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## ‘BEING OUT OF PLACE’: SOCIAL ANALYSIS, THE ORGANIC INTELLECTUAL AND THE PRODUCTION OF CLASS

The unique and extraordinary character of working-class self-organization has been that it has tried to connect particular struggles to a general struggle in one quite special way. It has set out, as a movement, to make real what is at first sight the extraordinary claim that the defence and advancement of certain particular interests, properly brought together, are in fact in the general interest. That, after all, is the moment of transition to an idea of socialism.

(Raymond Williams 1989 [1981]: 249)

Every real, great class struggle must rest upon the support and co-operation of the widest masses, and a strategy of class struggle which does not reckon with this co-operation, which is based upon the idea of the finely stage-managed march out of the small, well-trained part of the proletariat is foredoomed to be a miserable fiasco.

Rosa Luxemburg (1999 [1906] online version)

This chapter addresses the relationship between three aspects of the concept of class. The first is as an analytical tool, particularly within anthropology. The second is as a social relation that takes particular forms in particular historical settings. The third is as a means of struggle. I will address the relationship between these aspects of class in terms of four questions: What class do we need or want? What kinds of collectivity need to be conceptualised and brought about if we want to transform capitalism? What sorts of practical politics will have to be developed? <sup>1</sup>What sort of

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<sup>1</sup> In Gramsci’s terms, the historical bloc refers to the articulation of material realities and ideological constructs, and to the need for organic intellectuals to produce

historical bloc can we contribute to form?

Class is problematic because it has been conceptualized both as the locus of articulation of a structural position within the mode of production and as an emergent form in existing social conflict. Consequently, class is always being produced and changed through actual economic and political struggles. It is also important to recognise the strength of Gramsci's (1987) point that these struggles are also theoretical, for they are shaped by the common-sense interpretation of structural positions that defines collective identities and lines of struggle. I will follow Gramsci's lead and stress that what he calls the "organic intellectual", and intellectual debate in general, is central to producing understandings of the structure of the social processes that frame the realms of collective class identity and of organized and purposeful struggle.

## HISTORY AND PLACE

I pursue these questions in terms of my work in the town of Ferrol, in north-western Spain, where class became a central public concept because of the activities of the emerging unions and the clandestine Communist Party, centred on the town's shipyards, during the Franco dictatorship (1939–75). Those yards meant that Ferrol fits the classic industrial model, albeit in the political context of a dictatorship. Although the industry has been restructured repeatedly since the 1980s and unions have lost credit, they were able to mobilize more than 25,000 people in a demonstration in June, 2012, to protect the shipyard jobs that remain important for most people in the town, both economically and as an expression of working-class power.

Such a mobilisation was possible in part because the particular form of liberalization that the economy adopted during the dictatorship after the Madrid Treaties with the United States in 1953 serve to strengthen labor organisation. The orientation of the Franco government was corporatist, and with the support of international credit providers (US banks) it adopted indicative planning early in the 1950s. In favoring industries in key sectors that could benefit from economies of scale and Fordist modernization, indicative planning gave workers in those

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knowledge that corresponds to the actual feelings of the "popular element" and to the material structure they live in. The historical bloc thus formed can then become a force of change (Gramsci 1987: 360, 366, 377, 418): "If the relationship between intellectuals and people-nation (...) is provided by an organic cohesion in which feeling-passion becomes understanding and thence knowledge (...) then and only then is the relationship one of representation. Only then (...) can the shared life be realised which alone is a social force –with the creation of the "historical bloc"" (p.418)

industries a job that was protected not only by labor law but also by economic policy. This strengthened workers' position within these sectors and eventually enabled the re-construction of class-based trade unions. During the 'development decade' that followed, government intervention in labor relations was progressively reduced, and even though unions remained illegal until the death of Franco in 1975, beginning late in the 1950s workers acquired increasing rights to elect committees to represent their interests in negotiations with their employers. However, committees were framed by the corporatist national unions, which meant that the national government participated in, and oversaw, these negotiations. It was through their representatives on these committees that workers affiliated to the illegal Communist and Socialist parties infiltrated the labour movement. As a consequence, labour disputes became increasingly politicized and revolutionary, making use of heterogeneous types of intellectual analysis and tactical organization inherited from the period before the start of the Civil War in 1936 (Ramos Gorostiza & Pires Jiménez 2009; Sánchez Recio 2002).

After the death of Franco, however, a number of economic and political factors progressively led the newly-legal unions to avoid the use of class as an organizational and analytical tool. It is the case that in 1975 and 1976, immediately after Franco's death, the power of unions increased markedly. The number of strikes jumped from 855 in 1975 to 1568 in 1976 (Navarrete and Puyal 1995: 148), as unions pursued goals that were political (democracy, free unions, legalization of the Communist Party, Partido Comunista de España) as well as economic (better pay and working conditions, more social benefits). The result was an increased portion of Spanish GDP going to labour as opposed to capital. However, in 1977 the trend was reversed (Martínez-Alier and Roca Jusmet 1988: 52; Zaragoza and Varela 1990: 61, Gutiérrez 1990: 122–26). One reason for this reversal was the Moncloa Agreement (Pacto de la Moncloa), which was signed by the major political parties (including the Communist Party and the Catalan and Basque nationalist parties) in October, 1977, and which had the tacit support of the unions based on the shared objective of a transition to democracy. This Agreement was intended to stabilize the economy and make that transition possible, and it marked the acceptance of a technocratic approach to the national economy. Government policies were oriented toward reducing the country's high rate of inflation, increasing economic growth and competition, and, ultimately, integrating with the European Economic Community (later the European Union).

The Pacto de la Moncloa, and the subsequent agreements subscribed to by unions and employers under government supervision, could be seen in two different

ways.<sup>2</sup> Justo Domínguez (1990: 98), the head of the Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT, the Socialist union), saw the agreements as “trade unionism which is inserted in the State’s institutions, a trade unionism of participation, that is or tries to be where decisions are made”. Alternatively, they could be seen as neo-corporatist because they implied abandoning revolutionary objectives and subordinating trade union policies and goals to the neoliberal policies of democratic governments as “macroeconomic orientations become the basis of social agreements” (Martínez-Alier and Roca Jusmet 1988: 59). This corporatism framed workers’ struggles in a “language of contention” (Roseberry 1994) that appeared to be neutral and technical but in fact was that of the dominant groups (Martínez-Alier & Roca Jusmet 1988: 56). Unions, then, were co-opted into a framework meant to banish confrontation and consolidate liberal democracy. If liberal democracy was the end point of the Transition process, what useful kind of class concept remained? Using present-day struggles in Ferrol, I attempt to show the central, albeit elusive, position of the organic intellectual for the elaboration of that concept, and hence for producing solidarity and class.

Class<sup>3</sup> is produced through the pedagogical transmission of knowledge useful for analysing reality and for organizing strategies of struggle, often through the commemoration of past class struggle and exemplary class strategies and tactics (see Narotzky 2011). However, that commemoration has become less effective with the passage of time. The increasing fragmentation of production, the international division of labour, delocalization and financialisation, as well as the tendency to use consumption to mark identity, mean that past industrial struggles are of declining relevance in a city with rising unemployment, a majority of workers in the service sector and a workforce that is increasingly feminised. The older generation of union leaders continue to use class or its euphemisms in their analysis of the situation in Ferrol, but find it increasingly hard to do so with political effect. Their efforts are criticised by new radical leaders as *dirigisme* (“Leninist”) and not revolutionary enough, or as not attuned to the distrust of organisation that is common in new

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<sup>2</sup> The Comisiones Obreras (CCOO, the communist union) was less prone to sign the agreements, while the Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT, the socialist union) signed them all, arguing that “in a crisis situation a great sense of responsibility was necessary” (Domínguez, 1990: 82). During the first ten years after Franco, the CCOO signed only the Acuerdo Nacional de Empleo (in 1981 a few months after the attempted coup by Colonel Tejero) and the Acuerdo Interconfederal (in 1983). The UGT signed the Acuerdo Básico Interconfederal (1979), the Acuerdo Marco Interconfederal (1980), the Acuerdo Nacional de Empleo (1981), the Acuerdo Interconfederal (1983), and the Acuerdo Económico y Social (1984).

<sup>3</sup> Here I mean class both as an awareness of class and as a position of class itself (a dialectical process as Gramsci points out).

social movements. In this situation, both the old leaders and the new try, in their different ways, to become meaningful organic intellectuals as they work through a multiplicity of “militant particularisms” (Williams 1989, Harvey 2001, Narotzky forthcoming) that address issues of social and economic deprivation using different frameworks of analysis which are grounded in personal, intimate, ideologically-embedded experience linked to personal identities.

That is, they are faced with the challenge of creating a level of abstraction that transcends particular interests while also expressing them, and doing so in a context where leftist projects of revolutionary change have been discredited. Confronting a problem that revolutionary leaders have confronted before (notably Lenin 1902; Luxemburg 1906), they need to revise the concept of class, which means using the thorough analysis of the present-day economic structure to revise their political goals. In order to be useful, that revision should keep class as the dialectical link between structural forces shaping social production, people’s feelings and existing practical struggles, and the transformation of those forces. As producers of theoretical concepts that feed back into organic intellectuals’ categories of analysis, social scientists are entangled in this dialectical process whether they want to be or not (Smith 1991, 1999, Susser 2010, 2011, Bourdieu 2003). If we are able to revise class as a scientific concept, we will help produce class as an instrument of struggle and, possibly, change.

## LOS DESCLASADOS

Ten years of intermittent fieldwork in the Ferrol shipyards and steel mills led me to think that present-day workers and social-movement activists were fragmented and targeted particular conflicts, while the older unionists who had fought for democracy during Franco were thinking in terms of solidarity across sectors, mobilized through the commemoration of past class solidarity and a language of homogenization and commonality of struggle. My visit in May, 2012, produced a very different picture: collective organization was hampered not only by mistrust of the union bureaucracy, but also by mistrust of strategies and leadership in general. The only commonality that I saw then arose from people’s financial troubles in their everyday consumption practices. Why was this happening in a town that had been at the forefront of labour struggle since the 1960s?

In a conversation on my first day in town, I came across a new concept, *desclasado* (de-classed).<sup>4</sup> People used it to refer to those displaced from their class

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<sup>4</sup> In Marx and Engels the term ‘declassed’ holds two meanings 1) those that do not identify with their class interest and 2) those that, pertaining objectively to one

position and from their place in everyday social relations with family, friends, and place of origin. While this displacement stressed the importance of people's dependence on capital, it was of a sort that made class links difficult. This use of *desclasado* brings to mind Sigfried Kracauer's (1998) account of white-collar workers during the Weimar Republic and, I was told, it was central to the demise of the idea of a relatively homogeneous class.

The concept came up in a conversation about a worker in a supermarket who had been fired for participating in the general strike of March 29 2012. Although the firm insisted that this was not why he was fired, the union shop steward was convinced that it was, and so were all the people I talked to. The man was not likely to have been fired because he was bad at his job: he was a nice person with a serious attitude toward his work and with a wife who works in the same company. The company's attitude, moreover, was revealed by the fact that they had asked employees to go to work on the day of the strike, even though the shops might be closed to the public for security reasons.

The firing produced support from the local union representatives, but not from the regional and national offices: they wanted to accept the company's proposed resolution of the problem (reinforcing accusations that they were colluding with the company). Several demonstrations were organized in supermarkets owned by the company for which the man had worked. The first brought together some 200 people, mostly mobilized by the socialist cultural association Fuco Buxan, and by the critical, Trotskyite branch of the CCOO (Comisiones Obreras union, the ex-Communist union<sup>5</sup>). However, Francisco and

class, struggle on the side of the opposing class. In fact "declassed" as such appears only marginally in M&E: their reference to the Lazzaroni described in footnotes to *The Class Struggles in France*, and the *18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* as "declassed proletarians... who were repeatedly used by the absolutist Government [in Naples] in the struggle against liberal and democratic movements", or their reference to the *Society of December 10*, a secret Bonapartist organisation "consisting mainly of declassed elements, political adventurers, the reactionary military. Many of its members helped to elect Louis Bonaparte as President of the Republic". In Chapter VIII of Engels' *Origins of the Family...* the term declassed appears to describe free Romans that in fact work like slaves.

<sup>5</sup> The Union Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) separated itself explicitly from the Communist Party and its orientation in the 1980s. Originally, however, the union Comisiones Obreras was not attached to the Communist party. It was however increasingly co-opted by the party during the 1960s and 1970s and became associated with it in practice and in the minds of everyone. The UGT union (see below) had been officially the union of the socialist party since its inception in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and also officially disentangled itself from the party in the 1980s.

Mario told me, there was very little support from the citizenry. Mario said that people went in to buy while the demonstration was on, even bringing their children with them, and that supermarket employees went around clearing up the pamphlets and leaflets, probably through fear of losing their jobs too.

The conversation then turned to the general lack of mobilization, and Mario gave his view. He is a steel worker, a member of the UGT (Unión General de Trabajadores, the ex-Socialist union), and a representative of the local Socialist (Social Democrat) Party of Galicia (PSG). He said that the old retired workers of the national shipyard, the main yard in Ferrol, who used to influence public opinion in the city, held that when it embraced democracy Spain became a society of constant progress. With this, Mario was obliquely criticising the older union leaders who were part of the social-democratic compromise in the Transition, described above. This “constant progress” was that workers were becoming “middle class”, and could not accept the reality of the present economic crisis. Mario said:

They live with the appearances of the middle class, the idea that they can keep on consuming as before [the crisis]. Nobody wants to be identified as a “worker”, they all want to be middle class. It is difficult to accept that your life will be increasingly worse and that your children will live even worse ... that is very hard to accept.

(unless noted otherwise, all translations are by the author)

Consumption has been the hallmark of this ascent into the middle class (for the US, see Fantasia and Voss 2004: 27–29), facilitated by the easing of access to personal credit and mortgages for buying cars, household appliances and homes.

Francisco, a retired bank clerk, intervened at this point. He said that Ferrol was not particularly affected by the housing repossessions that have followed the financial crisis in Spain, because every mortgage application was examined thoroughly and also because “families help debtors pay”. In fact, credit was influenced by the social networks of acquaintances that linked bank employees and loan applicants. As Francisco explained, “You knew the people coming to you and you had been dealing with them for years. You knew their families. But also you didn’t want to put them in a bad situation because you wanted them to keep trusting you.” However, he said, some years ago a new type of bank employee appeared, one with a university degree and perhaps an MBA, and who had been abroad. While they were ordinary clerks, they had high expectations and saw being a clerk as only a temporary step on their move upwards. To achieve those expectations, they had to meet the objectives that management set for them, which meant selling a specified amount of mortgages, junk bonds, and other financial products to those who aspired to be middle class. Furthermore, banks started to move their staff around fairly often, so these young clerks were strangers to their customers and thus were not

restrained by the moral obligation that comes with local social ties. Driven by the objectives they needed to meet and freed of social constraint, these young clerks were the local instruments of credit liberalization. For Francisco, these new clerks were also *desclasado*:

they did not conceive of themselves as “workers” like us [those of Fernando’s generation] ... even if they were working next to them as tellers. They considered themselves linked to the bank’s regional manager.

They were *desclasados*. They were very exploited, much more than the proper workers like us. The workers stopped their working day at 3 pm and if they were required to work longer hours it was counted as overtime and paid accordingly, whereas the others would do all the hours that were requested, sometimes they stayed until 8 pm, without any overtime.

They were also *desclasados* from their places of origin: they came from other provinces, other towns; they were *desclasados* from their families, from their sweethearts that stayed in their place of origin. They did not have any support here, had no social links, so they sought recognition [from the bank]. But, now, you don’t know if they do it to get a promotion or just not to be fired or be sent away to another branch if they’ve managed to make a life here.

It is interesting that in these passages “class” is used mostly to identify what should be present, but is absent among those *desclasados*. Also, in their conversations these activists talked about people’s aspirations to middle-class status in terms of the emergence of an “aristocracy of labour” in the main shipyard, which seeks to distinguish itself from workers in the auxiliary yards, whose position was precarious and getting worse. Miguel, a shipyard worker in his late fifties with a history of involvement in the Communist Party, uses the idea of *desclasado* to describe this labour aristocracy:

In the 1980s the union committee promoted solidarity with the auxiliary firms, but this process gave way to a progressive distancing, a *desclasamiento*, where the staff in the main shipyard do not consider they are a part of a class. There is a loss of perspective of the unions, which turn to a managerial unionism. There is a loss of solidarity with other firms [which had been common in the 1960s and 1970s]. And this was parallel to the collapse of parties as a political referent.

This separation of stable workers in the main firm and precarious workers in the auxiliary companies concerned many others. Jaime, who is in the critical sector



of the CCOO and has been trying to set up a union committee representing both main and auxiliary workers, thinks that the workers in the main firm will ignore those in the auxiliary companies until their privileges are at stake. Others talk of how the workers in the main firm try to present themselves as “non-workers”, as middle class. As was the case with Francisco’s story about bank workers, those in the most awkward position are white-collar workers with university degrees. Mario said:

They all wanted to be middle class. That is what the media sell. That was seen as democratic, it was the democratic ideal, this appearance of having overcome the class relationship through consumption. They were *desclasados* in this sense: they did not want to be a part of the working class. In the steel company [where Mario works] many technical engineers, who are for the most part sons of workers, do not want to think of themselves as workers. They went to university [and] ... thought that with a university degree they would enter the middle class, but they are in a worse situation even [than the blue collar workers]. Their salaries are not much higher ... and are individually negotiated. Their function in production is to control the work of people, but ... they don’t have any experience and have to learn from those under them .... It is a question of class: you are a technical engineer but you work as a foreman, you have to do the same shifts as the blue-collar worker beside you. They are the new proletarians: they suffer pressures from above and from below.

However, not everyone agrees with this analysis. Some activists point to an increased awareness of their own proletarianization among technical and managerial workers. For example, a member of the Trotskyite faction of CCOO stresses the self-awareness of technical engineers in the shipyard. He says they are becoming increasingly aware of their proletarianized status: “They now participate like any other collective in mobilizations and assemblies. Even some of the engineers do.”

While the idea of *desclasado* that these people invoke is similar to that of false consciousness, it has complex ramifications. The more salient of these are related to the transition from Franco’s dictatorship to parliamentary democracy and to the role of the unions in that process. In the struggle for democracy, the revolutionary unions found themselves fighting for institutional respectability at a time when compromise and agreement between different interests groups and classes was seen as crucial. But also, the democracy at issue was a parliamentary democracy that required abandoning revolutionary projects in favour of a gradualist transformation through electoral majorities, a strategy that Lenin (1902) criticised in *What is to be Done?* as denying class struggle. Whatever the intention, this

turned out to mean that the unions encouraged a democracy that would transcend class because all would become, or have a reasonable chance to become, middle class consumers, especially in terms of home ownership (see López & Rodríguez 2011). In their conversations, the people I describe in this section were pointing to, and criticising, the links between Spain's economic crisis and the combination of consumption and credit that was supposed to transcend class.

## STRUGGLES AND ORGANIC INTELLECTUALS

To appreciate the work of organic intellectuals in Ferrol, it is important to understand the different problems that people in the town confront and the different efforts to deal with them. I will concentrate on labour conflicts, but it is essential to remember that there are many other conflicts in the town (environmental degradation, corruption, mortgage repossessions, health and education cuts, bank scams, etc.) which are also key to understanding how the possibility of a class consciousness emerges or is produced (see Narotzky 2007). However, 'work' and work issues, including unemployment, appear to the observer as the central problem of people's lives today.

In Ferrol unions have long been very strong and active. They still command wide public support, though this declined somewhat following the re-structuring of ship-building into the main and auxiliary companies, mentioned above, and the bureaucratization of the unions. Even so, shortly before the general election in November, 2011, the unions mobilized over 8000 people in a demonstration of support for the shipyards. In May and June of 2012 there were numerous demonstrations of shipyard workers demanding more investment in the yards and an end to layoffs. Workers, their families, indeed the entire region, are anxious because the shipyards are the "motor of the region", and "if the shipyard closes, Ferrol dies".

Competition for investments in different public-sector shipyards has pushed unions toward a form of economic regionalism, so that workers in the Ferrol yard in Galicia see themselves as competing for investment (and survival) with workers in the Cadiz yard in Andalucía, also part of Navantia, the same public firm. Within Galicia, the public yard in Ferrol is in competition with smaller, private yards in Vigo for regional and national government support. In a call for a unified struggle, the radical, Trotskyite group in the CCOO described the situation as "a crime against the workers' movement to which myopic union leaders contribute when they stir localist discourses and they represent other plants as the 'competition' that

threatens the future of their own plant” (*El Militante* 22-06-2012).<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, the nationalist trade union CIG (Confederación Intersindical Galega) gains the support of about a fifth of the workforce with a discourse that is at once very radical and very corporatist, pointing to the common interest of local entrepreneurs and workers, and holding all parties in Galicia responsible for the abandonment of local industry and in particular the public yards. At the same time, the secretary of the union committee in the main public yard in Ferrol (a member of the mainstream section of CCOO) denounced the Popular Party government for being willing to bail out the financial system at the cost of increasing deficit, cuts in social welfare, recession, and rising unemployment, but not being willing to help the productive sector, which includes the Ferrol yards. In this context, struggle may be complex, but its goal is simple: preserving jobs and livelihoods.

A simple goal does not, however, mean unity within the labour movement, much less agreement on the nature and use of the concept of class. Rather, the different sections of the movement stress their differences from each other and the validity of their own analysis of the situation, while their leaders try to be recognized as organic intellectuals. It is not surprising, then, that they define and invoke class differently. So, the older union leaders euphemize class as the “world of work”, in an explicit attempt to build bridges among people in order to promote class consciousness. The younger Trotskyites, particularly attached to classic Marxist literature, use class as their main analytical tool and seek to expand struggle through the dialectical articulation of economic and political strikes. The officials of the big unions (CCOO, UGT) make little use of class beyond occasional reference to the “needy classes” and the “wealthy classes”, and their economic analysis reflects a social-democratic liberal Keynesianism. This analytical fragmentation is made more complex by the awkward position of some of the older union leaders who were part of the struggle against Franco. While they remain a model of leadership because of that opposition, those who are still active are strongly criticized for acquiescing to the compromises of the Transition, a charge they do not accept. In turn, these older leaders make the same criticism of present-day union officials, distancing themselves from those compromises. Finally, while

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<sup>6</sup> El Militante is a monthly journal and a political group. The citation comes from a hand distributed leaflet (no author, no place of publication, just a date). A similar but not as clear piece can be found in the July issue of the journal written by Javi Losada  
[http://www.elmilitante.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=7933:los-astilleros-deben-unirse-a-los-mineros-en-madrid-el-dia-11&catid=1071:movimiento-obrero&Itemid=100015](http://www.elmilitante.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7933:los-astilleros-deben-unirse-a-los-mineros-en-madrid-el-dia-11&catid=1071:movimiento-obrero&Itemid=100015).

the older leadership is accused of having traded labour struggle for social-democratic consensus, they also are often accused of remaining old-style Stalinists. I will present stories that show this complexity.

The first was told by a member of the socialist cultural association, Fuco Buxan. They had a meeting with the CCOO representatives from the shipyard to show their support, asked if the CCOO needed any help, and urged that this was a time for solidarity. The answer from the mainstream CCOO representative was an ironic “Are we going to have to go back to class struggle then?” (and he added, “I’m joking...”). To the Fuco Buxan member, this showed the CCOO’s lack of interest in anything beyond concrete shipyard concerns, and a rejection of the idea of class confrontation. That response was taken to illustrate the ways that CCOO officials saw themselves as something like a political class, distinct from workers, and to illustrate the way that main yard workers saw themselves as a labour aristocracy who were becoming middle class, but who were a classic example of the *desclasados*.

The next tale is about Ramón, one of the older leaders who was active during the Franco period and the Transition and who is now seventy. A member of the Communist Party (PC) since his youth, he was committed to democracy and followed Santiago Carrillo, then leader of the Spanish PC, in his Eurocommunist strategy of a wide alliance of the left.<sup>7</sup> Ramón’s colleagues called him “a political animal” and even his rivals said he was an honest man. He was one of the founders of Fuco Buxan, which was set up in 1999 with the goal of mobilizing ordinary citizens against the ills of capitalist society, ranging from the unequal position of immigrants and women to environmental degradation and the aggressive practices of financial institutions. He became increasingly critical of the Socialist Party (PSOE) after the onset of the 2008 economic crisis, and after the Socialist government enacted a new labour law in September, 2011, he publicly abandoned the party in an act of protest against what he interpreted as an attack to the historical gains of the working class, acquired through hard struggle and sacrifice. When directly addressed on the issue of class, Ramón said:

The traditional working class has been modified and today it is much more diverse ... I think there exists a working class but it is composed by a diversity of experiences and realities of work, but I think that today the “world of work” – I think this is a more appropriate term than “working class” — still has common elements

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<sup>7</sup> In support of this strategy Carrillo urged his followers to integrate the socialist party PSOE.

... and as long as the economic, political and media power is concentrated in such a few hands, what this does generate is that the world of work has many more allies .... The other day I read the statements of those presidents of industrial parks [saying that their main worry was not the mobilization of workers but the credit squeeze], and I thought: well, deep down, these people are focusing their attack on the financial groups .... I think that the system managed to fragment us quite thoroughly so that big sectors of the world of work are not clear about who their adversaries are ... but it is also true that in the present moment I observe that the focus [of opposition is centred] increasingly on the figure of the big banks and financiers ... I think this is the head [of the system] ... *it is what might provide the world of work with that common perspective ...* but it will not be easy. (emphasis added)

The spirit of Eurocommunism has been reconfigured by this old-timer, as the class alliance is widened to include even small and medium entrepreneurs involved in industrial parks who are suffering from the credit squeeze. For these old union leaders, the belief that democracy would be the way to achieve social goals and a transformation of the capitalist system was an article of faith. In the present, they keep that faith and see a broad alliance with other parties and interests as the key to a democratic movement towards a socialist-democratic future.

Although those in the Trotskyite faction of the CCOO agree with many of the analyses of the older activists like Ramón, they reject their faith in social democracy and the nature of activist leadership that goes with it. Firstly, they criticise the old-timers for believing that it is possible to use the existing political structure to achieve a permanent transformation of capitalist society into a socialist one, free of exploitation. For the critics, that is the old revisionist, Eurocommunist sin. Secondly, they see the old-timers as complicit in the neo-corporatist compact after the death of Franco, which is the cause of the present bureaucratization of unions and the gap between the leadership and the membership. Finally, they say that the old-timers are dirigiste, imposing their own views on the rank-and-file from above and not listening to ordinary members' concerns and ideas. In contrast, the Trotskyites advocate a grass-roots orientation, in which any struggle can be used to extend class consciousness and the struggle for systemic change. In fact, however, the old-timers in Fuco Buxan are active in articulating many different concerns of ordinary people through continuous mobilization. It appears that what the Trotskyites dislike is what they see as the old-timers' assertive attitude, their willingness to tell people what to do. The old-timers would retort that general assemblies are necessary, but so is strong leadership. However, they are not heeded

by those in the younger generations, so that their efforts to be organic intellectuals fail.

The difference between the generations may, however, be greater in the eyes of the Trotskyites than they are in fact. For example, Ramón's analysis of why the main company workers do not support workers in the fringe companies is not very different from that of the Trotskyites. For Ramón, the main company workers "feel they are 'very important' in the region, they only mobilize for what is important, the rest is secondary. That is to say, the union leadership is pitiful", while for the Trotskyites, the "union committee reflected the mentality that the workers of the [auxiliary] companies were only passing through Navantia and, therefore, their problems could not be at the same level as the problems of the workers in the main [company]" (Sector Crítico de CCOO. Navantia-Ferrol 4-06-2012).<sup>8</sup> And again, Ramón said that, back in the 1980s, the union leaders decided that "politics was not our job ... our job is that we have to defend ourselves in professional terms ... that is an idea almost of a yellow unionism ... in any case unionism lost its sense, its mobilizing capacity", while for the Trotskyites,

During many years, the union committee of Navantia did not respond to the deterioration of the work conditions in the [auxiliary] companies and did nothing to promote the union organization of their workers; on the contrary: it opposed any process of organization in order to remain the only union power and to continue imposing its views. (Sector Crítico de CCOO. Navantia-Ferrol 4-06-2012)

Even in terms of their views on leadership, the old-time leaders and the grass-roots Trotskyites are not so far apart as the Trotskyites seem to think. Certainly, the old-timers believe in leadership. At a dinner after a demonstration in the city by workers of the shipyards in May of 2012, someone commented on the show of disunion and confrontation that ended the action, and said "We need leaders like the old ones ... someone who holds the megaphone up and gives an orientation". During that demonstration, workers in the main company were squabbling with those in the auxiliary companies, which led some old-timers to say: "This is pitiful, there is no direction, a workers' movement has to be directed and not be left to spontaneity!" Commenting on the same event, Ramón said that "when I meet comrades they tell me: you [old leaders] should come back because the

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<sup>8</sup> This leaflet was produced by the critical section of the union CCOO, self-identified as CCOO-Críticos. It is not signed, there is no publisher (it is a leaflet distributed by hand on site).

present ones do nothing, they don't do [general] assemblies, they don't inform us of anything, it is as if we, the workers, didn't exist.”

Once more, the old-timer Ramón and the Trotskyites are not that far apart. For Ramón, workers demand leaders, but those leaders have to respect them, inform them of what is going on and take their views into account. Indeed, as he explained it, leadership has to emerge from the grass-roots. Referring to his work in Fuco Buxan, he says:

if we help people who have concrete problems to self-organize we can create something similar to what is happening now in Greece with Syriza .... Based on my personal experience ... [I see that] through the weaving of that process [of helping people to organize themselves to resolve concrete problems] you also create the favourable conditions to have some of these people become leaders .... I am now very angry [with the situation] ... but I can also see that this cannot be a call from above but a process that has to be woven.

For the Trotskyites, on the other hand, their concern with democracy and a bottom-up approach is matched by a desire to “guide” and “orient” action in a way that accords with their political project. As well, their leaders present themselves as more knowledgeable in their analysis of the situation and more experienced in struggle than most, and so should be heeded.

These similarities, however, are not enough to erase the factors that separate the old-timers like Ramón from the younger Trotskyites like Jaime. Two are especially important. The first is history. It is very difficult for those of the younger generation to understand the very deep scars that the post-Franco Transition left in the workers' movement, especially after the re-structuring phase of the 1980s. The scramble for power and the fragmenting of the left hampered in important ways those who sought to unify the labour movement, and the complexity and depth of this history means that there is always a point at which anyone can be seen to have been defending the wrong position. The second factor is the intensity of the struggle to achieve the position of a legitimate leader. Such a leader is an organic intellectual capable of a knowledgeable analysis of the underlying features of the immediate situation, and is also an activist, the speaker with the megaphone organizing and leading protest. In Ferrol, this position is one of enormous prestige and authority, one that propels people into History, and each faction aims at achieving that position.

## CLASS

So, what class? Whose class? How is class possible in Ferrol? Is the concept

useful for struggle? Is it useful for analysis? What is the responsibility of academics with regard to the concept?

The people I talked with during my fieldwork approach class in terms of their long experience of workers' mobilization and their thorough knowledge of the classic Marxist literature and more recent work, including academic debates. They know of or have been involved in the debates and confrontations in the second half of the twentieth century that transformed Communist and Socialist parties and unions in Western Europe and, of course, in Spain. My own analysis is based on a less intimate knowledge than theirs, but reflects a different perspective, from which two things stand out that appear to contradict each other. One is that the unions are able to mobilize 25,000 people in an area with a population of about 75,000, which suggests something like class solidarity and the continuing ability of unions to represent common interests. The other is the mutual disqualification between the various factions of labour leadership which I have described, a rift that seems to prevent the emergence of strong organic intellectuals and of a sustained and unified class orientation and practice.

I want to try to make sense of these contradictory ethnographic facts in terms of some others. One set of these revolves around the increased importance of consumption and people's consumption aspirations for understanding class in Ferrol. This increase is reflected in the centrality of the idea of the *desclasado* in the local analysis of class fragmentation and, simultaneously, in the potential of the financial crisis to become the basis of a new interest coalition. The remaining ethnographic fact that I want to invoke is the importance of history, the way that the different historical experiences of the two generations of labour leaders that I have described shape their perspectives on the present and their ability to cooperate.

Re-reading the debate on revisionism in the 1890s, particularly within the Social Democratic Party in Germany, reveals a surprising number of similarities with the present (Gustafsson 1975). That old debate involved a number of topics, including the bureaucratization of the party; a shift away from class confrontation and direct action, and toward union negotiation and parliamentary elections, and the gradualism and collaboration between classes that these imply; the increasing importance of consumption and the associated decline in homogeneous working-class identity. These find echoes in Spain.

The Transition became a commitment to parliamentary democracy, a rejection of Marxism by much of the left, and the embrace of middle-class consumption and eventually of a welfare state of the sort common in Western Europe: the "European dream". No longer was capitalism to be superseded through class struggle. Instead, it was to be guided with tripartite agreements among the state, labour, and capital; any sacrifice that the working class had to make was just a



temporary adjustment required to correct the effects of state economic policies under Franco. In the process, the political aspect of the labour movement was replaced by wage negotiations carried out by bureaucratized unions, the leaders of which were co-opted by the rhetoric of the responsibility for labour peace and democratic stability (for parallels in the United States, see Fantasia and Voss 2004). Expanding consumer credit enabled working-class families to emulate middle-class consumption starting in the late 1960s, a process that skyrocketed in the boom period around 2000, linked to the housing bubble. As a result of these events, the experience of class was de-politicized and its nature and boundaries were blurred because of expanding social benefits such as education and healthcare and consumer credit. These changes did not, however, affect all sectors of the working class equally. Those in heavy industry, including those in the Ferrol yards, experienced repeated restructuring since the 1980s, which strengthened their identification as working class in the traditional industrial sense, facilitated by proud memories of union struggle and its victories during the dictatorship. This identification helps explain how the unions could still mobilize 25,000 people in Ferrol. It also helps us to understand how class is still a useful concept for the relatively young Trotskyites I have described, so critical of the older leadership and its embrace of revisionism after Franco.

In addition to the changes in the position of the working class that I have described, that class has been subjected to forces that produced both fragmentation and commonality. The increasing importance of identity in the past few decades was accompanied by growing differentiation in terms of gender, age, and race, as well as national, ethnic, and religious belonging. These latter differentiations became especially visible in the increasing voice of xenophobic groups and in outbursts of populist violence against immigrants that are driving elected parties towards exclusionary and discriminatory policies. Although Ferrol is not particularly beset by these identity divisions, the old-timers try to counter this fragmentation, stressing homogeneity within diversity through their invocation of “the world of work”. The talk of *desclasados*, however, shows that other tensions of differentiation are at work.

While people’s aspirations and their experiences at work point to a fragmentation of the working class in Ferrol, the mechanisms that facilitated that fragmentation recently have begun to produce a basis of commonality. This is not a commonality of work, but one of exploitation in the realm of credit and consumption. For ordinary people, employed and unemployed, and even for small entrepreneurs, the relation to credit has become the basis of their understanding of systemic dispossession. If credit became the way into middle-class identity and becoming *desclasado*, lack of credit has become the return ticket to a working-class

reality and, associated with that, a declining faith in parliamentary democracy. The financial crisis and the response of a technocratic government are producing a strong feeling of class differentiation and polarization: while the rich get richer (especially those in banking), the rest get poorer.

Credit and debt have become the centre of a new form of class consciousness, and even small entrepreneurs, unable to keep up their businesses because of the crunch in credit and consumption, are reluctantly abandoning their petty bourgeois position. Financial instruments that substituted for increases in salaries have trapped people in a debt circuit that is tied to a declining middle class standard of living, shattering the promise of a ‘classless democracy’. Credit has ceased to be an asset and debt has become an unsustainable liability when income from salaries (or small profits) has dried up. For most people in Ferrol, then, the old relationship of labour and capital has become mediated by the relationship of credit and debt, in which people confront not employers, but financial institutions. Wages, now mostly understood as income, become not so much the expression of the exploitive relation to productive capital, but the expression of an expropriation relation to financial capital that directly affects livelihood. The unemployment that more and more people confront increasingly is feared because it undercuts people’s efforts to be credit-worthy, to honour their debts and keep their middle-class lifestyle, the lifestyle that they thought came with the European dream of social democracy.

What Costas Lapavistas (2009:138) says of the main aspects of present-day financialisation fits the Spanish crisis: financial institutions are “extracting financial profit directly out of the personal income of workers”, producing a decline in personal savings and an increase in debt for workers, while real wages contract. This helps explain why working people (employed, unemployed, retired) feel exploited and defrauded by banks. This is aggravated by a feeling of being despised and humiliated by those that are involved in financial institutions and the political powers that protect them: while workers are permanently and publicly defined as inadequate to the needs of the economy, bankers convicted of embezzlement are supported and pardoned by the government. Workers (and others) have become thoroughly involved in the mechanisms of finance for their everyday livelihoods and have become expropriated or exploited through them in a very immediate way. This is not, however, conventional capitalist exploitation, because profit emerges in circulation rather than in production. The extraction that comes with financialisation

should be clearly distinguished from exploitation that occurs in production and remains the cornerstone of contemporary capitalist economies. Financial expropriation is an additional source of profit

that originates in the sphere of circulation. In so far as it relates to personal income, it involves existing flows of money and value, rather than [in] new flows of surplus-value. Yet, despite occurring in circulation, it takes place systematically and through economic processes, thus having an exploitative aspect. (Lapavitsas 2009: 131)

Moreover, this situation is based on inequality of information and power between working people and the financial institutions that give them credit (2009: 132-33).

This poses a problem in terms of class theory. The processes that homogenize class experience and produce social differentiation appear to be related not so much to the ownership of capital and exploitation in the realm of production, but to the realm of circulation, the home of finance capital. How can we articulate exploitation in production with expropriation in circulation in terms of class?

If financial institutions are to extract profit from ordinary people, those people need to have access to some kind of income, either their own or those of close kin. Also, credit for consumption requires that there be consumables, and hence people involved (and exploited) in the material activities required for their production and distribution. At the same time, however, if most people had adequate, stable incomes, they would have less need to borrow in order to maintain their basic consumption, which would hamper the system of financial expropriation. Taken together, these points suggest that the deregulation and globalization of markets has two pertinent consequences. One is the reduction of labour costs, through the relocation of production to cheaper regions and through labour migration resulting in the contraction of income for the working class in mature economies, with increased income instability. The other is the expansion of consumption based on access to credit and financial expropriation of the working class. Globally, then, the working class is simultaneously being exploited at the point of production through surplus-value extraction and expropriated through the financial system at the point of consumption. Locally, on the other hand, the changing structure of production fragments workers as a class while homogenizing them as subjects of financial dispossession. This, I think, is what *desclasado* points to: the commonality that the working class is unable to perceive at the point of production is becoming apparent to them in the realm of circulation, their common deprived position in the financial system. It remains to consider the effects of these fragmentations and commonalities for class struggle.

To begin with, we must consider some of the important things that people in the labour movement in Ferrol have to say. These include the point that those in the labour aristocracy will re-class themselves when they understand that their jobs are at stake, and that the weakening of the middle-class dream that has followed the credit crunch will awaken people to their class position. These points suggest that

the articulation of people's deprived positions in production and consumption are key to the re-awakening of class consciousness and that the goal of class struggle is to reverse those deprivations and so transform the social order. Those in the labour movement also say that the experience of past struggle is valuable for those in the younger generation, but that present-day struggles need to be waged by those involved in present-day structures of capital accumulation and dispossession. These points, in turn, suggest that a new set of organic intellectuals needs to reconfigure the strategies and tactics of the past.

Access to and distribution of a variety of resources, such as property, income, and knowledge, are still the central factors of a system of differentiation that is to be transformed by class struggle. Ownership, mediated by credit backed by income-generating opportunities, once seemed to be accessible to all who were willing to work. But this dream has evaporated, and people tell themselves: "We have been living beyond our possibilities". This expresses the sense of being out of place, and the idea that middle-class consumption was not meant for the working-class. Once the mirage of credit is gone, what defines "our possibilities" is paid employment. And as unemployment and underemployment grow, it again becomes clear that we own only our labour power, which becomes a valuable asset only in relation to capital's demand for it. This realisation can be the foundation for a re-classing of the *desclasado*. In other words, the immediate struggles around financialised expropriation are the prolegomena to a re-classing that leads back to basic class confrontation: the labour-capital dilemma and the universal search for the means of livelihood.

## CONCLUSION

Globalization has increased differentiation within the working-class, while neoliberalism has reduced state-mediated contributions to people's material welfare. The result, I have argued in the preceding paragraphs, is that large numbers of people have become subject to exploitation in production and extraction in circulation. Those people's struggle against this double form of dispossession appears commonly to take one or the other of two political forms.

The first form is efforts to protect their access to economic and political resources through exclusionary nationalism (Kalb 2011). In this, a corporatist unity is asserted on cultural and moral grounds, while economic inequalities are blamed on external causes. Although these are struggles *of* class that express class experiences, they are not class movements in the sense that they do not seek or lead to the transformation of the ownership structure, and so do not produce an historical bloc in Gramsci's sense. The second form is efforts to find a wide commonality based on people's position within the economy as producers and as consumers. In

Spain, such efforts are expressed in movements like the Indignados, which seek to re-create a political-economic sense of class beyond the workplace. There is potential here for the re-emergence of a concept of class, but in the absence of organic intellectuals who can promulgate strong arguments and a sense of direction, these movements also do not result in a historical bloc.

As Polanyi (1935: 392) argued in his analysis of the rise of fascism in Europe, democracy is inherently oriented toward socialism, and such a belief may well have motivated Communist union leaders who struggled against Franco in the name of democracy. However, as I have said, the compromise of the Transition entailed renouncing the goal of the radical transformation of Spain's capitalist system, and the old economic and political elites remained in place. With the economic crisis, that compromise has become increasingly meaningless, as technocratic administrations protect the interests of the wealthy and the powerful, under the guise of "the market", at the expense of the well-being of the mass of Spaniards.<sup>9</sup> Protestors in the new social movements demand "Real democracy now", indicating the corrosive effect of that technocracy on the faith that people had in a liberal-democratic system of government. Such demands also express, and help spread, the awareness that formal democracy too often, as Engels (1895) observed, favours the reproduction of the existing structure of power.

In Ferrol, we find this growing awareness among the old-timers like Ramón, among their Trotskyite critics and among the younger activists of the Indignados movement. However, and as I have shown, shared awareness is not a sufficient basis for extending and organizing class and class struggle. The old-timers are both defined as Stalinists and as party to the revisionist compromise of the Transition. The Trotskyites, in practice, appear mostly concerned with the employed members of the working class although, in theory, they address class as a multiple experience, and they are unclear about their immediate strategic project. The younger social-movement activists are allergic to any form of organization, and they analyse the situation people confront in terms that are more moral (*indignados*) than political-economic.

These divergences would matter less if the Ferrol population were as uniform and stable as it was during the heyday of industrialisation around the

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<sup>9</sup> Spain had liberal technocratic governments that produced structural adjustment under Franco, in the late 1950s and in the 1960s. These were undertaken without democracy, relying on the impending menace of violent repression against the working class's incipient collective organization. The meaning behind the apparently neutral macroeconomic language of present-day technocrats is clear, as it awakens memories of the technocrats during the dictatorship.

1960s. However, the precarious position of so many people in the region is a structural impediment to organization, as is the diversity of those people's backgrounds, ranging from ordinary industrial workers to lower-level managers and petty entrepreneurs, all with their different histories of aspirations, and frustrations, in their lives and the lives of those around them. The situation is one of a constant process of differentiation within working-class experience, springing from differences across class segments and generations, and shaped by developments within different spheres such as work and consumption. If there is to be a class movement, these new social and political-economic realities need to be matched with new analyses, ideas, and programs that sustain commonality. And one of the tasks of those in anthropology, and in the other social sciences, is to help assess concepts of class in terms of their potential to explain the logic of people's experience in the present and, hopefully, to help them to change it for the better.

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