

is the quest for insight, clarification, and understanding that constitutes the book's chief value.

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Alfred A. Hunter, *Class Tells. On Social Inequality in Canada*. Toronto: Butterworths; 1981, ix + 264 pp.

Twenty years ago the number of professional sociological studies about Canadian society, any aspect of Canadian society, was paltry indeed. The situation in Quebec was more impressive, that part of the country having had an indigenous interest in the sociological understanding of itself which stretches back further. In the last ten years or so, however, there has been a very significant blossoming of activity in Canadian sociology which has turned its attention increasingly to the sociology of Canada. This activity has manifested itself in a gathering torrent of monographs, journal articles and textbooks, the latter designed both for specific courses and as introductory sociological texts in which the focus is upon Canadian society (in 1973 there was less than a handful of the latter; today the publishers' competition for introductory course adoptions is intense: you now need at least five or six hands to count the array of Canadian content introductory texts).

This burgeoning of interest in the nature of Canadian society has had salutary effects. We are becoming much more knowledgeable about, and aware of, the intrinsic nature of a society which cries out for analysis. There is still a lack of studies and interpretations which embrace the whole of Canadian society (the disjunction between Francophone and Anglophone sociology remains very evident) but the awareness of the limitations of a sociology which fails to redress this problem is certainly growing.

Much of the impetus for devoting sociological attention to Canada, for reasons which would themselves make for an interesting study, has come from sociologists who see themselves as broadly in the 'political economy' tradition or who subscribe in a general way to some variant of Marxian modes of socio-economic analysis. This has meant that a good deal of the sociological work on Canada has concentrated on issues of class analysis and the elucidation of sources of inequality in society. Alfred Hunter's *Class Tells* is a fruit of such concentration in which we have a very useful compilation of information and analysis concerning Canada as a society divided in terms of many socio-economic dimensions. Furthermore, the book is about Canada as a whole, not just the non-French component (although one might note that in an otherwise excellent bibliography of approx-

imately 400 items there are just three written in French, two of which are directly concerned with French Canada. There are, however, many items listed written in English about the latter).

Class Tells is divided into five parts after a relatively brief introduction has laid out some of the important conceptual distinctions and categorical elements commonly used by sociologists in the study of social inequality. We have, for example, the distinction between "distributive" and "relational" aspects of social inequality. Thus in distributive terms "women whose labour market qualifications are in every way equivalent to those of men do not, even when they work in what seem to be identical jobs, earn as much on average as men do", and in relational terms the inequality of women and men is "organized and maintained to some extent by the fact that men tend overwhelmingly to occupy the command-posts of the occupational world, and... use their favoured positions to the advantage of other men" (p. 5). Part I is devoted to a review of some of the major sociological perspectives on social inequality, the primary contrast being made between that which relies on Marxist foundations and that which in sociology is structural-functionalist (and which has a very close relative in the economists' "human capital theory"). Baldly stated, and therefore a travesty of Hunter's careful and balanced discussion, the distinction between these two approaches lies primarily in the emphasis given in each to the relational and distributive character of inequality: the approach of Marx and his followers is mainly relational in that it sees the fundamental basis of inequality to lie in differential possession of, and access to, sources of wealth and power; the functionalist approach is primarily distributive in that it sees inequality resulting from the "needs" of a society to ensure its survival through the allocation of tasks and rewards, such allocation being made therefore, in the pure case, on the basis of competence and merit alone. Thinkers who have criticized these two main positions or who have added some new dimensions to the debate are also discussed, for example Max Weber, Dahrendorf, Giddens, Touraine and Daniel Bell.

Part II is concerned with the exposition of the distribution of certain inequality factors in Canadian society beginning with income and wealth. Here it is clearly shown that "Canadian society has long been characterized by substantial and persistent inequalities in income and wealth. In the case of income, the purchasing power of families and individuals has on the average increased in the post-World War II period, except for very recent years while, at the same time, the trend has been in the direction of increasing income inequalities" (p. 70). Less firm statements can be made about the distributions of wealth, but Hunter's reasonable assertion is that "inequalities in wealth are much greater than inequalities in income" (p. 71). The second chapter in Part II looks squarely at the question of merit as a basis for consequent inequality and becomes essentially an illustrated critique of the structural-functionalist/human capital theory approach. For here we are looking at levels of educational attainment, in particular in relation to occupational distributions and the degrees of prestige attaching to different sectors of the occupational structure. According to the structural-functionalist

view it should be the case that "ability and effort directed at obtaining a formal education result in the acquisition of knowledge and skills which qualify people for jobs whose rewards are at least roughly commensurate with their merit" (p. 104). But for Hunter the inadequacy of this assumption emerges "when it is appreciated that, for most jobs, job-related knowledge and skills are acquired at work, and not in the classroom" (p. 104). Hence a person's "market capacity" can not be solely determined by his/her formal education, nor is it true that a person's occupational standing (with its attendant rewards of income, prestige, wealth) is determined by merit alone. Thus the qualifications which are necessary to maintain the structural-functionalist emphasis on merit become overwhelming when so much else has to be taken into account, such as the persistence of the inheritance of wealth which can result in inequalities of opportunity, or the presence of certain social groups which act to control access to particular positions.

Consequently Part III addresses the question: If not merit, then what? Separate chapters consider inequalities related to gender difference, ethnic origins and those stemming from differences in social background. In the first case there is a judicious review of the evidence which leads to the conclusion that "in Canada . . . there is a pronounced and far-reaching system of gender inequalities in which men are favoured relative to women" (p. 127). This is shown in relation to such matters as the kind of education men and women receive (for instance, women differ little from men in their "overall level of educational attainment" but they tend markedly to be concentrated in educational endeavours which are "extensions of traditional household tasks" as in nursing, or teaching), or the kinds of jobs which women are more likely to be in than men (women being largely segregated in "female" occupations, despite slow inroads into this), or the fact that "women earn substantially less than men do, even when comparisons between the sexes are restricted to persons working full-time in identical jobs" (p. 127).

The chapter on ethnic inequalities is short (barely eleven pages) and selective in the ethnic groups with which it is concerned. The decision to restrict the discussion of this topic hardly allows Hunter to make much of his presentation, but again it is clearly apparent that Canada emerges as a country in which ethnic differences do make for very considerable differences in respect of school attendance, occupational standing, income and wealth, although it is also apparent that "the clear trend has been in the direction of progressively decreasing ethnic inequalities over time" (p. 140). Even shorter (nine pages) is the chapter on social background and social inequality. Here the issue is the extent to which a person's educational and occupational attainment is influenced or determined by his/her parent's socio-economic standing. Evidence relating to this in Canada is not extensive and it is clearly an area which is due for sociological attention. On the basis of what there is, however, Hunter can conclude that Canada is "characterized by a significant measure of positive social inheritance in educational and occupational status and, hence, by low to intermediate levels of social mobility" (p. 149). This means, therefore, that "coming from a privileged social background appears to confer real benefits upon people in terms of education, occupation

and wealth" (p. 150), and, of course, vice versa.

Part III ends with an interpretative chapter on the foregoing categories of gender, ethnic and social background differences. It contains a thoughtful discussion of some possible reasons as to why it is that such ascriptive factors should eventuate in inequalities in education, occupation, income and wealth.

Part IV presents a description and analysis of social class in Canada both in historical perspective and in terms of its contemporary manifestations. The approach Hunter takes here becomes more clearly (and appropriately) "relational" in its emphasis concerned as he is to trace the formation, persistence and continuing relevance of class divisions, power distributions, ideological factors and the role of the state in Canadian society. This is a valuable discussion if for no other reason than that it shows convincingly the relevance and plausibility of regarding Canada as a class-based society in a broadly Marxist sense. Consciousness of class may be relatively underdeveloped in Canada but, as Hunter is well aware, the lack of conscious concert in class relations does not detract from the cogency of class analysis.

Finally, in a short closing Part V, some of the issues raised in the book are reviewed and some tentative judgments made about possible future developments in Canadian social class relations. The point of view which Hunter finds most congenial on this is that which sees the big bourgeoisie or economic elite as essentially controlling society's values and ideology (and hence maintaining the status quo) possessed as it is with relative conscious coherence of interests, organization and outlooks. When other classes have no such coherence (as Hunter argues is the case in Canada) then there is no real challenge to the continuing dominance of that class which stands to gain most from the present structure.

Overall, then, *Class Tells* is a very useful book. It is written with clarity, good judgment and balance. It provides profitable reading for anyone interested in Canada as a society, especially for anyone who might be inclined to be sceptical of thinking of Canada in terms of social class (which, in line with Hunter's analysis, would be almost all of us); printing errors are few, the style is usually lively (although the author should have been persuaded not to start sentences with "Too" – a distressingly frequent occurrence), and mercifully the book does not lack for the odd humorous touch. It is unfortunate that most of the statistical information has to rely on the 1971 Census, but that is obviously an insurmountable problem when you publish a book at the end of the decennial period.

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