



How was the British economy and class structure transformed in the period since the Second World War

Melanie Kühn

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Essay from the year 2006 in the subject English Language and Literature Studies - Culture and Applied Geography, grade: 1,7, University of Wolverhampton (Humanity Languages and Social Sciences), course: Contemporary Britain, 6 entries in the bibliography, language: English, abstract: It seems that the human race is inclined to categorize and arrange everything, that is “not nailed down”, especially society itself. The reason for that phenomenon can be found in the desire to differentiate oneself from others or more general to feel as an individual. In a wider sense, we define ourselves geographically or better according to affiliation to a nation i.e. Asian (Chinese), European (German). Within this nation again there are different ways (depending on the social and economic history of the country) to classify further i.e. according to gender, race or class.

A closer look at the history of British society makes their way of differentiation obvious: class. Marwick (1990, p.34) called it “that topic all-absorbing” in British society. However, this paper is not to trace back the origins of this occurrence, but to investigate the development of the class structure, its transformation and interaction with the economy after the Second World War. Therefore, the main question is how and to what extent the British economic development has had an impact on the class structure? Before uncovering the main trends it should be made clear that the term class does not refer to Marx’s structuralist theories of the 19th century . Here, the term is based on the question in how far the people themselves recognize and experience class with regard to the distribution of income, wealth, job opportunities, housing and education. Concerning terminology I will stick to the acknowledged ONS (Office of National Statistics) of 1998, which is a slightly modified version developed by John Goldthorpe and Robert Erikson in the 1970s (Roberts, p.25). Marxists would reject this approach, on the one hand because of the lack of a separate capitalist class and on the other hand because people are partly classed according to technical features of their occupation (Roberts, p.31).

When the Labour Party under Attlee surprisingly came into power in 1945, the government had to tackle with the disastrous economic condition of the country (Childs, p.16): Firstly, Britain was deep in debt with about 3,500 million pounds, which was caused by the war for the most part (Childs, p.23). Secondly, loads of houses were destroyed and Britain lacked the material as well as the money to restore them. Furthermore, a great part of the male population was still in uniform and thus no available workers.

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