

## WHAT DOES THIS PROJECT MEAN BY 'CLASS'?

'Class' is a contested term. In this project we use it in the sociological sense, as a category which aids the investigation of the cultural uses of the ancient Greeks and Romans. In "Classics & Class" we read the history of the uses and abuses of 'classical' culture from a perspective that is conscious of the social class of the agents involved. But 'class' in the sociological sense means two different things, although they are often commensurate: 'objective class' is an economic category, while 'subjective class' defines the way individuals and groups are perceived by themselves and others.

### OBJECTIVE DEFINITION OF CLASS

Everyone has an 'objective' class identity in that everyone has a position in the economic working of society. Everyone acquires their subsistence (food etc.) from somewhere, and plays a role in the way that goods and services are consumed and distributed. Objective 'class analysis' simply asks what the source of subsistence and the role are.

All the people in our historical period of study (1789-1939) derived their basic subsistence from one or more of a number of sources, just as everyone does today. There are nine basic ways to acquire it:

- 1) Earn it. People who work for pay, selling either their physical or mental labour to other people or to organisations. A very few people are self-employed and employ nobody else.
- 2) Extract it legally from the labour of others. People who own factories, restaurants, farms, or other businesses and derive their income from the profits made by work of people they hire.
- 3) Steal it.
- 4) Live off interest on capital or rent on property. People who possess sufficient means to provide a constant income flow without requiring them to work.
- 5) Inherit it. Some people receive unearned financial capital or goods that can be converted into money from when their parents or others die.
- 6) Win it or be given it. A few people acquire large amounts of money suddenly from betting, lotteries, competitions or receiving gifts.
- 7) Derive it from the state. People on state pensions, studentships, unemployment or other benefits financed by taxation of other citizens fall into this category.
- 8) Derive it from charity, whether institutionalised or begging on the street.
- 9) Be supported by another individual (this includes 'marry it'). Children, and dependent relatives, spouses and partners who do not earn money fall into this category.

During the period under consideration in our project, the majority of British people fell into the first category, in that they earned their livelihood from physical labour, or were dependent on someone who did. This means that they were *objectively* 'working-class'.

### SUBJECTIVE DEFINITION OF CLASS

This, rather than the actually more significant socio-economic role, is how most people understand the term 'class'. Class position is often 'subjectively' diagnosed or perceived from a whole cluster of identifying markers, ranging from style of speech and accent, hairstyle and clothing, to recreational tastes and educational attainments. The 'subjective' markers of class, especially in the modern world and where there is social mobility, are *not* always co-extensive with 'objective' class position.