

Patrick Colquhoun On the Classes of Society 1814

(Patrick Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Wealth, Power, and Resources of the British Empire*, 1814, pp. 102-126; in J. F. C. Harrison, ed., *Society and Politics in England, 1780-1960*, New York: Harper & Row, 1965, pp. 4-10.)

An Attempt To Shew How The New Property In Great Britain And Ireland, Arising From Agriculture, Mines And Minerals, Manufactures, Inland Trade, Foreign Commerce And Shipping, Coasting Trade, Fisheries, And Foreign Income Is Distributed Among The Different Classes Of The Community.

Having in the three preceding Chapters taken a general view of the population, the estimated capital or wealth of the British Empire, and the new property acquired annually by the land and labour; it becomes an interesting object to discover, as far as discovery is practicable, by approximating details, in what manner and in what proportions this property is divided among the various classes of society in Great Britain and Ireland.

With a view to this object [a] Table . . . has been constructed. It may be considered as a map of civil society, exhibiting in one view the proportions of created wealth which is allotted annually to every class of the community, from the Sovereign in regular gradation down to the pauper. Although all that is possible to attain after much labour and research *is approximating facts*; yet if these shall be found sufficient to assist the mind in forming conclusions, useful in moral and political views of a subject so extremely interesting, an object will be accomplished of great importance as it relates to the public weal. From this diagram more correct ideas may at once be formed of the state of civil society than can be attained by the labour of perusing many volumes.

It will, through this medium, be discovered, what classes of the community by their labour in different pursuits tend to increase the national capital, and what other classes diminish it, together with the degree of increase and diminution as applicable to each order or rank in society. This species of knowledge, drawn from approximating facts, is of great importance in the general affairs of government, more especially when they are presented to the minds of statesmen and politicians, in such a form as to bring the whole scheme of the national economy at once under the eye; exhibiting in one collected view the proportions of the land and labour of the country assigned to each class of the community for their immediate support, and for the exigencies of the state.

By the aid of political arithmetic, or, in other words, by the practice of reasoning by figures on matters relating to government in all the branches of its internal economy, much useful information is obtained, calculated to assist the mind with respect to the encouragements which may be afforded in promoting the prosperity of the country, and the blemishes in the existing system which call for a remedy, so as to effect those objects which shall tend in the greatest possible degree to improve the condition of the people, by a more general diffusion of productive industry and moral habits.

As the wealth of all nations arises from land and labour, great advantages may be derived from an accurate knowledge of the produce of this labour, and the manner in which it is distributed among the community, by suggesting measures of state policy, which shall give a right direction to this labour, and to the improvement of the morals of the people, which nothing can tend more to the augmentation of the power and resources of the state, and to individual comfort and happiness.

The subject now to be discussed is placed in a point of view not less novel than interesting. It embraces the whole range of statistical economy connected with the existing population of the United Kingdom, divided into different classes.

It shews the distinction between the productive and unproductive labourers, according to their different pursuits in society. It discloses, by means of approximating facts, the share allotted to each class of the community of the disposable property or wealth annually created or obtained by land and labour, after reserving the capital employed in giving motion to this labour. It distinguishes the useful from the noxious members of the body politic, while it shews the relative degree of usefulness or noxious tendency, which applies to all the different ranks and degrees in society.....

The population of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, including the army and navy, admits of the following division into classes, viz.

| | Heads of Families | Total persons, comprising their Families. |
|--|----------------------|---|
| HIGHEST ORDERS | | |
| 1 st The Royal Family, the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, the Great Officers of State, and all above the degree of a Baronet, with their families | 576 | 2,880 |
| SECOND CLASS | | |
| 2d Baronets, Knights, Country Gentlemen, and others having large incomes, with their families | 46,861 | 234,305 |
| THIRD CLASS | | |
| 3d Dignified Clergy, Persons holding considerable employments in the State, elevated situations in the Law, eminent Practitioners in Physic, considerable Merchants, Manufacturers upon a large scale, and Bankers of the first order, with their families | 12,200 | 61,000 |
| Carried forward | 59,637 | 298,185 |

FOURTH CLASS

4th. Persons holding inferior situations in Church and State, respectable Clergymen of different persuasions, Practitioners in Law and Physic, Teachers of Youth of the superior order, respectable Freeholders, Ship Owners Merchants and Manufacturers of the second Class, Warehousemen and respectable Shop-Keepers, Artists, respectable Builders, Mechanics and Persons living on moderate incomes, with their families.

233,650 1,168,250

FIFTH CLASS

5th. Lesser Freeholders, Shopkeepers of the second order, Inn-keepers, Publicans, and Persons engaged in miscellaneous occupation or living on moderate incomes, with their families

564,799 2,798,475

SIXTH CLASS

6th Working Mechanics, Artisans, Handicrafts, Agricultural Labourers, and others who subsist by labour in various employments, with their families
Menial Servants

2,126,095 8,792,800
1,279,923

SEVENTH OR LOWEST CLASS

7th. Paupers and their families, Vagrants, Gipsies, Rogues, Vagabonds, and idle and disorderly persons, supported by criminal delinquency

387,100 1,828,170

Total

3,371,281 16,165,803

THE ARMY AND NAVY

Officers of the Army, Navy and Marines, including all Officers on half-pay and superannuated, with their families

10,500 69,000

| | | | |
|--|-------|-----------|------------|
| Non-commissioned Officers in the Army, Navy, And Marines, Soldiers, Seamen, and Marines, Including Pensioners of the Army, Navy, &c. And their families | | 120,000 | 862,000 |
| | Total | 3,501,781 | 17,096,803 |

...There is however another and, perhaps, a more interesting statistical view of this important and curious subject, as it relates to the productive and unproductive labourers in the United Kingdom, which it may be useful to explain, -as a means of more fully elucidating the state of the society, which, in this country, differs in many respects from every other civilized nation, and will account for its superiority in arts and arms (when its population is considered) to every nation in the world.

It has been already shewn, that in this as indeed in all other kingdoms, states, and empires, the communities, of which they are composed, consist of productive and unproductive labourers. In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, as far as approximating facts could be obtained, they seem to admit to the following classification.

*Productive Labourers, by whose exertions a new
Property is created every year.*

| | Families | Persons | Income |
|---|-----------|------------|--------------|
| Agriculture, Mines, &c. | 1,302,151 | 6,129,142 | £107,246,795 |
| Foreign Commerce, Shipping, Trade, Manufacturers, Fisheries, &c. | 1,506,774 | 7,071,989 | 183,908,352 |
| Fine Arts | 5,000 | 25,000 | 1,400,000 |
| Total | 2,813,925 | 13,226,131 | £292,555,147 |

*Unproductive Labourers, whose exertions do not
create any new Property*

| | Families | Persons | Income |
|--------------------------------|----------|-----------|--------------|
| Royalty, Nobility, Gentry | 47,437 | 416,835 | £58,923,590 |
| State and Revenue | | | |
| Army, Navy, Half-pay Pensioner | 152,000 | 1,056,000 | 34,036,280s |
| Clergy, Law, Physic | 56,000 | 281,500 | 17,580,000 |
| Universities, Schools | | | |
| Miscellaneous | 45,319 | 567,937 | 17,555,355 |
| Paupers | 387,101 | 548,400 | 9,871,000 |
| Total | 687,856 | 3,870,672 | £137,966,255 |

Thus it would appear, that more than 1/5th part of the whole community are unproductive labourers, and that these labourers receive from the aggregate labour of the productive class about 1/3d part of the new property created annually. But it does not follow, as has been already observed, that a very great proportion of these unproductive labourers are not highly useful in their different stations in society. On the contrary, with a few exceptions, in addition to the benefits derived from personal exertions, they eminently tend to promote, invigorate, and render more productive the labour of the creating classes.

Such is the structure of civil society, that the classes, whose minds are enlarged and their intellects and faculties improved by a superior education, are indispensably necessary as master-springs in the great machine; not only for the purpose of giving energy to the efforts of the productive labourers by means of capital furnished by every member of the community possessing real or personal property, from which they derive an income, but from the skill and superior knowledge of those who give employment to the labouring classes in agriculture, manufactures, trade, commerce, and navigation, and other objects of productive industry. But this is not the only advantage resulting from the labour of the higher and middling classes of the community; particularly in the British dominions, where they are called upon as legislators, judges, magistrates, jurors, managers of the poor, and peace-officers, to execute the functions which are required for the purpose of preserving the harmony and order, which are necessary to the existence of civil society.....