more important than their numbers, is their position in important sectors in modern society.

IV Why Adversarial?

One of the greatest puzzles for neo-conservatives is why should people with secure jobs, good salaries and successful careers be hostile to those societies which have rewarded them so well. Several explanations are presented: because it is in their political interests; because of psychological characteristics; because of the nature of their careers; and because of sociological circumstances.

The political explanation is probably the most popular with neo-conservatives. The New Class favour greater state intervention quite simply because they will have greater influence over the political allocation of resources than through the market, because of their skills. Berger claims that "The class interests of the New Class are masked by appeals to compassion and by the claim that they contribute to the welfare of the downtrodden. But whatever benefits the poor may have gained from the 'war against poverty,' there is little doubt about the benefits garnered by New Class professionals and bureaucrats administering the pov-

erty programmes” (Bruce-Riggs, 1979, p. 53). The New Class are not primarily interested in material benefits but in the increased power and status arising from a large public sector, and their ability to influence governmental decisions through their political skills. Wildavsky described the politics of the New Class as being “Using Public Funds to Serve Private Interests.” Basing his analysis on Fred Hirsch’s well known discussion on *Social Limits to Growth* and positional goods which lose their value as more people enjoy them, as degrees lose their value when large numbers acquire higher education, Wildavsky argued that “collective choice is a way of getting everyone else to subsidise the new class”. His examples included environmental protection, subsidies for commuter transportation, and limitations on campaign contributions, which reduce the influence of wealth but increase it for those “with professional skills in communication and plenty of free time” (Bruce-Riggs, 1979, Chapter 11). New Class concern for equality and the ‘public interest’ is dismissed by Podhoretz as just “an attractive ideological cover for the pursuit of self-interest” (Podhoretz, 1979, p. 282). However, this assumes that the New Class are consciously pursuing their self-interest rather than being able to persuade themselves that their own interests and the general interest coincide. The political self-interest of the New Class can be seen as either conscious or unconscious.

The psychological explanation is that the New Class are upper middle income people suffering from status anxiety and relative deprivation. Midge Decter seeks the explanation in the new childhood where children are protected from responsibility and grow up with immense self-regard. The young complained “not that society was too evil for them but that their position in it was not and would not be exalted enough” (Decter, 1972). Brought up as a leisured class, they rejected the work ethic and sought status recognition. This was denied to them in a capitalist society which rewarded work and material success (Kristol, 1973, p. 86). Bourgeois society is dismissed as philistine, with a vulgar conception of the common good and a failure to appreciate the higher things in life. Thus a new society is desired which would give proper status to intellectual and artistic skills.

A third explanation arises from the nature of intellectual work. Lipset and Ladd argued that intellectuality, rather than their class interests, was a better explanation of the adversarial position. Intellectuals, by their nature, are interested in new knowledge and new ideas, and will compare reality to the ideal, which will always be an unfortunate comparison for the real (Ladd and Lipset, 1975, Chapter 5). Scholarship demands independence, the exercise of critical judgement, freedom from outside interference and a high degree of scepticism. This critical frame of mind leads to an adversarial stance toward society. Lipset and Dobson found that the most creative intellectuals were also the most alienated (Lipset and Dobson, 1972). With an adversarial culture established among intellectuals, it is reinforced through selective recruitment and professional socialisation (Ladd and Lipset, 1975, p. 87). The more conservative are likely to seek careers in business rather than in the New Class professions. The critical stance necessary for intellectual development, as emphasised by Trilling, leads to an adversarial position towards the realities of society.

The sociological explanation is that socialism represents a restored community for the intellectual. The socially and geographically mobile professional is detached from traditional institutions, such as the family, neighbourhood or church, which provide the social bonds for others (Novak, 1978). Life lacks meaning, especially with the decline of religious values, and bourgeois society lacks moral vision (Kristol, 1978, p. 187; Novak, 1979, pp. 15-29). Political ideologies, socialism or egalitarianism, provide meaning and moral passion to life.

V Ideology

In his *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* Daniel Bell argued that, paradoxically, capitalism encourages attitudes of selfishness and hedonism, while simultaneously requires self-restraint and hard work. He discussed the existence and disjunction of three realms, the technical-economic, the political and the cultural, in particular the disjunction between the technical-economic (capitalism) and the cultural (hedonism). Coherence between the three realms in present day Western society would require capitalism (technical-economic), representative democracy (political) and the protestant bourgeois ethic (cultural). The ideology of the New Class can usefully be contrasted in socialism or statism, participatory democracy and cultural hedonism.

In the economic realm, the New Class is socialist, not in the sense of public ownership of the means of production, but in that the distribution of resources in society should be determined collectively. The problem with capitalism, Kristol argued, is that the people will not accept the distribution of income and wealth arising from the market (Kristol, 1978, chapter 24). The New Class want the distribution of income to be determined by the principle of social justice, which means by their contribution to society determined collectively. However, such a position assumes that someone knows what is socially just, and has the authority to distribute income on those principles. Distribution would be determined by the state, over which the New Class has so much influence, rather than the market, where they are only a minority of consumers. “There is a class of people who believe that they can define ‘social justice’, that they have an authoritative conception of the common good that should be imposed on society by using the force of government. These people can be called ‘the New Class’” (Kristol, 1978, p. 67). A liberal society, however, is one without a consensus on the common good and without a single authority who knows the truth. There is no agreement on the distribution that should arise based on ‘social justice’.

The New Class principle of egalitarianism is no more satisfactory. Kristol reported that, despite frequent requests to publish an article describing the proper redistribution of American income, “despite all the talk ‘about equality’, no one seems willing to commit himself to a precise definition” (Kristol, 1978, p. 127). Equality is but a surrogate term for the demand for the collective distribution of income rather than for any particular distribution. With their influence over such a collective distribution, Kristol expressed no surprise that “At major universities egalitarianism is a respectable point of view, but in a factory it is not” (Novak, 1979, p. 27). The New Class lack a clear conception of an egalitarian society, and certainly do not have an agreed conception.

New Class ideas on economics can be seen in attitudes towards the provision of welfare services and in their concern for the environment. Moynihan complained that his proposals for a guaranteed family income were frustrated by the New Class of service-dispensers, who preferred a service strategy by which middle class professionals would be employed to provide the services, rather than an income strategy by which the poor can purchase their own requirements. Moynihan quoted extensively from Samuel Gompers, one of the founding fathers of the American trade union movement.

“They want to do good in the world — the majority, in truth, that they may feel that flow of gratification that comes from doing for others. They have a vision of a new world with themselves as creators ... they are experts in social welfare, domestic relations, child life, and the thousand and one problems that arise out of the lives of the poor ... All these solutions are formulated along the lines that necessitate governmental machinery and the employment of experts — the ‘intellectuals’. The conclusion is inevitable that there is a very close connection between employment as experts and the enthusiasm for human welfare” (Moynihan, 1973, p. 305; Moynihan, 1975, p. 381).

The welfare professionals, recently estimated at 1 million people, are a vested interest in the promotion of welfare services.

Environmentalism is also a vested interest for the New Class, as it promotes the protection of the environmental values of the middle class at the expense of the working class and their desire for economic growth. Wattenberg stated that “The environmental mentality is a rich man’s mentality, it is a rich person’s environment” (Novak, 1979, p. 166). Lipset quoted the British Labour politician, Anthony Crosland, that those who seek to limit growth to protect the environment are “kindly and dedicated people. But they are affluent; and fundamentally, though of course not consciously, they want to kick the ladder down behind them” (Lipset, 1979, p. 23). Environmentalism has been concerned to limit growth as a polluter, reducing employment and economic opportunities to the working class, and to restrict access to areas of environmental interest, such as opposing more road building in national parks, affording opportunities only to those with sufficient leisure time to walk through those areas. Environmentalism is a movement designed to create an environment which suits the New Class. In the political realm, the demand is for a participatory entitlement, arising from “the conviction of one’s importance, and from this the sense that one’s interests and values generally, and one’s political views specifically, should be recognised and attended to seriously by society” (Ladd & Hadley, 1978, p. 205). The concept of participation will appeal to those with prosperity, leisure, time and skills in articulation. Time is a critical political resource of the middle class.

Two examples of the concern for participation are in the political parties and the Community Action Programmes. The reforms of the political parties to encourage greater participation has resulted in the replacement of “a representative few, who are elected, with an unrepresentative few who are self-appointed” (Polsby & Wildavsky, 1980, p. 222). Kirkpatrick has argued that the rise of participatory politics within the presidential nomination process has

shifted power to New Class activists who are unrepresentative of the mass of the American people (Kirkpatrick, 1976, p. 330; 1978, p. 12). Moynihan, in his critique of the attempt to achieve maximum feasible participation for the poor in the Community Action Programme, saw the concept of participation as used by the bureaucrats in their own interest (Moynihan, 1969).

The problem with participatory democracy for the neo-conservatives is that it gives power to those who are willing to attend, stay and participate in numerous meetings. For those without material concerns, without alternative family or social ties, with the necessary leisure time and skills, participation can be a satisfactory activity. For most people, however, participation has only a limited attraction. Participatory democracy, for Nisbet, is “a creature of the mere aggregate or crowd, rooted in fashion or fad and subject to caprice and whim, easily if tenuously formed around a single issue or personage, and lacking the kind of cement that time, tradition and convention alone can provide” (Glazer and Kristol, 1976, p. 168). This leads to the transitory majorities that the Constitution was designed to avoid and the mass movements of which Lipset is so critical (Glazer and Kristol, 1976, chapter 7).

Culturally the New Class is hedonistic, modernist and secular. It rejects the bourgeois virtues such as the work ethic, deferred gratification and the authenticity of ‘I’. This is well illustrated in the counter-cultural writings of Theodore Roszak’s *The Making of a Counter Culture* and Charles Reich’s *The Greening of America*. In art modernism and the avant-garde is triumphant, “the individual is taken to be the measure of satisfaction, and his feelings, sentiments and judgements, not some objective standard of quality or value, determine the worth of cultural objects” (Bell, 1976, p.xvii). Organised religion has been rejected in favour of ‘secular humanism’ whereby man is the measure of all things (Bruce-Riggs, 1976, chapter 4). Bell believed that “in doctrine and life-style, the anti-bourgeois has won” and that, as the ultimate support for the social system is the acceptance by people of the moral justification of authority, the dominance of the adversary culture is incompatible with a capitalist society (Bell & Kristol, 1971, p. 48).

The New Class thus has a wide-ranging ideology covering the economic, political and cultural realms, although the coherence of that ideology can be severely questioned. The enactment of the collective distribution of resources, and the pursuit of egalitarianism, requires a highly centralised economic system which conflicts with the decentralisation theme of participatory democracy. There is a desire to will the ends, egalitarianism, without the means, centralism

VI Style

The neo-conservatives are highly critical of the style of the New Class, with its moralism, utopianism and rationalism. Politics is viewed as the articulation of personal values rather than the adjustment of conflicting interests. Moynihan warned of the dangers of “a political culture that rewarded the articulation of moral purpose more than the achievement of practical good” (Moynihan, 1975, p. 22). The concern with intentions rather than consequences will lead to the attribution of failures of government to evil purpose or a lack of will rather than a deficiency of knowledge.

Another consequence will be a paralysis of will when moral values are in conflict, as they frequently are. The neo-conservatives believe that this created a failure of nerve in American foreign policy (Podhoretz, 1975). The New Class has a sense of moral superiority towards the common people, Greely complained that to the intellectual the American people were the Great Beast, racist, sexist, authoritarian, puritan and uncultured (Greely, 1974, chapter 14; Novak, 1973, chapter 5). This sense of moral superiority is seen as “the distribution of morality ... as it is felt by the best educated and most enlightened parts of the community” (Glazer, 1978, chapter 6), which acts as an ideological cover for the pursuit of self-interest (Podhoretz, 1979, p. 288).

“By utopianism I mean the frame of mind which asserts that utopias are ideals to be realized” (Kristol, 1978, p. 159). Bell noted at the end of one book that utopia had been “an ideal by which to measure the real. The modern sought to cross that gap and embody the ideal in the real” and finished another with “within limits, men can remake themselves and society, but the knowledge of power must co-exist with the knowledge of its limits. This is, after all, the oldest and most enduring truth about the human condition — if it is to remain at all human” (Bell, 1976, p. 489; Bell, 1978, p. 282). The optimistic faith in the ability of government to transform the human condition has led to the attempt to achieve the impossible. “The stability of a democracy depends very much on the people making a careful distinction between what government can do and what it cannot do ... to seek that which cannot be provided, especially to do so with the passionate and misinformed conviction that it can be, is to create the conditions of frustration and ruin” (Moynihan, 1975, p. 255). The necessary critique of current society by reference to the ideal must be tempered by the recognition that all societies are vulnerable to such a critique, and that some societies are farther from the ideal than others.

The rationalism of the New Class is the belief that society should be constructed upon rationally determined principles. Schumpeter believed that “The rationalist attitude does not stop at the credentials of kings and popes, but goes on to attack private property and the whole scheme of bourgeois values” (Schumpeter, 1942, p. 143). Kirkpatrick, in her discussion of political parties, held that “The effort to make institutions conform to abstract principles is the very essence of the ‘rationalist’ approach to politics, an approach which is potentially very dangerous because it assumes that institutions and people are more alleable than they are” (Kirkpatrick, 1978, p. 23). This desire to reconstruct society fails to respect the complexity of society, the lack of perfect knowledge and the existence of emotional bonds of family and friends, patriotism and religion, not subject to rationalism.

VII Power

The New Class are perceived as having immense power in modern societies. Bell believed that “the adversary culture has come to dominate the social order” (Bell, 1978, p.34) and Kristol that they have the “power to shape our civilisation” (Kristol, 1978, p. 28). This power arises from their numbers, their position in strategic areas of the post-industrial society, the importance of culture, their possession of politically significant skills and resources, and the lack of an effective opposition.

Those who have had some college education are identified as potential members of the New Class. Over 40 million people have had some form of college education in the USA, with almost 10 million students! There are over 600,000 professors, and Bell calculated that there are 900,000 artists (Lipset and Dobson, 1972; Bruce-Riggs, 1979, chapter 8; Ladd and Hadley, 1978). However, the power of the New Class does not derive from their numbers, as their power is far greater than their numbers would suggest.

In the post-industrial society, technical skills are the base and education the mode of access to power, influence and authority (Bell, 1976). With the centrality of knowledge, the occupation of those sectors of society concerned with the production and distribution of knowledge provides great power. The two most important sectors are higher education and the media. Almost all those occupying positions in the knowledge sector have been through higher education, and increasingly credentialism has made it a requirement, thus giving professors the power to determine entry into those professions (Lipset and Dobson, 1972; Bruce-Riggs, 1979, chapter 6). The media is important as the main distributor of knowledge. The media determines the political agenda by its choice of events and ideas to emphasise, and these are likely to be adversarial towards established authority. Produced by the professors and distributed by the media, adversarial ideas find a huge market of consumers, among the public sector, the bureaucracy, the judiciary, clergymen and even among businessmen.

The importance of ideas is central to the neo-conservative view of the world. Bell argued strongly that the cultural realm was dominant over the economic or political realms, because culture determines the construction of reality, the way in which society is perceived and understood. Culture provides the legitimation of society (Bell, 1978, chapter 1). “The ultimate support for any social system is the acceptance by the population of a moral justification of authority” (Bell and Kristol, 1971, p. 52). The withdrawal of legitimation of capitalist society is a sign of their power. Political issues are presented as those concerned with the public interest against the selfish narrow interests of business, as with the Naderite critique of business and the debate on environmentalism. Opposition is portrayed as immoral, as in the discussion of busing and crime, with opponents seen as racists (Glazer, 1978). Culture has become dominated by the adversarial style, and in the long term culture dominates the rest of society.

The fourth source of New Class power is their possession of the skills and resources to influence political decision-making. James Q. Wilson stated that “the attentive Democratic audience is a liberal one, made up of volunteers and part-time public servants, with discretionary money to spend, personal style to display, campaign skills to use, ‘interesting’ ideas to propound, and influence in the mass media to wield” (Wilson, 1971). Wilson discussed the rise of ‘amateur’ politicians, with their purposive incentives, expressive style and articulation skills, at the expense of ‘professionals’, in *The Amateur Democrat* (Wilson, 1962). The trend he identified has become a flood as political campaigns are increasingly run by issue-oriented ‘amateurs’, campaign consultants and media specialists, at the expense of the compromising nature of political parties. Jeane Kirkpatrick claimed that the presidential nominating process is dominated by the New Class, who seek conflict

rather than compromise (Kirkpatrick, 1976). The New Class has “the skills (analysing, criticising, moralising and persuading) and other resources (the mass media, and the educational institutions)” to communicate their political ideas (Bruce-Riggs, 1979, p. 35).

The final source of power is the weakness of opposition to New Class ideas. The obvious source of opposition is business. Kristol believed that there is a class war being conducted between the New Class and the business class (Kristol, 1978) the lack of response is attributed to the businessman’s lack of the necessary political skills to challenge the New Class, and a sign of the degree to which they have been influenced by those ideas (Bruce-Riggs, 1979, chapter 5). The acceptance of concepts of ‘corporate responsibility’ undermines the profit-maximising function of the businessmen in favour of a responsibility that will be largely determined by the New Class. “The relative weakness of the business class in the field of ideas and symbols, as compared with the massive strength of the New Class in precisely these areas, has significantly altered the power relationship between the two elites” (Novak, 1978, p. 34).

The working class are viewed as the natural allies of business as part of a coalition for growth and defender of the private sector (Lipset, 1978, chapter 13). Ladd & Hadley demonstrated that the working class believe in hard work, economic security, traditional life-styles, lower taxes, and a strong national defence in contrast to the upper middle class values stressing non-materialist satisfactions, self-fulfilment, permissive life-styles, big government expenditure and against increased defence expenditure (Ladd, 1978). The working class, however, are also weak in those political skills and labour unions have lost power within the Democrat Party to the New Class, of which the neo-conservatives are the most prominent. Kristol and Novak urged business to support those allies (Kristol, 1978; Novak, 1978, chapters 6-8), although they did not go as far as to give their telephone numbers. Defeats for the New Class in recent political issues and elections is attributed to the counter-attack by dissident intellectuals, including of course themselves.

VIII Consequences of New Class Power

The neo-conservatives believe that the consequences of the power of the New Class are the severe weakening of those institutions that provide a degree of coherence to a highly pluralist society, and the undermining of confidence in the basic values and institutions of American society. The New Class have encouraged increased demands upon the political system while it has also weakened the ability of political institutions to respond to those demands. The consequence is political instability.

The New Class have encouraged a Revolution in Rising Entitlements, whereby there is no restriction upon the demands that may reasonably be made upon government (Bell, 1978, pp. 232-6). Their utopianism has removed constraint upon political claims so that politics has become a scramble between competing groups for the satisfaction by government of their claims”. Inevitably, the politicization of decision-making — in the economy and in the culture — invited more and more group conflict” (Bell, 1976, p. 482). Government has expanded in response to these demands and provided jobs and opportunities for the New Class.

This development has created a Class Inversion and Liberalism Upside Down. Ladd & Hadley document the rise of democratic voting among the college educated and the younger higher socio-economic class. Among those under 30 years of age, more voters of higher social-economic status (46%) voted Democrat than low status (36%) in 1972, and 45% of the college-educated voted Democrat compared to 30% of the non-college educated (Ladd & Hadley, 1978, pp. 239-249). They also discovered that “groups at the top are more supportive of positions deemed liberal than those at the bottom” (Ladd & Hadley, 1978, p.212). On self-description as liberals, on race relations, equality, permissive morality, economic policy, the upper middle class were found to be more liberal than the working class. Part of the explanation is that ‘liberalism’ has become more associated with equality than liberty, and partly because there have been considerable changes in attitudes in the different classes.

The demands for greater government intervention now come far more from the upper middle class, into areas such as racial and sexual equality and the environment, than from the traditional working class, who increasingly feel that the activities of government are as much, if not more, a hindrance to them than a help. The New Class are more able to articulate their demands and thus create a greater strain on the political system.

Whilst increasing their demands upon the political system, the New Class has also undermined the legitimacy of the traditional institutions and their authority to satisfy demands. The New Class have been involved in the “slow draining away of legitimacy of existing institutions and prevailing traditions” (Kristol, 1972, p. 24), “a hollowing out of beliefs and values on which the polity depends for credibility” (Lipset, 1979, chapter 3, p. 66). Those integrating institutions, such as political parties, the trade unions, the mainstream churches, the Presidency, which seek to accommodate the diverse interests of American society, have been weakened. Institutions which encourage disintegration and fragmentation, single-issue groups, cult religions, candidate-centred organisations, the critical press, have expanded their influence.

The consequence of the increased demands and increased government failure leads to government overload and a decline in trust and confidence in the political system, Samuel Huntington’s ‘democratic distemper’ (Glazer and Kristol, 1976, chapter 1). The ‘system’ is blamed for the failure leading to populism, “the constant fear and suspicion that power and/or authority, whether in government or out, is being used to frustrate ‘the will of the people’” (Glazer & Kristol, 1976, p.126). Moynihan warned that “The polity must take care what it undertakes to provide for failure to do so is likely to be attributed to malevolent purpose” (Moynihan, 1975, p. 27). Failure is then used to gain support for New Class demands far more participatory democracy. The neo-conservatives fear a total breakdown of society and urge a series of responses (Ashford, 1981).

IX The Neo-Conservative Theory of the New Class: An Assessment

The neo-conservatives have presented a coherent and detailed analysis of the New Class. There are however a number of weaknesses and unanswered questions, which severely weaken their approach.

The first question is whether they have satisfactorily demonstrated that there is a New Class. Despite considerable use of the term 'class' there is little attempt to precisely define the qualities of a 'class'. Bell argued that the debate has been muddled by confusing the concept of a social stratum, 'the knowledge industry', and a cultural attitude, 'the adversary culture' (Bruce-Riggs, 1979, p. 169). There has emerged a sector of society, concerned with the production and distribution of knowledge, which does not fit the traditional bourgeois and working class categories. There has emerged an adversarial cultural attitude, highly critical of modern society. The relationship between the two is unclear. Many members of 'the knowledge industry' may be reasonably satisfied with a society which awards them status and good salaries, while there are working class socialists eager to create a new society. Membership of one does not mean membership of the other, although there may well be considerable overlap. Neo-conservatives must determine whether they are discussing a social stratum or a cultural attitude. While clearly they are describing something worthy of attention, they are not convincing that it should be described as a new class.

The membership of the New Class has some strange omissions. Bell's early discussion saw 'the new men' as "the scientists, the mathematicians, the economists, and the engineers of the new intellectual technology" (Bell, 1976, p. 344). Yet these people do not usually figure in the neo-conservative description of New Class membership. This must be because these people do not share in the counter-cultural ideas. Bell wrote of "a deep and growing split between the technical intelligentsia, who are committed to functional rationality and technical modes of operation, and the literary intellectuals, who have become increasingly apocalyptic, hedonistic and nihilistic" (Bell, 1976, p. 214). Bell thus makes very clear the distinction between stratum and culture, neglected or ignored by most neo-conservatives. A substantial sector of the knowledge class is ignored.

Another group excluded that might be considered members of the knowledge class is the foreign policy and defence professionals. They clearly have a vested interest in the expansion of the public sector, and are much concerned with the manipulation of knowledge, yet the New Class is seen as hostile to American intervention abroad. There is a New Class element in the foreign community, but it is mostly politik. This is because of the considerable moral conflicts in foreign policy and the emphasis on the importance of strength, rather than morality. In this respect, the neo-conservatives might be seen as more 'new class' than most foreign policy professionals because of their emphasis on the promotion of moral values in international relations (Moynihan, 1979; Moynihan, 1980). The explanation for the military may be that the military virtues of organisation, discipline and teamwork are contradictory to cultural attitudes of self-gratification. This would suggest that the cultural impulse is more important than social position.

A third omission is teachers in primary and secondary education. College-educated and distributors of ideas to children many of whom will not receive college education, teachers could be expected to be one of the cornerstones of the New Class, yet they are ignored. New Class issues, such as busing, racial integration, sex education and secularism, are connected with pre-college education.

Four explanations were presented for the adversarial nature of the New Class, but they are often confused in neo-conservative presentations and little effort is made to assess their relative importance. The political explanation, that an adversarial stance is in their vested interests, may be correct, but it suggests a deterministic view that one's beliefs are determined by one's interests. This appears to conflict with the neo-conservatives emphasis on the autonomous role of ideas. They have demonstrated by their own success that other ideas can be in the interests of intellectuals. New ideas (or what appear to be new ideas) are in the interests of intellectuals but they need not be in any particular direction. Furthermore the fact that an idea may be in the interests of its proponent does not, by itself, invalidate the ideas, as neo-conservatives sometimes seem to suggest.

The psychological explanation, of status anxiety and relative deprivation presents a refusal to take the 'new class' ideas seriously, as with their critics view that the predominant Jewishness of the neo-conservatives explains their position. The evidence does not tend to support this explanation. Ladd & Lipset found that the most adversarial intellectuals, from the most prestigious institutions, expressed a high level of satisfaction. There was no clear link between the perception of the standing of social scientists and adversarial politics, social scientists broadly had no sense of deprivation, and social scientists generally had a high sense of efficacy and satisfaction. (Lipset and Ladd, 1975, pp. 79-87).

The 'intellectuality' explanation, that intellectuals are by the nature of their professions critical, is plausible. Kirkpatrick noted "the intellectual's habit of measuring institutions and practices against abstract standards — reality is invariably found unsatisfactory" (Bruce-Riggs, 1979, p. 39). There still exist several problems with this explanation. Firstly, by this standard, intellectuals may be as much critics on the right as on the left, for example the cultural critics such as T. S. Eliot or Ezra Pound, but the New Class is presented primarily (although not exclusively) as a left wing phenomenon. Secondly, the neo-conservatives fail to provide an explanation for their own role as defenders of traditional institutions. Thirdly, they fail to explain why the critical tone of literature has historically been directed primarily at the behaviour of people rather than political institutions. There is no explanation for the politicisation of culture.

The sociological explanation, a desire for a restored sense of community, may be useful, but it does not explain why community is sought in the particular ways of the New Class, rather than through traditional institutions such as the family or established religion. All four explanations have some explanatory value but are not entirely satisfying.

In the discussion of New Class ideology, the biggest weakness is in the economic realm. Are the terms 'socialism' and 'egalitarianism' appropriate terms to describe their economic beliefs? If socialism is defined as the collective ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, it seems unlikely that they are socialist. Rather they should be described as statist, that the state should determine the distribution of resources. Admittedly most of the blame for the misuse of the term 'socialism' lies with the left, most of whom claim to believe in it even while believing in many different and frequently contradictory things. However the neo-conservatives should not continue to compound the error.

Bell has argued that the distributive principle of the New Class must be meritocracy, as it is merit or technical skill that they have in common and that the demands for equality (quotas, affirmative action) are anti-meritocratic (Bell, 1976, pp. 408-455). The goals of meritocracy and equality are incompatible for Bell. This apparent contradiction can be explained with a clearer examination of the meaning of the two concepts. Merit as with the principle of resource distribution has been presented as a capitalist principle, but as Hayek has argued, it is “neither desirable and practicable that material rewards should be made generally to correspond to what men recognise as merit” (Kristol, 1978, p. 260). The market distributes resources on the basis of value to the consumer not on the merits of the seller. This explains why the Chinese have been economically successful in the rest of Asia, even while they are politically and socially unpopular. Meritocracy implies that some person or body must decide who has merit and how much merit a person has. This, Bell implies, would be done by intellectuals such as himself.

Egalitarianism is very similar in principle. Very few egalitarians demand a totally equal society with everyone with the same income, wealth and possessions. Rather egalitarianism is a claim that the distribution should be more equal and, most importantly, that the distribution should be determined collectively rather than be left to the marketplace. Both meritocracy and egalitarianism are principles that distribution should be determined collectively, and essentially that it should be determined by intellectuals debating the various merits and needs of different groups in society. Bell and the meritocrats would favour a different distribution than the egalitarians, but would agree on the process of how distribution should be determined. Thus, the conflict between meritocracy and egalitarianism is much smaller than Bell would suggest.

In the cultural realm, the neo-conservatives never consider the relationship between the emphasis on the individual and his evaluation of culture as a personal experience, and the growing governmental support for the arts. If modernism is correct in rejecting the idea of objective standards in art, it is unclear by what standards the state can decide what is art and what isn't and what cultural activities to support. The neo-conservatives ignore this question because of their belief that there are objective standards and that it is the role of the state to uphold them.

The moralistic utopian and rationalist style of the New Class is also, to a great extent, shared by the neo-conservatives. The sense of moral outrage of the New Class towards modern bourgeois society is shared by the neo-conservative critique of the New Class. All intellectuals are, to some extent guilty of utopianism, in the sense that they have a model of the ideal against which reality is measured. The neo-conservative model of a pluralist, accommodationist political system is as much an ideal as a description of reality. The distinguishing feature is the degree to which the ideal is seen as a model to gradually work towards through debate and consent and probably changing through that process, or as a society which must be achieved immediately or very soon even at the price of the destruction of current society. The New Class and the neo-conservatives are not distinguished by their use of ideals, but on their attitude to change and its speed.

Is the New Class rationalistic, or as Bell suggests “an attack on reason itself” (Bell, 1978, p. 143)? Rationalism suggests that there is a clear conception of the alternative society to be built on rational principles. The study of the adversary culture would suggest that it is a rejection of many aspects of current society but without any clear alternative in mind. The nature of the alternative society is rarely considered by the New Class, which fails to have the rationalist constructionism of the Old Left.

The power of the New Class may have been exaggerated. All the college educated cannot be considered members, as many were educated before the adversary culture dominated the universities, many were educated in the sciences and business which have largely escaped the adversary influence, and many students were educated in the social sciences and humanities without acquiring adversarial attitudes. Among professors can be found a wide spectrum of opinion, and those who concentrate on their teaching tend to be more conservative. (Ladd & Lipset 1975, chapter 4). The size of the New Class is much smaller than suggested.

Secondly it is not clear that most of the knowledge class are indispensable. They have been successful in promoting credentialism, that a college education is a necessary requirement for their profession, but it may be questioned whether this is anything more than an attempt to control the intake and to achieve higher status. Glazer suggested that most of the professions required little specialised knowledge or training that could not be more usefully provided on the job (Glazer, 1978).

Thirdly, the neo-conservatives exaggerate the importance of culture. Society is not to be confused with high culture. Bourgeois values of family, religion, work, faithfulness in marriage, are still very strong. Even while people have become more tolerant of alternative life-styles, most have preferred more traditional ones. The influence of the cultural elite is immense over the New Class, but its impact is considerably less on the rest of the American people, who make up the vast majority. The influence is there, but as the presidential elections of 1972, 1976, and 1980 suggest, they are not decisive politically.

Fourthly, the importance of political skills of the New Class have frequently been neglected in much traditional political science literature and deserve to have attention drawn to them, but there is the danger of exaggerating in the opposite direction and ignoring political resources of other groups. The most important, for electoral purposes, is numbers, and other groups, businessmen and workers, still outweigh the New Class in that resource. Another important resource is money. The New Class has discretionary money and uses it in political campaigns, but it is not rich, and it tends to be weaker in the collective organisation and distribution of funds, compared to business and union PACs. Their resources are valuable, but not the only ones.

Finally, the neo-conservatives have weakened the New Class by drawing attention to its existence and acting as the intellectual opposition. While adversarial attitudes are stronger in the knowledge class, than in other sectors of American society, they are not without considerable opposition, and to some extent the adversarial culture is in a defensive position.

Much of the ‘blame’ for political instability is attributed to the New Class. While New Class ideology is one potent

explanation of the increased demands on the political system, there are other explanations which deserve consideration. There are economic explanations, which relate governmental growth to industrialisation and urbanisation, and political explanations, which relate governmental growth to electoral competition, left party control, bureaucratic size-maximisation, interest group pressures and centralisation. While this writer is sympathetic to ideological explanations of political change, (King, 1973), and the political explanations of bureaucratisation and interest group pressures could be incorporated into a New Class explanation, the neo-conservatives never deal with alternative explanations.

Such a criticism can also be directed towards the role of the New Class in undermining the legitimacy of institutions. The source of the decline of trust and authority may be found in the events of the 1960's and 1970's, such as racial conflict, Vietnam and Watergate, events with which the pluralist balance of interests is ill-suited. The New Class may have been a contributing factor to the weakening of authority, but it is not clear that they were the decisive factor.

X Conclusion

The neo-conservatives have identified certain features of modern society which deserve the attention of political scientists, and have presented a complex model to explain those features. Their conception of the New Class has significant weaknesses, but it still provides a useful basis for understanding and development.

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