

EMERGENT CLASS DIVISIONS AMONG YOUNG ADULTS IN THE FORMER SOVIET UNION*

Ken Roberts, University of Liverpool, UK**
and
Jochen Tholen, University of Bremen

Abstract

In this paper classes are defined as formations based on occupations with similar work and market situations, the occupational aggregates thus created acting as likely bases for the development of common lifestyles, socio-political orientations, perceptions of common interests and related political action. Evidence is drawn from survey investigations conducted in 2002 among a total of 1800 25-29 year olds in six contrasting locations in three different ex-communist countries (Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine). The rapid destruction of the old system and the steep drops in output and living standards in all the countries had fostered widespread feelings that the societies had become classless, that virtually everyone was facing very similar opportunities and problems, or that the countries had become divided into prospering elites on the one hand and impoverished masses on the other. However, the survey evidence shows that young people were entering very different labour market situations and occupations, and that they were quickly becoming locked into particular employment segments by normal labour market processes. The emergent class divisions are shown to be similar (though not identical) to those conventionally recognised in western sociology. It is argued that the new market economies already have clearly defined middle classes and less homogeneous working classes, and that these classes, especially the middle classes, are already acquiring social and cultural dimensions. However, it is argued that the type of class-based politics familiar in the west is likely to remain a long-term absentee.

* The research on which this paper is based was supported by INTAS (award 00-020)

** Corresponding author:

Professor K Roberts,
Department of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work Studies,
University of Liverpool,
Eleanor Rathbone Building,
Bedford Street South,
Liverpool L69 7ZA,
England.

Phone: work, 00 (0) 151 794 2971

Phone: home 00 (0) 1695 574962

Fax: 00 (0) 151 794 3001

Email bert@liverpool.ac.uk