

# A reader asks: are white-collar workers a part of the working class

Fred Mazelis  
2 April 1998

To whom it may concern:

I am an editor with the American Chemical Society, white-collar, non-management.

Am I a worker you wish to assist?

Am I simply too bourgeois?

Interested,

DL

25 March 1998

Dear DL,

Thanks for your brief inquiry. On behalf of the *World Socialist Web Site* let me assure you that you are part of the working class.

In some quarters the claim is made that, in light of “de-industrialization” and other economic changes, the working class has disappeared or greatly declined in importance. Nothing could be further from the truth. While the composition of the working class has changed enormously in recent decades, as a percentage of the population it has only grown — most dramatically on a world scale in countries such as China, South Korea, Indonesia, Brazil and so many others, but even in the US and the rest of the industrialized world.

With the tremendous growth of the white collar and service sectors of the economy, the relative privileges that these layers enjoyed years ago have largely evaporated. In many cases they must work two jobs to make ends meet, or a typical household must consist of two or more wage-earners working three or more jobs. Above all they face the job insecurity that has always been the lot of the worker who must sell his labor power—his ability to work—to the capitalist in order to survive.

Every working person who depends for his or her existence on selling this labor power, i.e., who owns none of the means of production and distribution (or only a tiny portion, as with those workers who have

invested some or all of their savings in the stock market), is part of the working class. Their interests come into absolute conflict with the needs of the profit system, which exists not to meet human needs but only to produce profits for the owners of capital.

Of course there are white collar workers who still relatively better off than many other workers, but the gap has steadily narrowed. Just as skilled blue collar workers have faced a sustained assault on their jobs and living standards, millions of college-educated white collar workers are also staring these attacks in the face.

I hope we have answered your question. Teachers, researchers, editors, computer programmers and many other occupations are definitely part of our definition of the working class. This definition only begins to deal with the question of the problems and the political tasks and challenges facing working people today. We would very much like to hear more from you on your own experiences, views and further questions you may have.

We will be posting material dealing with these theoretical and political issues on the Web Site. I urge you to read the lectures from the recent international school in Australia that have been posted.

Thanks again.

Fred Mazelis

*World Socialist Web Site*

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