

STATUS AND CLASS

A classless society is one where no social group exploits or oppresses another, i.e. where there are no social classes and therefore no class privileges or burdens. However, there are at least two ways in which such a society can be imagined or designed: with and without differences in status or authority. Most socialists are willing to put up with some differences in status deriving from the possession of special skills and the corresponding responsibilities-- e.g. the status of the teacher is higher than that of his students at least inside the classroom. A few, such as Bakunin, Kropotkin and, nowadays, Nielsen (1985), advocate a statusless society where strict economic and political equality prevails. It must be objected that this is not only utopian: it is not even desirable, because if we wish the various social units so work efficiently

in the interest of all their members
^ we must run them competently; and management, even when under democratic control,
involves some authority. So, between radical egalitarianism (or anarchy) and authori-
ritarianism we must interpolate qualified egalitarianism, a regime under which
the best qualified exert an authority guided and checked by the remaining members
of the group, but sufficient to carry out the duties attached to the job. Such
people in positions of authority, whether political, managerial, or intellectual,
would belong to an élite but not to a higher class, because (a) their authority
would be under constant challenge, and (b) the exercise of such authority would not
be rewarded by privileges.