

A Discussion on Social Class Background with Special Reference to Students At Queen's University, Belfast

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(Read at Queen's University, Belfast)

SECTION I

In this introductory section, I am concerned to answer two separate though inter-linking questions. First, what do we understand by social class? Secondly, what criteria would we use for indicating social classes?

In political literature social class has reached the position of being referred to as an institution. It is of contemporary interest, being at the forefront of political thought, especially since Marx. "The concept of social class . . . has in a certain sense become the symbol of [Marx's] whole doctrine and of the political programme that is derived from it. According to Engels Marx effected a revolutionary change in the whole concept of world history. For Marx, so Engels maintained, had proved that the whole of the previous history is a history of class struggles, that in all the simple and complicated political struggles the only thing at issue has been the social and political rule of social classes. The concept of social class is also linked with . . . the clarification of the relationship that prevails between capital and labour. Finally . . . the concept of social class is bound up with the entire Marxian conception of culture as superstructure of class interests."¹

"Class" may be defined as different things possessing at least one attribute in common. Ossowski suggests three assumptions which he believes to be common to all conceptions of a "class" society: first, the classes constitute a system of the most comprehensive groups in the social structure secondly, the class division concerns social statuses connected with a system of privileges and discriminations not determined by biological criteria; and thirdly, the membership of individuals in a social class is relatively permanent.²

It is obvious that to classify anything you must have some standard of selection. When we come to human society we find that the members of a society, could be classified in an indefinite number of ways depending on the objects or attributes chosen as criteria. Both objective and subjective criteria are relevant: first objective criteria: sex, income, occupation, education, material possessions, etc., etc.; secondly: subjective criteria: "I am working class" etc., or self-assessed status, participation in certain social activities and relationships.

In the conventional case of social classes people are conscious that they

¹Ossowski, Stanislaw: *Class Structure in the Social Consciousness*, p. 70.

²*Ibid*, p. 133.

belong to a particular class i.e. "you are one of them" said a boy of seventeen years to me recently, "not one of us". That people are such and such a classification is "subjective" in the most fundamental sense. That which constitutes a "social class" is that people should feel that they belong to that class i.e., that they should feel that they have something in common which makes them feel part of a group. Of course, those things which they feel make them belong to this class may be an objective attribute and indeed probably is.

In the Ancient World in Athens the population was divided into three main groups: first, the Athenians who were citizens who performed the political function; secondly, the Aliens, who performed the commercial function and though disallowed from politics were free; thirdly, the slaves or serving class. In this case the criterion was objective – "function" backed by law and custom and supported by the hereditary factor.

Up until the eighteenth century in Europe, the hereditary factor reigned supreme, though people were breaking through more and more. There is in fact always some movement between classes no matter how rigid the feeling of the different orders of people within a society.

The Industrial Revolution broke down the idea of hereditary status and replaced it by the cash nexus as the most important basis of classification. Movement became more free.

The basis of Plato's classification is objective, i.e. it is a psychological and educational basis . . . into three classes: the Guardians, the Military and the Producers. This basis of division into three main classes is the basis for determining the distinction between the rulers and the ruled. They were in principle open classes with no absolute rigidity. Those in these classes – which have been determined by the above objective basis – could then feel a subjective attachment to their particular class.

Marx believed that the particular method of production will determine the class to which a person belongs. This could therefore be an objective criterion since it would be based on an individual's function. There are two classes: the Rulers and the Ruled; the former are those who control production.

These historical and philosophical views of class pose for us the question: what criteria would you use for indicating social class in the U.K. today? As pointed out above the range of possible criteria is very wide. The difficulty of selection is, however, reduced by a number of practical considerations: first, the need to be as objective as possible, the need to choose criteria about which reasonably accurate information can be obtained and which lend themselves to classification; secondly, there is a high degree of inter-relationship between many of the criteria, and bearing this in mind, if one is deliberately selected as the major criterion, then it may be examined to see how far it is correlated with other characteristics of status?

But what do we mean by this word "status"? It brings us to something which perhaps is more subjective than objective but non-the-less powerful in its meaning, something implicit in all I have written . . . that class tends to imply layers of higher on lower status. "It needs", as Glass tells us, "no elaborate conceptual framework or tests of carefully formulated hypotheses

to show that there are different levels of social status in contemporary Britain. What is more difficult is the choice of a criterion or criteria . . ."³ He then goes on to point out that in contemporary society the different levels are not specified in a legal or hereditary way. This is not to say that they do not exist; they undoubtedly do.

Wherever therefore social intercourse is limited by considerations of status, by distinctions between "higher and lower", there, social class exists. We can then agree with Maciver and Page that "a social class is any portion of a community marked off from the rest by society status".⁴ A system or structure of social classes involves, first, a hierarchy of status groups; second, the recognition of the superior-inferior stratification; and finally some degree of permanency of the structure. This puts concisely the argument that I have so far sought to develop.

The economic factor is commonly associated with status distinctions. Note in this connection my reference above to the replacement of the hereditary influence by the cash nexus, brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Is income a satisfactory criterion of social class in our society? It is undoubtedly an important factor but it is unsatisfactory. This is because economic division does not unite people and separate them as a group from others unless they feel their unity or separation. In other words whatever criterion we use, we do not have a social class unless class consciousness is present. The old established landed class frequently regards itself, and is generally regarded as superior to the Cottons and the Clores, the wealthier and more powerful industrial and commercial class. The white collar workers even today, though earning much less than the line-workers of Dagenham or Cwley would, I suggest, regard themselves as socially superior. To put the argument in a nutshell: many classes at a point of time may be in the same income group.

I suggest that "occupation" is not open to the same criticisms as "income" as a useful criterion of social class. This is the criterion used by the Registrar General. Glass, using the same criterion, with some amendment puts the point that it (ie. occupation) tends to be one of the aspects of social status which springs most readily to mind when people try to assess the position of an individual in the social hierarchy. He pressed this point home with an impressive study confirming the view that "there was a substantial amount of agreement in the community on the position of various occupations in a hierarchy of prestige".⁵

I suggest also that occupation best fulfils the practical considerations (stated above) of any suggested criterion. It offers a reasonable approximation to that which is desired in the first consideration; the Registrar General uses a Five-fold Classification: Classes I, II, (III NM, III M), IV and V respectively. Into each class certain defined functions are stated to fall. In respect of the second consideration, occupation is a particularly useful criterion because it is linked to economic status and to educational

³Glass, D. V.: *Social Mobility in Britain*; Introduction, p. 5.

⁴McIver and Page: *Society: An Introductory Analysis*, p. 348.

⁵Glass, D. V., *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

background; in other words it tends to be correlated with the pattern of living of an individual. Oldman and Illsley have commented:

Social classification in British sociology is almost synonymous with occupational classification. There are good reasons why this should be so. As a determinant of source of income it affects an individual's class position in the socio-economic structure. As a determinant of the amount of income it influences the individual's consumption possibilities and life styles, thereby contributing to his status position. It also determines certain degrees of power over others both in the work situation and in other social areas. It is further related to a status dimension in that people ascribe prestige directly to an occupation by virtue of its functional significance, and by the amount of skill, training and knowledge they believe to be associated with it. There is now a considerable body of empirical evidence that shows the high correlation between an index of occupation and other indices of social position."⁶

A word of caution:

Classes . . . are not sharply definable groups whose precise numbers can be determined by gathering in enough information about every individual. There are rather aggregations of persons round a number of central nuclei, in such a way that it can be said with confidence of those nearer each centre that they are members of a particular class, but that those further from a centre can be assigned to the class it represents only with increasing uncertainty."⁷

In other words, the drawing of status lines tends to be somewhat arbitrary.

SECTION II

My interest in this subject had its beginning in a lecture entitled "The Concept of Social Class" given in November 1962 by Mr. D. G. Neill to the students attending his Social Administration II course. It was further stimulated by my coming across a series of three articles entitled "About Equality" by C. A. R. Crosland, the present President of the Board of Trade. Let me try to summarise the latter's argument. . . .

Crosland suggested that if we wanted more equality, the case for it must rest on statements largely, if not entirely, unrelated to economic welfare. He argued that the case could still rest firmly on certain value or ethical judgment of a non-economic character: on a belief that more equality even though carrying few implications for the sum of economic satisfaction would yet conduce to a "better" society. This he believed to be the case for three reasons, relating respectively to the diminution of social antagonism, to a just distribution of privileges and rewards, and to the avoidance of social waste.

In his second article "Is Equal Opportunity Enough?" Crosland states

⁶Oldman, D. and Illsley, R.: *Measuring the Status of Occupations*, p.53. *The Sociological Review*, March, 1966, Vol. 14, No. 1.

⁷Cole, G. D. H.: *Studies in Class Structure*, p. 1.

that the case often made against the mobile equal-opportunity society both exaggerates the evils and underestimates the compensating gains. He argues that not only do wider opportunities tend to diminish class feeling and stratification, but that other social benefits inevitably follow in the wake of greater social mobility.

"Education and the Class System" is the title of his third article. He commences with the realisation that the apparent invulnerability of the class system to changes in the sphere of income suggests that the "classless society" will not be reached simply by more redistribution of wealth. It is his belief that educational reform in particular is likely to be of infinitely greater significance. Crosland is convinced that the school system remains the most divisive, unjust and wasteful of all the aspects of social inequality. The 1944 Education Act set out to make secondary education universal. He admits that formally it has done so but he decries and substantiates his denial – that opportunities for advancement are still equal. For example he tells us that children from professional and managerial families account for 15% of the total population, 25% of the grammar school population and 44% of the sixth form population.

A. H. Halsey has made the same point. "There remains," he tells us, "a severe class linked process of selection operating from the bottom to the top of the British educational system. Its severity may be judged by the fact that though the unskilled labouring class contributes each year about 12% of the nation's births it accounts for only 5.6% of grammar school entrants, only 1.5% of those entering the sixth-forms and only 0.9% of the boys (0.6% of the girls) going on to the universities."⁸

(It has also been pointed out that there are other inequalities of educational opportunity besides those of class – inequalities between the sexes for example. "At the extreme of the scale an unskilled manual worker's daughter has a chance of only one in five or six hundred of entering a university – a chance a hundred times lower than if she had been born into a professional family.")⁹

It is Crosland's opinion that the contrasts implied by these percentages are much larger than can be explained on genetic grounds. Nor can they be accounted for by overt social bias in the selection process. Crosland suggests that the explanation must be looked for partly in social and environmental influences. He then proceeds to mount a rational argument for comprehensive schools.

Now this latter argument is not my concern although it is interesting in that it shows that the policy of the Right Hon. C. A. R. Crosland, years later in his role as Minister of Education, was merely a logical extension of this work. What stimulated my thinking was his point that from the children of professional and managerial families at one extreme to the children of unskilled workers at the other, there is a steady and marked decline in

⁸Halsey, A. H.: British Universities and Intellectual Life, *University Quarterly*, 1957-58, Vol. 12, p. 149.

⁹Little, Alan and Westergaard, John, The Trend of Class Differentials in Educational Opportunity in England and Wales. *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 15, 1964, p. 307.

performance at the grammar school, in the length of school life and in academic promise at the time of leaving.

However, there is nothing original about this point. The Report of the President's Commission on Higher Education: "Higher Education for American Democracy" published in 1947 stated that inadequacy of family income with all its attendant consequence is one of the primary factors limiting the opportunity of young people".¹⁰ In defence of this argument the President's Commission quotes at least three studies: first, Sibley's study of 1926, which found a close correlation between the highest grade of school completed, I.Q., and the father's occupation; secondly, a 1938 study showing a high correlation between parental occupation and the educational progress of the child; and thirdly, a 1940 census data study showing a close correlation between educational attainment and the monthly rental value of the home. One wonders did the framers of the 1944 Education Act or the education departments of our universities ever bother to read the American research literature. If they had done so perhaps the harsh inequities of the tri-partite system and the 11-plus might have been avoided.

"Social class . . . is" as Jean Floud has told us, "both cause and consequence of inequalities of educational opportunity in the sense of unequal chances of access to educational institutions or facilities: or again at a given level of ability, it may influence the volume and direction of pupils' energies and, hence, their educational output; or finally, and more radically it may affect the very structure of ability itself".¹¹ This, I would suggest is an excellent synthesis of Crosland's argument.

The 1944 Act was largely a response to the desire to remove social class as a barrier to opportunity. The problem was an institutional one: how to secure equality of access to grammar schools and institutions of higher education of children of comparable ability regardless of their social origins. Insofar as social class was seen to influence educational "performance" the problem was conceived as a material one to be mitigated by the other social services of the welfare state. "Only in the post-war period has the continuing attempt to democratise secondary and higher education in unfamiliar conditions of full-employment and wide-spread prosperity confronted with the need to formulate the problem more subtly and to see social class as a profound influence on the "educability" of children".¹² This Crosland succeeded in doing. The Report of the Robbins Committee provided further clarification.

Section 2, Appendix 1 of the Robbins Report is devoted to a discussion of "The Influence of Family Background". Let me summarise this discussion. The proportion of children who reach full-time higher education is about six times as great in the families of non-manual workers as in those of manual workers; the chances of reaching courses of degree level are

¹⁰The Report of the President's Commission on Higher Education. *Higher Education for American Democracy*, Vol. II, p. 11.

¹¹Floud, Mrs. Jean: *Social Class Factors in Educational Achievement; Ability and Educational Opportunity*, p. 94. O.E.C.D. 1961.

¹²*Ibid.*, p.94.

TABLE I: FULL-TIME UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS WHO ENTERED QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY IN THE FOLLOWING YEARS:

Year	CLASS I			CLASS II			CLASS III M			CLASS III N.M.			CLASS IV			CLASS V			X			TOTALS		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
1950-51	56	22	78 13.9	145	71	216 38.5	59	18	77 13.7	75	18	93 16.6	14	1	15 2.7	13	1	14 2.5	53	15	68 12.1	415	146	561 100
1951-52	53	26	79 12.5	164	67	231 36.5	60	19	79 12.5	61	22	83 13.1	24	5	29 4.5	8	2	10 1.6	90	31	121 19.1	460	172	632 100
1952-53	52	23	75 13.6	152	53	205 37.3	59	16	75 13.6	57	29	86 15.6	25	2	27 4.9	7	3	10 1.8	61	10	71 12.9	413	136	549 100
1953-54	50	14	64 12.5	136	66	202 39.4	40	25	65 12.7	54	23	77 15.0	13	4	17 3.3	6	3	9 1.7	49	30	79 15.4	347	165	512 100
1954-55	36	21	57 10.6	138	58	196 36.4	63	13	76 14.1	58	21	79 14.7	14	1	15 2.8	6	6	12 2.2	82	19	101 18.7	397	142	539 100
1955-56	69	29	98 16.4	175	68	243 40.7	61	24	85 14.23	46	17	63 10.5	14	1	15 2.5	8	—	8 1.3	63	22	85 14.2	436	161	597 100
1956-57	71	25	96 15.0	158	61	219 34.2	89	25	114 17.8	55	19	74 11.5	16	3	19 3.0	8	3	11 1.7	94	14	108 16.8	491	150	641 100
1957-58	74	24	98 12.8	214	69	283 36.8	87	16	103 13.4	98	30	128 16.6	27	3	30 4.0	27	—	27 3.5	77	21	98 12.8	604	163	767 100
1958-59	72	32	104 12.6	235	83	318 38.6	81	26	107 13.0	93	30	123 14.9	30	7	37 4.5	17	4	21 2.5	96	18	114 13.8	625	199	824 100
1959-60	91	34	125 14.3	238	84	322 37.0	108	31	139 15.9	84	22	106 12.2	26	2	28 3.2	9	—	9 1.0	115	26	141 16.2	670	199	869 100
1960-61 *																								
1961-62	99	44	143 11.7	291	157	448 36.5	169	53	222 18.1	132	49	181 14.8	45	9	54 4.4	31	7	38 3.1	109	31	140 11.4	876	350	1226, 100
1962-63	69	38	107 11.6	234	107	341 36.9	135	41	176 19.0	97	54	151 16.3	20	9	29 3.1	18	3	21 2.3	79	21	100 10.8	652	273	925 100
1963-64	92	39	131 12.6	225	92	317 30.5	147	46	193 18.6	143	56	199 19.2	24	8	32 3.1	22	8	30 2.8	103	34	137 13.2	756	283	1,039 100

Compiled from Matriculation Forms and using the Registrar General's Classification of Occupations.

*1960-61 figures not available

about eight times as great; the differences are much greater for girls than for boys.

The Report tells us that altogether there is much evidence to show that both before the age of 11 years and in later years, the influence of environment is such that the differences in measured ability between social classes progressively widens as children grow up; their measured ability is more and more affected by their accumulated experience. The environment of middle-class children is in many ways more favourable than that of working class children. In general their parents may take a greater interest in their education; they go to better primary schools; their families are smaller and their housing conditions better. These factors, of course, overlap but it can be shown that each has an independent influence on the measured ability of children even within the same social class.

It is the opinion of the Committee that if there were data on the educational attainment of school children in each social class, in, say, 1950 and in 1960, they would probably not show a great narrowing of social class differences. The Committee adds that it looks as if the relative chances of reaching higher education for middle and working class children have changed little in recent years. A perusal of Table 1: "Full-time Students who entered Queen's University" in the years stated confirms this impression of the Committee with one qualification. The acceptance of the Anderson Committee Report by the Government and particularly its recommendation that a student on acceptance to an institution of higher education should be awarded an L.E.A. grant (subject to Means Test) as of right was to push the students in Class III manual from 13. % in 1957-58 to 18 % in 1961-62. This one would have expected. But the new grants policy did not appear to make any impact on classes III M, IV, or V respectively.

In so far as the occupations of parents are related to their education the findings of the Committee also reflect the influence of the parents' education on that of their children. It appears that a child whose father has been to a selective school is four times as likely to enter higher education as one whose father had only been to an elementary school. In terms of educational attainment, the children with one parent from a selective school resembled more closely those with both parents from selective schools than those with no parents who had had selective schooling. This reinforces the Committee's impression that educational experience tends to be infective. Rather less than 4 % of the children in the sample had a parent who completed a course for a degree or a teacher's certificate. Of these, 39 % entered full-time higher education themselves (30 % of them entering degree level courses). The comparable figure for the remainder of the sample was 6 % (3 % entering degree level courses). It would appear that the age at which children leave school or other full-time education is strongly related to the age at which their parents completed their education. A far greater proportion of the boys and girls whose parents stayed on into the fifth and sixth forms entered higher education than of those whose parents left at under 16 years of age.

The Report also reveals that whatever the education of the parent, a

child who is one of two is more than twice as likely to reach higher education as a child from a family of four, and about four times as likely as a child from a family of five or more. The effects of family size appear to be much the same for boys and for girls. The work of Jean Floud, A.H. Halsey and F. M. Martin confirms these findings.

Why should all this be important? One of the ends of education is what I would call a recognition of the needs of the market place. The Rockefeller Report on "The Pursuit of Excellence" recognises this objective when it states: "We must see them [our human resources] as a vast reservoir of human abilities and skills upon which our social, technical and economic institutions depend".¹³ The Robbins Report expands this objective when it states with special reference to higher education "... [higher education] should provide instruction in skills suitable to play a part in the general division of labour".¹⁴ "We must therefore attempt to meet the specific needs of the future by elevating the quality and quantity of talented individuals of all kinds".¹⁵ All of us would, I suggest, agree that the common good requires a balanced supply of persons with different skills and aptitudes who have been so educated as to maximise the contribution they can make to the common welfare. It is therefore imperative that "the national resources are used economically and to the best advantage, that there is no waste of individual capacities, by denying them the chance of development and use, and no waste of money and effort, by giving education and training to those who cannot get enough out of them to justify the cost."¹⁶

SECTION III

Section II attempted to define what I understand by social class and I suggested that occupation was the best of the objective criteria for classifying social class. In Section II I have sought to draw upon the literature in respect of social class background with special reference to education and especially higher education. In Section III I am concerned to discuss the findings of a survey of students at Queen's University, Belfast with respect to social background.

I conducted this survey in the Michaelmas term 1964. The survey was limited to undergraduates. The sample size was 403 or 10.71 % of the undergraduate population in October 1964. The sample was stratified into four groups: Group A: Arts Faculty; Group B: Faculties of Economics and Law; Group C: Faculty of Medicine (including Dentistry); Group D: Faculties of Science, Applied Science and Agriculture. A random selection of students was then made within each group. Table II, page 161 describes the sample. It will be noted that the total sample response as a percentage of total sample size was 81.14 % (Note: hereinafter when I speak of the "sample" I am referring to the sample respondents.)

¹³The Rockefeller Report: *The Pursuit of Excellence, Education and the Future of America*, p. 6.

¹⁴H.M. Committee on Higher Education, *Higher Education, Report 1961-63*, p. 6.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 90.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 90.

Now to add some flesh to the bones of the sample. 12.53% entered the University at age 17 years, 52.2% at 18 years, 21.4% at 19 years, and the remainder at age 20 years and above. The ages of the sample as at 1st January, 1965 were distributed as follows: 25.38% were age 20 years, 18.96% age 21 years, 18.3% age 18 years and 16.8% age 19 years. As to place of origin 48.62% of the sample came from Belfast, 42.2% from outside Belfast but within Northern Ireland, 3.66% from England and Scotland, and 5.50% from overseas. 70.94% of the sample were Protestants; 21.10% were Roman Catholics and the religion of the remainder was unknown.

TABLE II

	GROUPS				
	A Arts	B Economics and Law	C Medicine incl. Dentistry	D Science App. Sc., and Agric.	
Faculty size (U.G.)	1,256	362	660	1,484	3,762
Sample size	119	68	96	120	403
Sample size as Percentage of Faculty	9.5%	18.78%	14.54%	8.08%	10.71%
Sample response	97	60	78	92	327
Sample response as Percentage of Sample size	81.51%	88.23%	81.25%	76.6%	81.14%

79.2% of the sample attended voluntary grammar schools and 20.49% attended county grammar schools. 294 students had sat the 11 Plus examination and of these 91.15% were successful. Of the 26 students who failed, 21 resat, of which 8 were successful. Altogether then 84.4% of the sample were successful in the 11 Plus examination. In respect of 38.53% of the sample no fees were paid for most of the time that they were at secondary school; in respect of 27.21% reduced fees were paid and in respect of 25.68% full fees were paid. 82.87% of the sample had been day boys whilst at secondary school; 15.9% had been boarders.

81 or 24.77% of the sample had applied to another university at the same time as they applied for a place at Queen's. Of this number 60.5% applied to Trinity College, Dublin.

76.45% of the sample admitted that they were very keen to get into a university. However, 21.1% were somewhat uncertain. Of their parents 78.13% were entirely favourable to their children applying to come to university; 10.09% though favourable had some reservations; 2.0% were indifferent and 1.37% were rather opposed on the whole.

It would appear that before coming up to university 40.97% of the sample did not receive any advice on the courses that were open to them at

university. The most common source of advice for those who did was their school staff. Some 51 % stated that they were not influenced by anyone in deciding which course to read at university. Those students who stated more than one influence considered that school staff followed by parents influenced them most.

At the time of coming up to university 239 students or 73.08 % of the respondents did have a fairly clear mind as to what occupation they thought they would like to take up; 26.29 % did not. Needless to say students in Arts, Economics and Science Faculties largely account for the latter figure. Of those students who did have a fairly clear mind as to what occupation they would like to take up 76.15 % stated that this was a major influence in their decision to apply for a university place; 18.41 % stated it was some influence but not the major one; 4.6 % admitted that it influenced their decision very little or not at all. Of these 239 students 89.12 % did not list the occupation of their father as the occupation which at the time they thought they would like to take up; however, 51.46 % of them admitted that they had relatives in the same or similar field of employment. 81.58 % commented that having their occupation in mind did influence their choice of university course; for 12.97 % it did influence their choice of university course but it was not the major influence; and 5.34 % admitted that it did not influence their choice. Of the 86 students who did not have a fairly clear idea of their future occupation at the time of entering the university 51.16 % still had not decided.

32.41 % of the sample stated that they wished to do post-graduate work in a university; 22.32 % said they didn't and 44.03 % weren't sure.

52.9 % of the stated that in their opinion adequate arrangements were made for them to obtain advice on academic matters; however 35.16 % did not; and 10.39 % just didn't know. As to advice on personal matters 31.19 % commented that adequate arrangements were made; 24.77 % did not think this was so; and 40.06 % did not know. Of the sample 65.74 % stated that they had not had a conversation with a member of staff in the fortnight prior to filling in the questionnaire.

23.24 % of the sample felt that they had not come to Queen's at the right age. 42.5 % were agreed that 18 years of age was the ideal age to come up to university. 46.17 % of the sample admitted that study did not come easily to them. Of the sample 91.13 % stated that they would still go to university if they were to start again; 80.73 % would choose the same course; and 65.13 % would choose the same university, i.e. Queen's.

91.13 % of the sample were agreed that "the essential aim of a first degree course should be to teach the student how to think".¹⁵ However, only 48.62 % accepted that "... in so far as the student is under such pressure to acquire detailed knowledge that this aim is not fulfilled so far the course fails of its purpose".¹⁶ 22.62 % were uncertain about this latter point.

48.31 % of the sample believed in the Means Test as it applies to L.E.A. grants; 43.1 % did not.

From a list of ten career objectives 22.01 % stated that "to help their fellow citizens" was their main aim; 17.73 % listed as their main objective

"to express their personality"; 12.23% opted for a steady income and security; and only 3.36% put "to earn a large income (over £2,000 per annum)" as their first objective.

Having put some flesh to the bones of the sample let me now turn to the answers to those questions in the questionnaire which were concerned with social class.

31.49% of the students' fathers and 29.35% of their mothers finished their full-time education under 15 years of age, 26.6% of fathers and 34.55% of mothers over 15 years but under 18 years of age and 31.49% of fathers and 23.85% of mothers 18 years of age and over. It is interesting to note that in the Faculty of Medicine 47.43% of students' fathers and 33.33% of their mothers enjoyed full-time education beyond 18 years of age.

90.5% of students whose fathers finished their education under 15 years of age, 96.25% of those fathers finished above 15 years but under 18 years and 93.6% of those whose fathers enjoyed some form of higher education respectively were successful in the 11 Plus examination. 92.13% of students whose mothers finished their education under 15 years of age, 94.23% of those whose mothers finished above 15 years but under 18 years, and 95.77% of those whose mothers enjoyed some form of higher education were successful in the 11 Plus examination. In the light of the literature referred to in Section II these are the sort of marginal differences in respect of each parent (and not between parents) one might expect, but it should be remembered that these 11 Plus performance figures are the figures of children who *made it* to university. Whilst the influence of parental education can be seen in the above figures, its most critical influence is felt throughout the school years. "The education of the great majority of children finishes at 15 or shortly after. As a result the working class child who strives or is encouraged to stay on at school is deviating from the pattern of early entry into the labour market which is the typical experience of his agemates of the same social background. Because successful completion of a full grammar school course is thus at present inevitably exceptional, it is not surprising to find hints in the evidence available that the working class child who manages it, fairly often comes from a family which, by virtue of origins, style of life, or aspirations is somewhat detached from the general working class environment."¹⁷ It is obvious that when we think of level of education we should interpret "education" in its broadest and deepest meaning.

As to the type of school attended last by the students' parents, 84 or 25.68% of fathers and 80 or 24.46% of mothers last attended a public elementary school; 35.47% of fathers and 31.49% of mothers last attended a grammar school. It is remarkable how the figure for both fathers and mothers in the other as well as these categories closely approximate to each other. This would appear to suggest that the parents of students married from within the same social class if education is taken as the criterion.

234 fathers or 71.55% and 253 mothers or 77.37% took neither a University degree or a teacher's certificate. Of those who did there is no

¹⁷Little, Alan and Westergaard, *op. cit.*, p. 313.

significant difference in the performance of their children in the 11 Plus and in the children of those who did not. Again, however, it should be emphasized that this is a comparison between those who arrived at university.

As to the size of family from which the students came see Table III, page 165. It will be noted that 197 students or 60.2% of the sample came from families of two children or less, 82.26% came from families of four children or less and 92.6% of students came from families of six children or less. Of those students who had brothers and/or sisters 132 or 40.36% were the first child, 24.15% were the second child, 11.31% were the third child and 9.51% were the fourth child or more. Of those students who had brothers and/or sisters it would appear that in 37.3% of the cases another member or other members of the family (excluding the parents) had been to a university or training college. 26.29% of students had one brother or sister at a university or a training college; 8.25% were the third family member to attend an institution of higher education; and 2 students were the sixth family member to attend such an institution.

It is not possible to obtain figures of family size either for Great Britain or for Northern Ireland. It is, however, possible to ascertain figures of the size of family households. In 1961, 17.2% of the population of Northern Ireland came from private households of six or more as opposed to 6.7% of the population of England and Wales. 6% of the total population of Northern Ireland came from private households of 8 or more as opposed to 1.3% in England and Wales.¹⁸ If, as Robbins suggests, the larger the family the less likely is the child of that family to reach some form of higher education than in the absence of any analysis by the Lockwood Committee, I would suggest that the implications are obvious for a sizeable proportion children in Northern Ireland. Much more statistical information is required here.

In reply to the question: "Is there such a thing as social class?" 292 students or 89.29% said "yes". There was no significant distinction between the replies of the men and the replies of the women. The following are some of the comments of those who replied in the affirmative:

Social class is partly of historical origin and is found in every society. In the U.K. it is based partly on birth and occupation, and also earnings. Education would enter the definition too – or at least is becoming a criterion.

Inevitable stratification resulting from (a) birth, (b) education. In the field of sociology, this belief has an academic basis.

Social class undoubtedly exists and it depends mainly on occupation and education. Education usually determines type of occupation.

I don't believe that a classless society can exist and I see no evidence that it does exist in the socialist countries – in fact the reverse.

I am from a working class family, some of my friends are in a higher social class than myself and I try to conduct myself on their level

¹⁸England and Wales: *Census of Population*. Table 4, p. 62. Northern Ireland: *Census of Population*, Table 6, p. 10.

TABLE III
NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN FAMILY

S I S T E R S									
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Totals	
B	0	48	52	20	6	1	2	—	129
R	1	52	45	8	2	—	1	—	108
O	2	18	11	15	4	3	3	—	54
T	3	7	3	9	3	—	—	1	23
H	4	1	3	2	—	1	—	—	7
E	5	—	1	2	—	—	—	—	3
R	6	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	2
S	7	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1
	Totals	38.53 126	35.16 115	17.12 56	4.89 16	2.14 7	1.83 6	.30 1	327

instead of on my own. It is usually embarrassing to reveal one's social class though it shouldn't really be in an ideal state.

Yes, and there will always be, whether we like it or not.

I feel it is inevitable.

It is so obvious that I have no time for those who (if there are any) say NO.

I think it is very important and noticeable when it comes to making friends — it is much easier to become friendly with someone who has had the same background.

Whilst not denying the existence of social class, some students are reluctant to recognise it:

Such may be said to exist in certain people's minds, but I refuse to recognise it.

Social class exists, though everyone including myself would like to think it did not.

Would like to think there wasn't, but this doesn't alter facts.

I don't think they should exist, but they do.

But my answer is more of a sorry admittance that there is too much class consciousness and too much snobbery based upon material prosperity.

Unfortunately there is, though I wish there wasn't.

Others who acknowledge the existence of social class felt, however, that it was diminishing in importance.

Of course there is such a thing, but it is less sharply defined and limiting than before.

There still is though not to the same degree as 100 years ago.

Much stronger influence on behaviour 20 years ago.

Social class exists, but it is fast becoming a thing of the past. To many of these students, education was the great mobilizer.

For a sizable number of students money was the main determinant of social class:

Class is . . . based on money.

Class is . . . dependent on the income of parents.

Money talks too much especially in Ulster.

Tends to be governed in Northern Ireland at any rate by wealth; family background or education playing little part.

Seventy five percent of class distinction is governed by income.

. . . class is a reference to one's financial position.

Fewer students than one might have expected recognised that meritocracy could supersede money as a determinant of class.

Some students felt that the existence of social class was a good thing:

Division of society into groups is necessary and to be welcomed.

It is necessary that there should be. I do not disagree with a class society.

And it is a good thing too. There are certain standards to be maintained in social behaviour.

Fewer students than one might have expected were of the opinion that social stratification was less here than in England. At least three students commented that they were aware of social class distinctions at Queen's

The students were then asked to answer the following question:

To what class would you say your parents belong? (N.B. If you have said that "there is no such thing as class" how do you think those who say there *is* such a thing as class would classify your parents).

Upper Class	...	...	...	...	1
Lower Upper Class	...	...	...	...	2
Upper Middle Class	...	...	...	...	3
Middle Class	...	...	...	...	4
Lower Middle Class	...	...	...	...	5
Upper Working Class	...	...	...	...	6
Working Class	...	...	...	...	7

CLASS

Sex of Student		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	No. Reply	Totals
Male	...	6	6	51	93	26	35	16	9	242
		2.47	2.47	21.07	38.42	10.74	14.46	6.61	3.71	100%
Female	...	1	2	20	44	10	5	2	1	85
		1.17	2.35	23.5	51.76	11.76	5.88	2.35	1.17	100%
Totals	...	7	8	71	137	36	40	18	10	327
		2.14	2.44	21.71	41.89	11.00	12.23	5.50	3.05	100%

It is obvious from this table that according to the students' subjective criteria approximately 75% of them come from middle class homes; 87.02% of the girls state that they come from middle class homes.....

Question 26 followed the framework of question 25 and asked the students: "To what class would you say you belong?" The replies were as follows:

Sex of Student	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	No. Reply	Totals
Male ...	8 3.30	6 2.47	51 21.07	108 44.6	27 11.15	16 6.61	4 1.65	22 9.09	242 100%
Female ...	1 1.17	2 2.35	23 27.05	45 52.94	7 8.23	4 4.7	2 2.35	1 1.17	85 100%
Totals ...	9 2.75	8 2.44	74 22.62	153 46.78	34 10.39	20 6.11	6 1.83	23 7.03	327 100%

It is apparent from this table that 79.79% of the students believe themselves to be middle class; 88.23% of the female students say they are middle class. The clustering of numbers around the diagonal matrix in Figure I, page 168 shows a high positive correlation between the students' estimate of their own class and their estimate of the class of their parents. The higher density of numbers to the left of the diagonal matrix suggests a movement upwards by some students out of their parents' social class; these would appear to be meritocracy mobiles.

The social class breakdown for the sample according to the Registrar General's Industrial Classification of occupations is as follows:

CLASS

I	II	III NM	III M	IV	V	VI	Not Known	Totals
56 17.12	119 36.39	62 18.96	64 19.57	10 3.05	1 .30	—	15 4.58	327 100%

It should be noted that 34.61% and 37.17% of Medical students in the sample fall into classes I and II. Granted there are only 69 Roman Catholic students in the sample but I find it interesting that 29% of these came from Class III M as opposed to 18.53% of Protestants and 11.58% Roman Catholics from Class IV and V as opposed to 1.29% Protestants.

If the students' subjective estimates of their parents' social class are compared with objectively determined class allocation the figures fall out as in Figure II, page 169. It should be noted that though the boundaries of the objective classification are sharply defined by occupation, the boundaries of questions 25 and 26 are by their nature subjective and therefore are not

FIGURE I

Q. 25. To what class would you say your parents belong?

Q. 26. To what class would you say you belong?

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	TOTAL
0	9	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	10
1	-	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	7
2	-	-	6	2	-	-	-	-	8
3	1	-	2	54	12	1	1	-	71
4	3	2	-	11	119	2	-	-	137
5	4	-	-	5	7	20	-	-	36
6	4	-	-	1	9	10	16	-	40
7	2	-	-	1	5	1	3	6	18
TOTAL	23	9	8	74	153	34	20	6	327

sharply defined. Thus Class III NM is not synonymous with Class 3: Upper Middle Class; Class III NM is more likely to be found in Classes 4 (Middle Class) and 5 (Lower Middle Class). Nevertheless I think it is fair to say that the apparent trend of the tabled matrices to be upper right triangular in form suggests a tendency of the students to underrate the social class of their parents.

"Characteristic patterns of association", Glass has told us, "have also been found between brides and grooms in respect of social origins and education level." What did the sample have to say about this? 272 students or 83.18% stated that they would marry someone above their class; 9.17% of the total and 9.41% of the women said they would not. 238 students or 72.78% stated that they would marry someone beneath their class; 17.73% of the total and 29.41% of the women said they would not. The reluctance to marry above their class was higher for those students who estimated their parents to be working class, i.e. approximately 19.00%. The reluctance to marry beneath their class was most marked amongst those students in subjective social class I, i.e. Upper Class, and this reluctance is quite marked in the other subjective social classes for example in subjective social classes 4 and 5 it is approximately 20%.

FIGURE 2

X: Objective Social Class (Father's Occupation)

Q25: Students' Subjective Social Class of Parents

X \ Q25	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	TOTAL
0	1	-	-	3	3	2	4	2	15
I	2	2	4	22	21	3	1	1	56
II	4	5	4	31	54	10	8	3	119
IIINM	1	-	-	10	36	12	2	1	62
IIIM	2	-	-	5	21	8	21	7	64
IV	-	-	-	-	2	1	4	3	10
V	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
VI	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	10	7	8	71	137	36	40	18	327

The students were asked to comment on their replies. The following are offered for your perusal:

Would you marry someone above your social class?

I would, but not for the express purpose of a rise up the social ladder.

Certainly, that is if there were not overwhelming social pressures brought to bear which I like to believe is unlikely.

When one considers marriage one doesn't consider class.

Financial considerations, which I consider are the basis of what you call social class, would not prevent me from marrying a person who reciprocated genuine feelings of love.

If I loved her enough.

I hope a girl's class as such would have little influence on me.

... I feel equal to anyone who says that they are in a class above me.

To marry someone is to like them for themselves and not for their class.

I will marry for love.

The important thing for me in marriage is that I must feel my husband to be superior in every way - therefore I would prefer someone of a higher class to someone of a lower.

Why not? If I love him and get a better standard of living.

If the class distinction were too great I would probably feel so

uncomfortable that I would not wish to. But I have nothing in principle against marrying above my class.

I intend to marry someone above my class.

I would marry anyone who really made me feel I would want to marry them, irrespective of position.

I think that I could be capable of fitting in with a higher social class and would make an effort to equate myself intellectually.

If she would marry me.

I am going to.

Can't think why I shouldn't but I doubt if someone above my class would marry me.

If I thought she would make a good wife and she was prepared to accept me I would not hesitate because of class difference.

As I am a girl, I would feel superior if I married someone of a lower class and I feel that woman should be inferior to man.

It all depends on how intelligent he is.

And why not if she can satisfy your requirements – physical and psychological.

Would you marry someone beneath your social class?

I don't think so, as, to my mind, education and similar intelligence are necessary if a marriage is to be a happy one.

My 'Mrs.' must have a certain educational standard.

... perhaps when I (a female) am about 30 I will willingly marry someone of a lower class.

If an exceptional personality that was not bound by class though of working class origin, came along, I might consent.

A person from a poor family – with a badly paid job – couldn't afford to marry me.

... I could marry someone who came from a very poor family, but who had received a university education like myself. Class does not matter so much as what the person himself is.

Provided we were intellectually compatible.

Here I would draw the line. To marry someone below my class could jeopardise my chances at doing well in my career, my wife could become a social embarrassment on the grounds of accent if nothing else.

To marry below one's class is to degrade oneself unless the girl herself is an exception – which sometimes occurs.

This possesses greater difficulties than in marrying someone above my class. The partner would have to have the same interests and outlook as myself and because marriage is based on love, such a marriage ought to survive.

Depends on how far beneath or whether the girl in question could behave and conduct herself reasonably – i.e. not a "millie", any half respectable girl would do.

I don't think I would ever be able to forget that he was of a lower class.

... if I loved her and she me. Class does not come into intimate

personal relationships. I am at the minute going with a girl that might be considered beneath my class and I intend to marry her.

With reservations – unfortunately it could damage my career.

I don't mind marrying a hard working, nice looking girl in any class.

It would lead to bitterness in later years after the initial sexual attraction had worn off.

There were also those students who were not prepared to commit themselves beyond:

I think it depends on the person.

There were those – and especially males – who felt that love conquers all barriers:

I don't think that love knows any bounds of class or anything else.

You may not believe it, but I believe in love.

When I get married I hope I'll get married for love, so it doesn't matter whether the girl is a millionairess or a mill worker.

There was the solid core who preferred to marry within their social class:

I think social class matters in marriage, not from a snob point of view but because similarity of outlook and values play an important part in the compatibility of partners. On the whole this is hard to find outside one's own class.

In general I think it is better to marry someone of your own class.

Personally I would prefer to marry someone from the same class.

It is preferable if both people come from a similar background.

I think I would prefer to marry someone from my own class.

However, intellectual level for many students appears to be more important than family background.

SECTION IV

Concluding Comments

In any discussion of the fundamental characteristics of social class generally speaking the same principle characteristics will keep recurring. First there is the characteristic of the vertical order of social classes. My survey suggests that the overwhelming majority of students at this university are convinced of the superior-inferior categories of social statuses.

Secondly, there is the characteristic of class consciousness. This is implicit in the statistical analysis of the replies to the question: "Is there such a thing as social class?" It is explicit in the comments which accompanied their replies to this question. It is perhaps even more explicit in their comments on the marriage questions. The latter, one feels, do not always correlate with their Yes/No answers. By this I mean that I suspect that they are a little more class conscious than the statistical analysis of the marriage questions suggests.

Class consciousness, Ossowski, suggests, "... may involve not only class identification, but also a consciousness of the place of one's class in the class-hierarchy, a realisation of class distinctness and class interests and,

possibly of class solidarity as well."¹⁹ In my analysis of the survey I feel I have met all of these aspects of class consciousness.

It is, I think, fairly obvious that the universities in their class composition have shown little reflection of the equalitarian spirit of the 1944 Education Act and the "welfare state" acts which accompanied and followed it. The fault however does not lie with the universities; it lies in part I would suggest, with the education system which caters for the earlier years. It also lies in part with the difficulty of "controlling" through legislative machinery the talent of the lower strata of society. Is there any substitute for what the French have called "la famille educogene"?

It is not difficult to understand that the middle class have been the main gainers from the 1944 Education Act and the other "welfare" acts for as David Lockwood has pointed out:

A relatively small family and a strong desire for the educational success of one's children have been the hallmarks of middle class status since the closing decades of the 19th century. Taken together they represent a concern with social mobility through individual achievement and a conscious discounting of the present against the future . . . The connection between small family size, the high aspirations of parents for their children, and the high scholastic achievement of the children is well known . . ."²⁰

This survey suggests that Jean Abbott is quite correct when she states that "students seemed to think that class divisions in universities are more latent than in society – that more depends on the individual personality – but that although blurred they are a natural continuation of the class divisions which one sees outside university and of which they are constantly reminded when they go home".²¹

¹⁹Ossowski, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

²⁰Lockwood, David, *The Black-coated Worker: A Study in Class Consciousness* p. 14.

²¹Jean Abbott: *Students' Social Class in Three Northern Universities*, p. 216.

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