

# REVIEWS

★ John Westergaard and Henrietta Resler Class in a Capitalist Society  
Heinemann London 1975

As the blurb on the cover says, "the theme of this book is class inequality - its nature and extent today in modern capitalist society." The book addresses itself to the question of the very existence of classes, and provides a much needed summary of evidence in this debate.

Using many official sources of data, judiciously combined with the best of sociological research in the last 10-15 years, Westergaard and Resler relentlessly pursue their argument that in all spheres of life, the wage market, taxation, ownership of profit-making property, the state, social mobility, education and political parties, there is complexity, to be sure, but underpinning this complexity there is stark evidence of a society divided across class boundaries.

Conceptually the argument is severely weakened by not weeding out the out-dated notion of the intermediate strata of non-property owning higher professionals: Westergaard is still tarred by the traditional British Fabian anti-professional brush (self-denial?). It stops him from being able to assess accurately the response to inequality in his final chapter; he cannot bring himself to accept that there may lie, in "white collar workers" a segment of the populace without traditional ties to the Labour Party (albeit with hang-ups of their own) from whom support for radical change may come.

But the breadth of grasp of detail in this book is impressive, and the common sense with which the material is marshalled and discussed is very refreshing. It ends up being very much more than the sum total of its constituent sources. I especially enjoyed the chapters on income inequality and the dismissal of theories of "poverty" which essentially blame the victims. And perhaps I was even reassured that the evidence for the persistence of a middle strata of higher professionals whose interests are materially allied to the ruling class was thin. This book certainly shows how the bluntests of survey tools and ideologically loaded government statistics can be turned to good purpose.

7 February 1977

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