

Good manners, correct speech, and material possessions may weigh heavily in the social scales, but a patch on the pants is nothing short of disaster for

CLASS-CONSCIOUS SCHOOLBOYS

If class distinction exists, who started it, why and when?

THE LISTENER put this question to the headmistress of a girls' secondary school in 1946, after the publication of a Departmental report stating that class distinctions affected the recruiting of labour for industry.

"I can say quite plainly," said the headmistress, "that nothing of that sort exists in this school."

So far as she and her staff were concerned, the principal may have been right. But what of the children? Were they also unconscious of social class distinctions?

A survey conducted by A. A. Congalton, and published recently by Victoria University College's Department of Psychology, seems to show that the answer is "No." A questionnaire submitted to 100 schoolboys aged 16 and 17 years reveals that, with few exceptions, they were prepared to rank the social class of individuals according to a number of readily observable criteria.

In general, wealth (including property and income), occupation, titles, and residential districts, in that order, were considered the best indications of social class. Of less importance, but nevertheless of definite value, were (in decreasing order of importance) speech habits, etiquette, education, newspaper reading habits, politics, church affiliation, intelligence, and radio listening habits.

On the question of wealth, the boys were fairly clear in their opinion. The property most associated with the upper class was the possession of more than one car. This was followed by a swimming pool, a large library, and, to a less extent, a billiards room. A tennis court and large grounds were also upper class, but shared by some of the middle class. A large house, a weekend bach and a refrigerator were also included as possible middle-class possessions, while a car was thought the least likely item to indicate the social class of its owner. Even so, only 16 per cent expected a car among the lower bracket of the lower class.

Similarly, with income, the boys equated material quantity with social quality. The table shows the weekly in-

come range most commonly associated with each social class:

Social Class		Income Range
Upper Class	Upper	£100-£40
	Lower	£75-£18
Middle Class	Upper	£25-£10
	Lower	£14-£7
Lower Class	Upper	£9-£4
	Lower	£6-£4

These are, of course, 1946 figures.

Personal property did not appear to be of great importance to the boys' own social status. Out of six questions on this subject, only two appeared to bother the majority. Sixty-eight boys thought it important to have enough pocket-money to be on a level footing with their friends, and 69 thought a strong social stigma attached to patched trousers. A patch at one end, it seems, entails loss of "face" at the other.

As with the adults who recorded opinions for the survey described in last week's *Listener*, the boys showed general agreement about occupations. They rated them like this (in descending order): Lawyer, Bank Manager, Architect, Veterinary Surgeon, Chemist, Postmaster, Accountant, Bank Clerk, Reporter, Policeman, Plumber, Barber, Taxi Driver, Tram Motorman, Factory Hand, Porter, Cleaner, Navy.

The majority considered the first three predominantly upper class occupations; the next nine predominantly middle class; and the last six predominantly lower class.

To the question about titles, the group gave similarly definite answers. They ranked Lord, Duke, Sir, Bishop, Doctor and Lieutenant-Colonel as predominantly upper class, and Mayor, M.P., Captain (ship), Rev., Councillor, Lieutenant, Sergeant-Major and Private as predominantly middle class, but shared to some extent with other classes. Only 12 boys thought they could talk easily to any of the titled people, where 46 felt they would be at ease with any of those on the occupational list. One boy thought, "It all depends upon the person's manner." Another remarked, "Have talked with Prime Minister, though it was dark and I didn't know who it was." A third, for whom there must be a word, noted: "Have talked with Governor intimately while escorting him."

As might be expected in Wellington, the estimate of various suburbs followed a roughly vertical pattern. Social status seemed to relate directly to height above sea level. Thus Kelburn, Karori and Wadestown were considered upper and middle class. Thorndon and New-

town—mostly on the flat—were considered lower class, in spite of their gubernatorial and ambassadorial residences.

The other criteria listed were considered of somewhat less importance. "Correct" speech was, however, thought characteristic of the upper and upper-middle classes. "Affected" speech did not mark any particular class, while swearing, slang and bad grammar were associated with the lower-middle and lower classes. Likewise, certain aspects of etiquette were thought to indicate certain classes, though most of the accepted courtesies were noted as being common to all.

The question on education revealed that the boys thought attendance at state and Catholic schools common to members of all classes, but more characteristic of the middle class. Private schools were thought to mark upper and upper-middle class membership, and technical schools lower-middle and lower class membership. The survey was taken in a state school.

The opinion on newspaper reading habits showed a fairly definite class identification. Wellington's conservative morning and evening papers, *The Dominion* and *The Evening Post*, were thought to be read mostly by the upper and middle classes. The Labour morning paper *The Southern Cross* and the national weekly *Truth* were thought to have mainly lower-middle and lower class readers. The percentage of boys who thought the papers no indication of class membership were respectively 20, 44, 9 and 11, for the four papers mentioned.

Only one boy thought there was no connection between politics and social class, while six showed bias (e.g., by marking all except one party as belonging to the lower class). The remainder assigned mainly membership of the lower-middle and lower class to Labour supporters, of the lower class to Communist supporters, of the upper and middle classes to National supporters, and of the middle class to Independent supporters. With the exception of the



National Party, the M.P.'s were thought to come from a class slightly higher than that of their supporters.

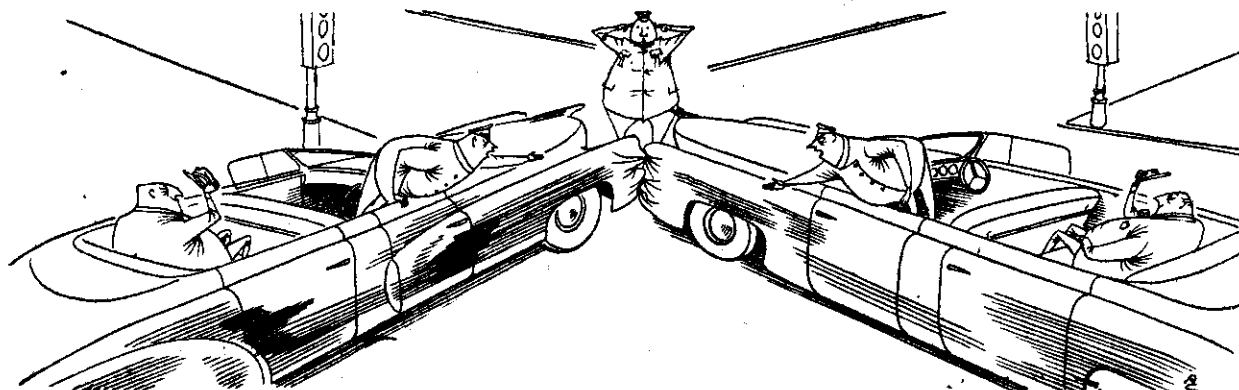
The results of a question about religious affiliation were less definite. Fifty-five per cent thought Church of England membership did not indicate specific class membership. Of the remainder, a majority thought it indicated upper or upper-middle class membership. The Roman Catholic and Presbyterian Churches were considered either to be unconnected with any particular class or to be associated with all—with a slight bias toward the middle class. For the rest, upper-class members were not thought of as adherents of the Salvation Army or of the Baptist Church, while lower-class members were not associated to any extent with any of the denominations.

Intelligence was not thought a clear indicator of social class. Thirty-two said it had no bearing. Six said the clever boys came from all classes, three said the same for the average boys, and two the same for the dull boys. The remainder tended to place the dull boys in the lower class and the average and clever in the middle and upper classes, but opinion was not clear cut.

Of radio listening habits, 18 boys said all classes listen to National stations, while 30 said the same of Commercial stations. Apart from these, the majority thought the National stations were listened to mainly by members of the upper and middle classes, and the Commercial stations by members of the middle and lower classes. In general, listening habits were not considered a reliable guide to social class.

As far as could be ascertained, the boys answered the questionnaire as seriously and as objectively as possible. Two or three boys suggested that the lower class contained Lords and Dukes, and that its members dressed for dinner and drew £40 a week. They may not have been entirely serious, but their opinions would not affect the result.

Several answers did, however, reflect an attitude prevalent in New Zealand, and best summed up by one schoolboy (name of Paddy, no doubt), who said: "There are no social classes in New Zealand, and if there are there shouldn't be."



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