BOOK REVIEWS

Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification. By Gerhard E. Lenski. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966. 495 pp. Figures and tables. $8.50.

Stratification is a key concept in the vocabulary of contemporary sociology. In recent decades empirical investigations have accumulated an impressive amount of information about differentials in income, wealth, prestige, and power in a wide variety of societies. Hardly any other social fact is as well documented as the pervasiveness of social inequality and, as S. M. Miller has recently pointed out, social class has become the most widely employed variable in contemporary sociological research.

Unfortunately, the theoretical analysis of stratification has not kept pace with the empirical prominence of the phenomenon. Although there has been no lack of theorizing, the most basic concepts have remained tangled and highly controversial. Spirited debates by protagonists of divergent interpretations in the pages of the professional journals have generated more heat than light. Meanwhile the conceptual confusion has been compounded by many empiricists who have tried to escape involvement in the theoretical disputes by producing their own ad hoc definitions. In view of this unsatisfactory situation, it is a distinct pleasure to be able to report a major effort by Gerhard Lenski to break out of the theoretical impasse. Dissatisfied with the customary classroom presentation of diverse and often contradictory works of major theorists as more or less discrete contributions, Lenski attempts to synthesize their propositions into a new and systematic body of theory.

In order to move stratification theory off dead center, Lenski shifts the major focus of analysis from the usual preoccupation with class structure to the processes which generate the structures, concentrating on the causes of stratification rather than its consequences. He equates stratification with the distributive process by which scarce values are distributed in societies. "Though superficially unorthodox, I believe this definition reflects the central concern of major stratification theorists far more accurately than most current definitions, which identify the field with the study of social classes or strata. These are merely the structural units which sometimes emerge as a result of the workings of the distributive process, but the process itself is the basic phenomenon" (p. x).

Beginning with a brief review of the development of thought in this field from early pre-Christian views to contemporary theories, Lenski distinguishes two major points of view: a conservative "thesis" which defends social inequality as inevitable, and a radical "anti-thesis" which opposes it as unnecessary and unjust. Throughout the ages the major controversies about social inequality have been carried on by proponents of these two schools of thought. At present the conservative position is represented by the "functionalist" theories of Parsons and Davis while "conflict" theorists like Mills and Dahrendorf are rooted in the radical tradition. Both of these views are partially correct but each reflects only one facet of reality, and it is Lenski's major aim to achieve a synthesis of the valid insights of both the radical and the conservative tradition.

Drawing upon both traditions, the author first sets forth certain postulates about the nature of man and society which form the basis for the formulation of a general theory of distribution. In the simplest societies where there is no surplus, goods and services are distributed on the basis of need. With technological advance and the appearance of a surplus, an increasing proportion of goods and services will be distributed on the basis of power. Control of surplus goods or services results in privilege, thus privilege is largely a function of power. In turn, prestige is mainly a function of power and privilege. The nature of distributive systems, i.e., stratification, varies primarily with the stage of technological advancement of a society, and the degree of inequality in distributive systems varies with the size of a society's surplus. There are also secondary variations which stem from differences of the physical environment, of the military organization, and of the political regime.

Turning next from the dynamics of distribution systems to their structure, Lenski defines classes very broadly as "aggregations of persons in a society who stand in a similar position with respect to some form of power, privilege or prestige." Of these, power classes are basic because privilege and prestige are mainly determined by the distribution of power. Since power rests on various foundations, classes may be based on property, occupation, education, age, sex, and racial-ethnic group membership. Whenever these various forms of power are not perfectly correlated with one another, a single individual may simultaneously be a member of several different power classes.

Following the exposition of the general theory, which takes up the first four chapters, Lenski tests and modifies the general propositions by applying them to five different types of societies. His classification is based upon stages of technological development which follows logically from his fundamental proposition that technological development is the primary determinant of variation among distributive systems. Lenski's typology, a modifi-

cation of that proposed some years ago by Walter Goldschmidt, identifies five stages which form a continuum of technological efficiency: (1) hunting and gathering societies, (2) simple horticultural societies, (3) advanced horticultural societies, (4) agrarian societies, (5) industrial societies. In addition Lenski also recognized herding, fishing, and maritime societies as separate types, as well as hybrid societies, but these are excluded from consideration for reasons of time and space.

Lenski's analysis of the five major distributive systems is a model of the comparative approach, making extensive use of anthropological, demographic, and historical materials and including data from industrial nations other than the United States, especially the Soviet Union, Britain, and Sweden. The author shows in broad perspective that social inequality rises steeply with advancing societal complexity. Whereas power, prestige, and privilege are largely a function of personal skills and ability in primitive hunting and gathering societies, stratification becomes increasingly institutionalized and entrenched in horticultural societies. Hereditary differences in power, privilege, and honor reach their apex in agrarian economies. Contrary to theoretical expectations, however, the appearance of industrial society with its greatly increased efficiency has not led to even greater inequality. Instead the opposite has occurred, the emergence of industrial societies has been marked by a decline in political and economic inequality, and this trend is likely to accelerate in the future. This significant reversal leads Lenski to important modifications and refinements of his initial propositions.

The author himself is well aware that his theory is merely a preliminary statement which is subject to further modification. As he himself points out, "the fit between theory and data is often poor or unclear" and much remains to be done. The reader may not agree with all of his definitions and propositions, at times alternative interpretations seem equally valid. But this in no way detracts from the very substantial achievement of this book. This is not another parochial description of the American class system but a systematic and comprehensive analysis, based upon a judicious and erudite examination of a wide range of literature. Lenski has set an important benchmark for the study of social stratification, and every sociologist is in his debt.

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CLASS, STATUS, AND POWER: SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE. 2d ed. Edited by Reinhard Bendix and Seymour Martin Lipset. New York: The Free Press, 1966. 677 pp. Tables. $9.95.

If, in Europe, sociologists talk about "Readers" (an untranslated, if not untranslatable word), the first, and for many the only title that comes to mind is *Class, Status, and Power*. In the United States, an inflation of Readers has probably lowered the perceived status of this particular anthology somewhat, but even so, the volume edited by Professors Bendix and Lipset has become what a youthful discipline in a shortlived time may well call a "classic." In the 13 years since its first publication in 1953, this Reader was reprinted nine times, until in the end its editors decided to compose a second edition: bigger, glossier, more expensive—better too?

The second edition of *Class, Status, and Power* is an entirely new book. Of the 60 pieces of the first edition, only 13 have survived; 61 new pieces were added to make up the bigger volume. The volume has been brought up to date; no less than 53 of the articles included were published after the appearance of the first edition, 40 of them after 1960. The book has become more attractive; notably, the 60 unreadable pages of notes at the end have disappeared and footnotes are now printed on the pages to which they belong. There is a new dedication; whereas the first edition was dedicated to the memory of Paul Hatt, the second is dedicated to that of Stanislaw Ossowski. There are more foreign authors represented; at least 10 of the pieces written by contemporary sociologists were written by non-Americans, among them four Poles.

Nor are these rather superficial observations without symptomatic relevance. "A Reader in Social Stratification," the subtitle of the first edition, has become "Social Stratification in Comparative Perspective." In 1953, the editors stated: "The single most important omission in the American literature on social stratification lies in the study of comparative social structure" (p. 15). In 1966, they can cite the "growth of comparative studies, which constitutes a major reorientation of American sociology" (p. xiii) as the *raison d'être* for their work. Texts on American society have given way to those about other countries, or, by evident preference, to comparative analyses. If we have experienced a decade of comparative research and of greater historical depth in sociological analysis, this is to no small extent the merit of Professors Bendix and Lipset, and the new edition of their Reader bears witness to the fruitfulness of this change.

But not all the changes made by the editors are as unambiguously improvements as those quoted so far (and many others which it would take much space to enumerate). To begin with, the comparative perspective itself poses many a question. It is certainly unfortunate if research is parochial, and if no notice is taken of what goes on elsewhere. (Are the editors quite certain, however, that this deficiency is never theirs?) But comparative research as such is, much like historical work, to begin with a method of description; it leaves all major problems of explanation unsolved. What is more, the technical difficulties involved in comparative research are consider-