

CARLETON UNIVERSITY SYMPOSIUM: BRAVERMAN AND BEYOND

Introduction by John Myles

In a period when the intellectual division of labour is intensifying, it is rare to find a work which is generally acclaimed as being "important", much less read, by social scientists representing a wide range of disciplines and specialties. Such a work is Harry Braverman's Labor and Monopoly Capital and it is for this reason that Braverman's analysis of "the degradation of work in the twentieth century" was selected as the topic for a special symposium held at Carleton University in the fall of 1977, a summary of which appears in the following pages.

The centerpiece of the symposium was an address delivered by Michael Burawoy, assistant professor of sociology at the University of California, Berkeley. It is reprinted in this volume under the title: "Between Marxist Orthodoxy and Critical Theory: Comments on Braverman's Labor and Monopoly Capital". The paper presents in summary form the major points developed in a much longer manuscript made available to the participants beforehand. A subsequent revision which in manuscript form runs to 119 pages is forthcoming in Politics and Society (Vol. 8, No. 4).

In agreeing to prepare this paper for the symposium, Burawoy accepted the difficult and challenging task of critiquing Braverman from within the perspective of Marxist analysis. The widespread acclaim with which Braverman's work has been met makes this task all the more crucial. As with any great work, it stands in danger of being accepted as the last word on its subject matter, thereby becoming an impediment

rather than an impetus to further theoretical and empirical analysis. Burawoy comes well qualified for his task. His discussion of Braverman, which is mainly pitched at a theoretical level, is informed by his own experience and research in a Chicago factory, the results of which are to appear in a forthcoming book entitled The Production of Consent on the Shop Floor, 1945 - 1975: The Labor Process Under Monopoly Capitalism.

Perhaps more than any other contemporary work, Braverman's Labor and Monopoly Capital reflects the vitality and relevance of the recent resurgence of Marxist analysis in North American sociology. The seeds which Braverman has planted, however, will wither and die unless nurtured in an atmosphere of intellectual struggle and debate. Accordingly the participants in the symposium were deliberately encouraged to confront one another and avoid the unfortunate practice of avoiding points of disagreement which often passes for academic good manners and professional respect. As will be apparent, the discussants of Burawoy's paper fulfilled their mandate admirably. The most extensive replies came from Leo Panitch and Donald Swartz who, like Burawoy, take their position from within the Marxist perspective. John Porter's comments, on the other hand, are probably representative of those sociologists who have been profoundly impressed by Braverman's work without accepting his Marxist frame of reference.

It is hoped that the presentation of the Carleton debate in this issue of Alternate Routes will encourage more of the same elsewhere.