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

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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 (limited) opportunities and (huge) 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 although few could be described as prospering the young people were entering very different labour market situations and occupations, and 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 emergent middle classes and less homogeneous, less distinct working classes, and that the middle classes are already acquiring social, cultural and political dimensions. However, it is also argued that the type of class-based politics familiar in the west is likely to remain a long-term absentee.

Keywords: social stratification, labour markets, careers, Eastern Europe, youth.

The problem

How should we classify (place into classes) the populations in the new market economies/democracies of East-Central Europe and the former USSR? Up to now there have been four types of answer.

i. One denies the existence of western-type classes. The countries are said to have polarised into rich and powerful elites at the top and impoverished masses way beneath, and that it is impossible to identify class boundaries among the latter (Tilkidjiev, 1996). Ilyin (1998) argues that Russia's new professionals and managers cannot be treated as a separate middle class because of the huge overlap between their own and workers' (generally low) salaries. Likewise Kivinen (1998) claims that the new east's new middle class is a mirage (like communism's 'holy working class') which disappears whenever and wherever it is approached.

ii. A second response has been to avoid the class problem by taking an alternative course when examining inequalities, usually by dividing populations into income quintiles or deciles (see Bogomolova, 1998; Sumbadze and Trakhan-Mouravi, 2003). Replacing class with income appeals not just because suitable data are usually available, but also on account of the prevalence of poverty in most of the countries, and the consequent desire of national governments and international organisations to aid poverty-reducing economic growth and job creation. Hence their need for measurements of the extent and location of poverty. However, we (in sociology) know that, as a substitute for social class, income has grave flaws. It is not just that the validity of the data is often suspect, and this applies whether the collectors are government agencies or independent investigators: people often refuse to disclose or exaggerate or under-report. The fundamental flaw is that current income can be a poor guide to life chances. There is considerable lifetime mobility between different income bands, much moreso than between social classes. This applies in the old west and the new east. Bogomolova (1998) found that in Russia only a fifth of a panel remained in the same income quintiles across three annual surveys in the mid-1990s. Past income and future income expectations can be as important as current income as indicators of class position. We need to know not just who is poor in income terms at a specific point in time but also their chances of escape and the likelihood of any escape proving permanent.

iii. A third response, which is congruent with how we proceed below, is to try to identify new classes that are being formed in the historically unprecedented conditions that have arisen in the new market economies. Up to now a weakness in these attempts is that new classes have been hypothesised on the basis of patchy rather than substantial evidence, and analysts who have taken this course have not agreed on what the new classes are. Piirainen (1998) claims that three new classes are being formed in Russia: a 'new middle class' composed of people with marketable assets who have become integrated into producer and consumer markets; 'the people' who are acting defensively, relying on the old system (the state) for their principal jobs and incomes while simultaneously earning additional sums in informal segments of the new market economies; and 'proletarians' who continue to rely entirely on the state. Khmelko (2002), using evidence from Ukraine, argues that not one but two new middle classes are being formed: 'semi-owners' who are able to transform the earnings and profits of enterprises into personal incomes, and 'officialdom' whose members exploit businesses and private citizens alike. Kutzenko (2002), also using evidence from Ukraine, argues that there are actually three new classes: owners and those who identify with them, support them, and who are rewarded for their support; experts who can offer special skills and knowledge; and workers.

iv. Some western sociologists (and rather fewer in the ex-communist countries) have applied class schemes developed in the west in their research in the new east. They have justified this by claiming that a general process of convergence is underway. For example, since the end of communism income inequalities have widened in favour of the better-educated in most of the countries (Domanski, 2001). In this and other respects, inequalities have been westernised. Given such trends, it is said to be reasonable to anticipate similar class divisions to those found in the west (Domanski, 2000). These investigators have also been able to show that their measurements work in the sense of identifying the expected clusters of job characteristics and the expected correlations with dependent variables (Evans, 1996; Evans and Mills, 1999). However, the fact that a measurement predicts a hypothesised outcome is not in itself proof that the independent factor (class in this instance) has been measured accurately. Others (as above) argue that it is unreasonable to expect the new market economies to create even broadly similar class structures to those of the old west on account of the inevitable legacies of communism on the one hand, and, on the other, the countries' distinctive experiences during their transformation. Our view, given the evidence presented below, is that 'similar class divisions' is indeed a likely outcome of the reforms, but one that has to be treated as a hypothesis until alternative possible outcomes have also been considered and tested.

What are social classes?

Before proceeding further it will be helpful to specify exactly what we are looking for when we set-out in search of social classes. Sociology has different, competing, definitions of class (Marxist, Weberian and functionalist) but fortunately these concepts have common basic features. Most definers (in sociology) agree that classes have an economic foundation. People are usually classified according their occupations or jobs. So in searching for classes we are seeking, in the first instance, groups of occupations or jobs with similar features which are likely to be products of similar work and market situations which result in incumbents deriving similar rewards from work (in terms of income and other elements of compensation packages, security, job satisfaction, prospects of advancement, prestige and power), and experiencing similar risks and deprivations.

However, for occupational or job aggregates to become *social* classes there need to be additional developments which should follow from the similar work and market situations. Classes should develop a social dimension (members associating with each other as equals at work and outside more frequently than they experience such relationships with members of other classes). As a result of their common experiences and propensity to associate, we expect social classes to develop a cultural dimension – similar states of mind and orientations to action. Some of these actions are likely to be political in which case the classes will become political actors. Finally, these social classes should govern their members' life chances in the sense that particular class origins are associated with particular mobility prospects, and recruitment to particular classes is not random but from among persons with specific class-related characteristics. Any macro-economic trends or government policies are likely to have different effects among, and to be appraised differently by, different social classes which, one would expect, will reinforce processes of class formation. So in seeking social classes we are hoping to encounter sections of a population who play similar roles as economic producers and who also share common social practices and cultures, political orientations, and mobility chances.

Once we know what we are looking for we can approach the new market economies forewarned. First, in searching for new social classes (here we assume that the end of communism has been seriously disruptive of the former stratification systems), we should

not expect to encounter 'finished products'. Class formation is usually (probably always) a very long-term process lasting decades or even generations rather then just years. Britain, the very first industrial nation, had a working class (as an occupational aggregate) by the mid-nineteenth century, but it was only from the 1850s onwards that effective trade unions were organised, 1900 when the Labour Party was founded, 1945 before the first majority Labour government was elected, and organised labour (Old Labour in present-day UK political terminology) arguably did not reach the zenith of its influence in Britain until the 1960s and 70s. Class formation may not take this long, but the new market economies still have their first post-communist cohorts of adults. The old systems were dismantled or collapsed very quickly. The old recognised strata of nomenklatura, specialists, other non-manuals, industrial workers and farm workers may not have continued intact but their legacies are likely to remain. Market forces have still had less than two decades to transform old classes or create new ones. This is a short time span in which to expect market forces even to have assigned definite positions to particular kinds of work let alone for such occupational aggregates to have acquired socio-cultural and political dimensions. Ost (1993, 1995) has drawn attention to additional impediments to class formation in the new east; namely, the classless ideologies of both communism and then the reform movements.

Another realistic expectation is that such class formation that has occurred since the 1980s will be uneven. We should not expect the processes to be occurring in strict parallel within all sections of the workforces. If one adopts a relational rather than a gradational view of class (as do the present authors), meaning that classes conceived as being formed through their relationships with one another, formation at any level in the class structure is likely to trigger comparable responses elsewhere. Up to now, social analysts appear to have found it easier to detect class formation towards the top rather than towards the base of the new systems of stratification in former communist countries. Profiles of new oligarchs, owners, experts, officialdom and so on are more numerous and detailed than accounts of developments beneath. Arguably (and see below), the developments beneath will occur only in response to perceptions by the disadvantaged that other groups have formed to pursue their particular interests successfully. Towards the base of the new class structures, even basic positions vis-à-vis the labour market may still be imperfectly formed, and any such aggregates may have yet to develop any social and cultural dimensions. Domanski (2001) has shown that, in most of the new market economies, the unemployed who live in low income households do not yet exhibit additional 'underclass' characteristics such as commonly disadvantaged educational backgrounds or deprivation in home furnishings and fitments.

Evidence

Our fresh evidence is from interview surveys conducted in 2002 among 600 young adults in each of Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine (a grand total of 1800 interviews). We realise that young people are not an obvious age group to select for investigating class formation. They are notoriously difficult to classify while they are making their life stage transitions. They can be grouped according to their social class origins (parents' occupations) but while they remain in life stage transition young people's own occupational destinations remain unknown. We know that in all modern societies many young people are experiencing social mobility. Up to now youth researchers in the new market economies have normally side-stepped class issues in preference for presenting overall profiles of the age group in particular countries and regions (see Magun, 1996; Zubok, 1998; Zuev, 1997). However, our samples were aged 25-29 (older youth), so their life stage transitions were complete or nearing completion, and in the new market economies this particular age group appeared likely to offer the clearest possible indications of emerging class formations and divisions since they would be carrying minimal 'baggage' from the old system yet they would already have significant experience in the new labour markets. All our respondents had entered the

labour markets only after communism ended. Inevitably they carried some ‘baggage’ acquired from parents, teachers and other adults, but they were from the first cohorts to have entered adulthood in their countries’ new times.

Earlier efforts to identify emergent class formations among young people in former communist countries have produced disappointing results (see, for example, Roberts and Jung, 1995; Roberts et al, 2000, 2002). Investigators have found consistently that parental class predicts educational attainments, which predict the types of occupations that young people enter. Thereafter very little has proved predictable using the normal sociological variables. Income levels and socio-political attitudes have exhibited no clear connections with parental class, subjects’ education or occupations. This could have been because there were not, and possibly never would be, any clear patterns to uncover. Or the investigators’ search methods may have been inappropriate. Or it could still have been too early historically for social classes to be forming. In 2002 we were better prepared, more aware of what to look for, the new market economies had slightly longer histories, and the young adult samples were slightly older than in previous studies.

The fieldwork in 2002 was conducted in selected regions of the participating countries. In Ukraine the sample was split between Makeeva, a coal-mining town in the Donbass region, and rural villages in west Ukraine. In Armenia and Georgia the samples were split between the capital cities, Yerevan and Tbilisi, and regional centres, Vanadzor and Telavi. The samples were not intended to be statistically representative of the age group in their countries, or even the wider regions from which they were drawn. Rather, they were intended to offer clear indications of how young people in contrasting and well-defined post-communist locations had been affected by the macro-transformation of their countries.

All the local samples were identified by household canvassing within districts or villages (in west Ukraine) which were selected so as to achieve balanced overall social mixes. None of our conclusions depend on estimating the prevalence of particular experiences or attitudes in the age group throughout the countries or regions. Rather, we simply explore contrasts and relationships between different measurements within the samples overall and within each region. We group respondents by education where the only meaningful distinction was between those with and those without higher education. We gathered a great deal of information about the respondents’ first jobs and their current or most recent jobs; the sectors that they worked in (state, private or self-employed), their occupations (managers, professionals, other non-manuals, workers in manufacturing and extractive industries, and farm workers), their hours of work, levels of job satisfaction, the degrees of correspondence between their education and their jobs, and their total incomes at the time of the research. The samples were questioned about their views on a wide range of topical social and political issues, their levels and types of civic activity, and they were also questioned about their plans and hopes for the education of their own children. The information collected thus enables us to interrogate the validity of some hypothesised (emergent) class formations as well as the applicability of western social class divisions in the new market economies. As well as comparing occupational aggregates we can also compare employees in the state and private sectors plus the self-employed, and in addition, since we could anticipate confidently from previous research that there would be considerable unemployment and under-employment among our respondents, we can compare those in ‘regular’ jobs (full-time, reasonably secure, and paying a full adult salary) and those who were marginalised in the new labour markets.

All the new market economies began their transformations from broadly similar starting points in 1989-91 but we realise that thereafter they have diverged considerably. All our new evidence is from former Soviet countries. Developments in other parts of the old communist bloc, particularly in Central Europe, may well (but will not necessarily) be different. We do not know for certain whether our findings would be similar in other ex-communist countries but we feel on safe ground in suggesting that the main and consistent (across all the locations) findings would be very similar if the surveys were replicated in any other European parts of the ex-USSR. The locations for our 2002 surveys were chosen because they were very different from one another, and also because each had a distinctive economic and labour market profile. Makeeva is a separate town administratively but it is really a suburb of Donetsk, the capital city of Ukraine's Donbass region. There are senses in which Makeeva (originally a cluster of pit villages) epitomises Donbass whose economy has long been based on coal mining and other heavy industries such as metal manufacture and chemicals, all of which have been in crisis as a result of market reforms. However, new jobs, some of them good jobs with international organisations (or their money) have been created in Donetsk along with many new 'McJobs' in consumer services. In all the West Ukraine villages employment in agriculture (the long-standing economic base in all rural parts of the region) had declined following the break-up of the state and collective farms but, once again, new opportunities had been created, mainly for 'doing business' which usually meant trading, preferably across the borders of one or more of the several adjacent and not too distant countries. Tbilisi and Yerevan are both capital cities, albeit of two of the poorest countries in the former Soviet Union, but they still offer the exceptional range of labour market opportunities that are found in all capitals. Vanadzor and Telavi are regional centres, in both of which the main industries (agriculture, wine-making and tourism in Telavi, and chemicals, textiles and engineering in Vanadzor) stopped almost entirely around the time of the countries' independence (1991) and had barely restarted in 2002. So in the surveys conducted in 2002 only around a third of the 25-29 year olds in both Vanadzor and Telavi were in proper jobs.

It seems safe to assume that any class divisions that were being created in all these very different locations will be forming in other parts of the ex-USSR also. Simultaneously, our diverse locations should offer pointers to any differences in the class structures that may be in formation in different types of places within, and in different, ex-Soviet countries.

The new labour markets

There were strong continuities over time in the samples' types of employment (for detailed evidence see Roberts, 2004). Those whose first jobs were manual were usually, and by far the most likely to be, in manual jobs when interviewed, and likewise those whose first jobs were management or professional. Similarly, those who were initially employed in the state sector had tended to remain there (though there had been an overall drift over time away from this contracting sector), while those whose first jobs were in the private sector were unlikely to have switched. Those who became successfully self-employed early-on had usually remained self-employed. Those who were mainly unemployed during their initial year outside full-time education had tended to remain unemployed ever since. Those who worked full hours in their first jobs were usually still working full hours when interviewed. The continuities may have been partly due to individuals' (stable) employment preferences but they would also have been due to the operation of normal labour market processes. Experience in a profession in any market economy strengthens a person's chances of obtaining a similar subsequent job. Successful experience of running a business increases the likelihood of those concerned continuing to do so. People with records of unemployment tend to be avoided by prospective employers. The new market economies' private sector

employers often prefer to recruit staff who have not been 'contaminated' by public sector experience (see Roberts et al, 1997).

So the incoming workforces in the countries and regions in this study were becoming segmented very rapidly. What were the main segments, the distinctive characteristics of the jobs therein, and of the young adults who were entering and remaining in them? There were three distinct and in two cases largely overlapping, configurations. The first clear configuration had been formed by higher education graduates who were more likely than other respondents to be in public sector jobs. In all the locations the higher education graduates were also the most likely to be in management and professional occupations, to record high levels of job satisfaction (measured through a battery of questions on various aspects of their jobs), and to be relatively well-paid. Second, there was an overlapping configuration. The 25-29 year olds who had been recruited into the public sector were more likely than those employed or self-employed in the private sectors to be higher education graduates, and to occupy management and professional positions. In all the locations the public sector employees were more likely to be in trade unions than their private sector counterparts, and they were also more likely to be working in accordance with their specialties (the occupations for which they had been educated, when applicable). The relatively high levels of job satisfaction expressed by the higher education graduates would have been due in some cases to their above average earnings, in others to working in the fields for which they felt properly prepared and in others to both of these satisfiers (see below).

Each of the above configurations had an opposite. So non-university graduates tended to be employed in clerical and manual jobs, and in the private sector, to be paid less, and to be less satisfied with their jobs. Private sector jobs tended to be at lower levels (not management or professional), and performed by non-graduates who had not joined trade unions. However, non-university graduates were far more numerous than graduates, and there was more variety in the non-graduates' types of jobs, levels of job satisfaction and so on. Likewise there were more private sector employees than public sector workers and the former had less in common. In other words, these were more heterogeneous, less well-defined groups.

The self-employed were the third distinct group, and in more respects than just their self-employment. They tended to be non-graduates and yet to be the highest earners in the samples. Self-employment was acting as a route to high incomes for some (very far from most) young adults who were not higher education graduates.

Overall, examination of the types of young people who were entering and settling in different workforce segments indicates the formation three 'classes':

- A new middle class with higher education graduates as the core members, and based mainly in the public sector. Contrary to some conceptions, according to our evidence, the typical young member of the new market economies' new middle classes is not a private sector manager but a public sector professional. The state is still the largest single employer in all the ex-communist countries (as it is in the west) and overall public sector employment profiles tend to be top heavy (also as in the west). The new east's new private sector economies have not created or retained comparable numbers of management and professional-grade jobs. Members of the new middle classes are mostly well-educated. Higher education is a unifying experience which simultaneously sets them apart from other classes. Again, contrary to some conceptions, public sector employment is not badly paid overall in all the countries. Some public sector professions are low paid in all the

- countries but, as explained below, the individuals who enter these jobs (mostly women) are most likely to be members of their countries' higher income households.
- A petit bourgeoisie, composed mainly of people without higher education whose basic occupations are manual, but whose businesses are generating some of the highest personal incomes available in the new east. Note, however, that in some places the profile of this class in blurred by the prevalence of 'survival self-employment' which disappears when sufficient 'proper jobs' are available.
- A working class which is a less well-defined entity than the other two classes, suggesting perhaps that processes of working class formation will need to be triggered by perceptions of other groups successfully pursuing interests which are different from those of working class individuals and households.

These employment-based classes are, of course, similar to those found in the west, superficially at least.

Socio-political attitudes

Here we find one major configuration of types of young adults and types of attitudes. Within our samples, being highly educated, holding a professional or management job, and having a high income – in other words, being part of the emergent middle classes - were all related to three sets of attitudes and, where applicable, related action.

- First, the middle classes were pro-west, moreso than other respondents. This did not mean that they wanted to leave their own countries in order to live and work in the west. Very few were considering emigration. Rather, they simply aligned themselves with the west and in particular with its most powerful country, the USA. They were glad that the Soviet Union had broken-up, they supported the American bombing of Afghanistan in 2001-02, and they wanted their own countries to join NATO.
- Second, the middle classes were more likely than any other groups to want and expect to pay for their own children's education; some combination of paying for them to attend private schools, extra coaching, or to attend university, maybe with a spell at a western institution.
- Third, the middle classes had relatively high (though absolutely still rather low) levels of civic activity. They expressed the greatest interest in politics, were the most likely to belong to political parties, to have attended political meetings in the last year, and to have made up their minds to vote for specific parties at the next elections.

The converse configuration had a singular working class base. Holding a manual or a clerical job, and having a low income were associated with feeling that the end of the USSR had brought more problems than benefits, that the reforms had made life more difficult, and wanting to quit the countries temporarily or permanently to work in the west (though those concerned were not necessarily pro-west in outlook). Within the working class, levels of civic activity were extremely low. These young adults' feelings about the course of events in their countries were not being amplified in public arenas and expressed politically with as much voice as the breadth of their support would have justified because it was people who held opposing views who were the more likely to be politically active. According to our evidence, there is widespread yet currently mainly latent domestic hostility to developments in the former communist countries, and the discontented are typically working class.

Gender, the family and class

Our evidence suggests that to understand class formation in the new east it is necessary to bring households, families and gender into the frame. In the 1980s British sociology debated how to deal with gender in general and women in particular in class analysis (see Britten and Heath, 1983, Goldthorpe, 1983, Leiulfsrud and Woodward, 1987). The conventionalists' case for treating the family-household as the unit to be 'classed', and for this purpose using the occupation of the (usually male) head of household or the occupation of the member with the strongest attachment to the labour market (a continuous rather than an interrupted career, and working full-time rather than part-time), was never felled with an intellectual knockout blow, but since then most researchers have opted to classify individuals, not households or families. Over time women have been spending greater proportions of their adult lives in the labour market and conjugal relationships have become less stable. So treating members of each sex as earning their own class positions, and regarding their own occupations as crucial to their personal life chances, has surreptitiously become the new conventional practice in western sociology.

This makes less sense in the new east. Ever since the beginning of, and even before the reforms commenced, households have depended on more than one stream of income (Rose, 1991). In the regions and countries in this research, a single income would very rarely support an entire household. In the new and uncertain labour markets it has been rational for households to generate several streams of income, preferably from different sources, thereby making it unlikely that they will all dry-up simultaneously. In this way family households have spread their risks and optimised outcomes (Piirainen, 1998). So having a relatively secure if low paid post in public services such as health and education can counter-balance the higher risks and potentially higher earnings from self-employment. Under these circumstances, occupational choice becomes as much a matter of household strategy as individual decision-making (see Wallace, 2002). The young women and men alike who we studied realised that they could not hope to live in reasonable comfort independently. Mothers without partners would usually go back (if they had left previously) to live with their own parents (Roberts et al, 2003). Even a male income would not have made women independent. Men also needed families! Almost a half of the respondents in this research were married, and most of these had their own children, and most were still living with their parents or parents-in-law. Ideally the young couples may well have preferred to have their own places but in most cases they knew full well that the households to which they belonged could not afford to split their total incomes. There are some sound material reasons for the failure of western feminism to make headway in eastern Europe. This is despite the huge disparities between men's and women's terms and conditions of employment, overwhelmingly (it appears at first sight) to women's disadvantage.

Levels of job satisfaction did not depend on the sectors that our respondents worked in but varied by their occupations (lowest among manuals), and according to their levels of pay (the lowest paid were the least satisfied), and whether those concerned were working in accordance with their specialties. Pay levels and a job corresponding with the person's education were having generalised uplifting effects on satisfaction rather just on satisfaction with pay and the work itself respectively. This meant that, among our respondents, low pay could be compensated by grade of employment (non-manual) or correspondence between occupation and education. In general, within our samples, the males were opting for money while the women were opting (or settling) for full or partial (depending mainly on social class – see below) compensatory packages.

At this point we should draw attention to a tendency for like to marry like, in particular for higher education graduates to marry one another. This probably applies the world over (see Blossfeld and Timm, 2003) but for present purposes it matters only that the tendency was powerful in all the locations in this study. We did not ask about our respondents' spouses (most were still unmarried) but we did ask about their mothers' and fathers' education (and occupations). Roughly four-fifths of fathers who had been to university had wives with higher education, and four-fifths of the non-graduate husbands had also married educational peers. We have no reason to believe that this pattern was not being reproduced among our 25-29 year old respondents.

Men could maximise their earnings either through self-employment or employment in non-manual occupations. However, the variations in male earnings between sectors and occupations were fairly narrow. Men's public sector jobs were not particularly low-paid. The men who worked in the public sector tended to be employed as specialists and managers in engineering plants and suchlike (where any were still in state ownership, mainly in Donbass), or to have entered line management posts in state administration. It was women's public sector jobs that were especially badly paid. They were becoming teachers, medics, librarians and suchlike. For men who wished to maximise their earnings, self-employment was attractive but no moreso, and probably less so for those who could choose, namely the higher education graduates, than entering a professional or management post in a public or private sector organisation. Employees (compared with the self-employed) worked the shorter hours and, if men's jobs in the public sector paid slightly less than similar occupations in the private sector, there were compensations in the state sector in the form of slightly shorter hours and being able to work according to one's specialty. Overall, male employees were more satisfied with their jobs than the self-employed. For graduate women, provided they lived in households where a male had a relatively well-paid job, it could make sense for them to sacrifice pay in preference for the generally shorter hours and more satisfying work (within their specialties) in feminised pubic sector professional occupations. Hence the normal division of paid labour among married graduate couples (and the division that would be created among those who were yet to marry). Males would work relatively long hours for relatively high incomes. The women would take relatively low paid, short hours professional jobs in public services. This gendered division of employment was, of course, congruent with the traditional gendered division of domestic labour.

Non-graduates had less scope for choice. Over three-fifths of male respondents without higher education were employed in manual occupations where the pay was generally less and the hours were longer than in other men's jobs. Likewise the non-graduate women did not have access to management and professional occupations. Their pay was lower – much lower – than men's whatever their occupational grades, and this was despite the manual women working longer on average than the manual men. In all the other occupational grades it was the men who were working the longer hours. There is no conceivable way in which working class labour market outcomes, among either males or females, could have arisen solely through the actors' free choices: lack of alternative opportunities is the only plausible explanation. One result was a typical long working hours working class culture. Time had to be traded for money, yet despite this total incomes were lower than in middle class households. In these respects, the new middle and working classes in the new market economies are not mirror images of their western counterparts.

The absence of class-based politics

We hope to have shown that it is possible to identify class cleavages among non-elite groups in the new market economies. The countries may all have acquired new fabulously rich elites, but the rest of the populations are not uniformly impoverished. The countries have emergent (singular in each country) new middle classes, based more solidly on backgrounds in higher education and employment in the public sector than in the commercial market place. Our data collection and analysis would have allowed unfamiliar (to the western sociological gaze) class formations to be identified, yet those encountered have turned out to be broadly similar to the types of middle and working classes well-known throughout the west, and not just in sociology. Our evidence shows that these classes are already clearly defined in terms of labour market configurations – features of jobs and the entrants. Each also has distinguishing socio-cultural characteristics. Individuals tend to marry social equals. Total incomes and total paid workloads (in terms of hours spent) differ in ways that have inevitable implications for domestic arrangements. The new east's working class households do the most paid work in terms of hours spent yet have the least money to spend. The different classes also differ in their socio-political orientations and levels of civic activity and, although not discussed here, their leisure practices (see Roberts et al, 2005). In all these respects – labour market configurations, social relationships and practices, socio-political orientations and civic activity – the middle classes were the most sharply defined, meaning internally homogeneous and different from other strata.

What is still missing in the new market economies/democracies is a western-type party political dimension to class cleavages. Gijsberts and Nieuwbeerta (2000) claim that in East-Central Europe attitudes on social and economic issues vary along class lines but are still not expressed in political party preferences. It was the same among the young adults in the countries that we investigated. The middle classes were the most enthusiastic about market reforms, the most pro-west and, although not against all state welfare measures, they were the keenest and most confident of being able to supplement such provisions with paid-for additions (specifically, in our evidence, in the case of education). Working class respondents were less enthusiastic about the course and outcomes of the reforms. Many felt damaged but they possessed no alternative visions of how their countries might develop. They could vote for a change of political leadership. Or they could dismiss the entire political class. Or they could do other things. They could seek personal betterment (through self-employment, for example), or hope for better lives for their children (by whose time they could hope that market reforms would be working properly), or they could migrate. The underlying economy-based class foundations may be basically the same, but the classes that are currently being formed in the new market economies are developing in a post-socialist, global market era of privatised lifestyles. There are no parties (however broadly defined) that are offering plausible alternatives to the market economy. Levels of working class political/civic activity (again, however broadly defined) are pitifully low. All this is bound to make a long-term difference. West Europe's democracies were created in an era of strong and strengthening labour movements. The political 'right' (conservative and Christian democrat parties) organised to resist working class power. In the new east matters are taking a different historical course. Middle class formation is in the lead. Middle class views dominate in politics. Hence the minimal welfare states, the flat taxes, and the enthusiasm to become part of NATO and mainstream (EU) Europe. Working class formation, if and when this happens, is going, of necessity, to be a defensive reaction.

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