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MIDDLE CLASSES: THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES, CONTEMPORARY WORKING OUT, REGARDING THE HIRED WORKERS¹

The article deals with the problems of defining middle classes. Theoretical principles of social and class structures, including middle classes, are examined. The criteria of reckoning some hired workers as middle classes worked out on the basis of normative methodology (normative criteria) are submitted, the most important of them being educational qualifications, occupation, personal income and provision of housing.

Methods of statistical and sociologic analysing data are applied. The results of analysing the conformity of the hired workers to the normative criteria of representing middle classes are produced. It is determined that today heads of organizations and their subdivisions as well as certified top and middle management specialists representing middle classes comprise only 2-3 per cent of the total number of the hired workers. It should be noted that there are practically no-one among them who has got a family with two and more children. The low level of wages is the main reason for that. In addition there are some other reasons, too.

The results of the research could find application in the state social and economic policy.

Keywords: the hired workers, middle classes, education, occupation, material security.

We proceed from the fact that the purpose of modern national social policy is to increase cardinally the quality and standard of living of the majority of our country's citizens, although this seems to be just an assumption, a desirable vector of its development. Anyway, this does not withdraw the statement that identification of social structures is one of prerequisites for, and their transformation — the result of implementation of economic, social, political and spiritual programs of the development of the society and increase of quality and level of living of the population.

1. Theoretical Bases of Identification of Social Class Structures

Depending on the ontological (essential), axiological (value) and gnoseological (cognitive) foundations of research of laws of nature, society and thought, various schools of social thought have worked out different theories, methodologies and standards of identification of social class structures. They can be structured into the following principal theories of identification of social classes [1, p. 120-147]:

1. Production theories of social classes (production relations): based on property relations of the means of production, antagonism, struggle and oppression, where two large classes are distinguished — proletariat and bourgeoisie. Most consistently these theories are presented by Marxism, where the class structure determines the key contradictions of the world of alienation. We refer to the main criterion of social class the place in the social production which is determined by property of the means

of production, the resulting sources of income, employment and labor exploitation. Marxism considers the class structures only as one of the components of complex developing social structure of the future society (structures of dying classes) [2].

It is reasonable to refer to this group the distribution theories of social classes on the basis of community of sources of income, community of interests and antagonism with relation to other classes. There can be distinguished large classes: the landowner class, the capitalist class and the labor class. As well as the intermediate classes: the class of money capitalists, the petty bourgeoisie class, the peasant class and, partially, the intellectuals class.

2. Social class theories based on property differences (wealth theories): based on property and ownership relations. Some proceed from the fact of capital ownership or non-ownership, others proceed from the differences in the levels of incomes. They focus mainly on the external results of the distribution. Their basis is expressed rather in the levels than in the types of ownership. Most consistently this approach is presented by the liberal belief system (presented by L. von Mises). Liberalism, unlike Marxism, considers private property of the means of production, private (hired) labor employment, individualism as a driving force of the society development and the resulting capitalism, production relations which are not transient, but immanently inherent to the society, production relations accompanying its development. Since liberalism considers the society in this "reference system," its structuring is carried out within the framework of trade relations and free goods market and production factors (re-

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sources), including labor market and the associated multitude of social strata and economical factors of motivation of development of the society and satisfaction of its needs [3]. Liberalism distinguishes bourgeoisie, proletariat and middle class as the main classes. The latter is assigned with a particular distinctive mission.

The social class theories based on different living standards (according to the signs of incomes) should be referred to the varieties of this group. There is a characteristic of housing, employment, education and social habits identified within each income-making group. Ultimately they are grouped in the lower, middle and upper classes.

3. Social class theories which consider both material and ideal needs of people as the basis of social characteristic of the society development, formation of social behavior and integration of people in social structures. One of the most widespread of them is the German Historical School (represented by M. Weber). It considers the social organization of the society depending on interaction of material (economic life, economic rationalism) and ideal (spirit, ethics, trust, right) factors. The social structures in this belief system generate: wealth, or economic status. Therefore, according to Weber, the basic interpretation of classes is as follows: 1) presence or absence of property; labor market situation and the resulting people's life chances; 2) power as an opportunity to subject other people to one's will; 3) prestige as the basis of social status, recognition and respect of the entity's advantages.

We can refer to the varieties of these theories the social class theories based on division of labor and formation of professions; the social rank theories (social level theories: based on identical mode of life, identity of position, identical aspirations and way of thinking); theories of historical stratas and implementations on the basis of various economic systems successively changing each other in the course of the historical development of societies and realizations in some social group included in the society at every given time.

In all these theories the middle classes play a significant role. Thus, considering the structure of the society, M. Weber distinguished the proprietary class; the class represented by people who have no property and have no qualification which could be offered at the labor market; and there are middle classes between these classes — petty proprietors and those who have special qualification which could be offered at the labor market [4].

4. We can classify radically different theories in separate groups, such as natural and organic doctrines of social classes (based on organic or bio-

logical process of zoological struggle for resistance and natural-organic selection); racial theories of social classes (based on race difference); psychological theories of social classes (the basis of differentiation is in human psyche: belief in social ranking, aspiration for domination, desire to be higher than other one, etc.). We consider them to be coarse and unilateral simplification of ideas on regularities of formation of social class structures which has no scientific ground under modern conditions.

2. Modern Russian Developments of Social Class Structures

In general, modern studies carried out in different years, dedicated to the identification of Russian middle classes, have different methodological foundations: a set of criteria of identification of the middle class (objective, subjective, monetary, nonmonetary criteria), method of determination of criterion boundaries of reference to the middle class (on the basis of standards, indices, grades, scales, etc.), method of designing an integral quantitative evaluation of the middle class (for example, the method of concentration of middle class signs), the basis for distinguishing of the middle class (households, economically active population, the entire population, etc.).

Regardless the considerable experience of studying the problems of social stratification, as well as the distinguishing of the middle class in the structure of the society, no agreed approaches to its identification at the modern stage has been worked out. The representatives of various fields of knowledge, depending on research objectives, apply different criteria and obtain different quantitative evaluations of middle classes.

The list of criteria of reference to middle classes, including employees, is broad enough. Anyway, there can be distinguished several approaches used in modern domestic surveys of middle classes.

Within the framework of the first approach for the quantitative evaluation of the representation of middle classes in the structure of the Russian society there are different criteria of material security proposed by researchers. Thus, in the All-Russia Centre of Living Standard (ACLS) there were substantiated the material wealth criteria on the basis of which the reference of population to middle classes is carried out, as well as the evaluation of their scales. There have been developed standard consumer budgets of different level of material wealth which allow classifying the population into groupings according to the income level [5, p. 191-200; 6, p. 3-22].

Initially, the analysis of social structure of the population was carried out in the ACLS on the basis of income criterion in relation with consumer budgets of the population. The further studies gave interpretation of the criterion of housing provision, and also living provision standards were developed. As a result, an assessment of the Russian society was given on the basis of common use of two criteria — the criterion of household incomes and the criterion of household living provision, which made the assessment of the material provision more integrated [7]. Taking into account the common use of these standards the share of middle classes was 14–19 % of the population in 2008 [8, p. 27]. This approach is limited by solely objective measurements of the living standards of the population.

The second approach is presented by the definition of middle classes through the criteria of labor market situation and in the sector of employment in combination with subjective evaluations. It is based on the “poverty and wealth” scale, and 4 large classes and 11 strata: 1) poor (the beggary, poor proper and the needy), 2) median class (low-income persons), 3) middle strata (lower middle class and middle class proper), 3) the rich (upper middle class, the rich proper and “elite and subelite”) [9, p. 62-97].

The results of using another variety of such an approach are presented by the following class system structure [10, p. 167-286]:

- The social elite (associated with the upper and governing class including the business elite as one of the main strata);¹

- The middle classes are associated with the proprietors of personal business (the core is represented by the medium and small business) and professionals; holds the “medium” status positions between the upper and lower strata; fulfills the functions of “stabilizer” and “supplier” of the skilled labor force;

- The working class (its content remains unresolved with regard to the modern society);

- The lower classes (associated with the problem of poverty of the considerable part of the working class, as well as with the situation of the marginal strata — the “social bottom” or underclass).

This classification is rather eclectic since along with the criterion factor of “property” (the working class, part of the middle class) other elements of the class system are based on other criterion factors: “income” (lower class), “enjoyment of

power” (elite), as well as “profession and qualification” (part of the middle class).

It appears that the use of the given approaches does not allow conducting the analysis of the middle classes to the full extent, distinguishing only one or several aspects from their characteristic.

It is necessary to carry out a survey of middle classes in terms of several criteria characterizing property relations, the material situation, education, labor market situation and subjective evaluations.

These requirements are better met by the researched opinion of the Independent Institute of Social Policy (IISP). Here the following criteria were used for determining the middle class boundaries in the Russian society:

- material property criterion;
- social professional criterion;
- subjective criterion.

Within the framework of the analysis of material property criterion, incomes, savings, movable property, housing provision were taken into account. The social professional criterion included education level, employment availability, the occupational status at direct work, number of working hours (full-time or part-time employment). The subjective criterion was based on identifying the social feeling through the index of confidence in the future. On the basis of these criteria, by using concentration of households’ signs as part of the generic middle class, there were distinguished the core (households possessing three signs of the middle class, the core — 5 % of the number of households) and the semi-core (the presence of two signs — 15 %). Therefore, the generic middle class was 20 %. The middle class periphery (households which possess only one sign of the middle class) accounted for 30 % of the total number of the households [11, p. 7-102].

Other results which were also obtained in combination with material, educational professional and self-estimate criteria are presented in the surveys of the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The middle classes were distinguished on the basis of the following criteria [12, p. 9-10]:

- education (not lower than secondary vocational education);
- social professional status (non-physical labor or entrepreneurial activity);
- standard of well-being (average monthly per capita incomes are not lower than the median incomes in the region);
- self-estimation of one’s position in the society (based on 10-grade scale).

¹ It should be noted that we can find the mention of historical predecessor of the governing class — bourgeoisie, however, the authors omit this description when considering the modern business — elites and the modern entrepreneurship in Russia.

Therefore, taking into account these criteria, 20–22 % of the economically active urban population of the country and only around 14 % of the entire population were referred to the middle class [12, p. 10-11].

Conspicuous is the detailed list of middle class identification criteria presented in the survey carried out under supervision of O.I. Shkaratan [13, p. 30-31]:

- material situation (takes into account the assessment of the material situation, movable and immovable property);

- education level (not lower than secondary vocational education, providing the availability of foreign language skills or computer skills);

- professional status (holding professional positions requiring education not lower than the secondary vocational one);

- quality of living (includes the economic component — possibility to obtain paid medical/educational services, recreation/tourism, and the sociocultural component — the availability of own library containing at least 100 volumes, cultural leisure arrangements not less than 11 times per year);

- self-identification (self-estimation of one's own position according to 10-grade scale);

- profession and education of the inner circle (education not lower than secondary vocational one, the profession requires the availability of at least secondary vocational education).

The integral assessment of the middle class representatives on the basis of the worked out criteria constituted 2.1 % of the economically active population of the country [13, p. 30-31].

The absence of unified, generally accepted criteria identification of middle classes does not allow getting an insight on their real incidence in our country, makes it difficult to work out state policy measures aimed at increasing the middle class share, which is one of the priorities of long-range policy of our country, which is connected with adersion of liberal capitalist values.

One more unsolved problem is the creation of conditions to enter the middle classes for employees. In this publication, we will try to explain how the secondary roles which are assigned to employees by liberalism influence the possibility of their inclusion in the middle classes.

3. Identification of Middle Classes Among Employees

The neoliberals are known to focus on middle classes rather than modern identification in the social structure of the labor class and bourgeoisie.

The absence in liberalism of interest and aspiration for understanding and increase of the role

of modern labor class and, in general, of employees, results in creation of conditions for growing up the intermediate strata, middle classes, outside these social class unions. The middle classes in liberalism are associated mainly with personal business proprietors (the core is represented by medium, small and, partially, big business) and professionals beyond the scope of employees. They take “medium” status positions between the upper and lower strata.

Therefore, the working class and the mass presented intellectuals among the professional employees are deliberately taken out from the scientific analysis in the liberal paradigm of the capitalist society development and are excluded from the sphere of economical and social policy of creation of conditions for entering the middle classes.

The contradiction of the modern state of Russia development is in the fact that the employees constitute more than 93.1 % of all people occupied in economics, and self-employed persons: employers, self-employed population, production cooperative members, assisting family members — less than 7 % of their number [15, p. 90].

An important methodological aspect of middle class identification is the problem of selection of the unit of analysis, or the selection of the “base” of search for the middle class. The given problem is solved by the researchers in different ways. Households or individuals can serve as a unit of analysis.

The authors have a critical attitude towards the appropriateness of consideration as the primary unit for determination of class-forming (stratified) signs of households. If pondering on the appropriateness of such a rather wide-spread identification of middle classes, one will have to refer to the classes the incapable children and non-working life-long disabled persons, non-working old people who are retired due to their old age and the economically inactive population. In our opinion, only economically active population can be referred to the classes, and its other strata should be considered as the members of employee (unemployed persons) households, included in the middle classes.

To identify those persons out of the employees who meet the middle class standards, the authors have developed standard identification criteria of the education, employment situation and wages on the basis of objective measurements.

It is proved that in order to meet the principal standard criterion of education the employee education level should be not lower than the upper professional one which is the basis of the formation of high qualification and the respective em-

ployment position. Taking into account that the qualification is achieved not only through acquisition of professional education but also through the experience of practical work, an additional standard criterion of education is reasonably introduced, according to which the employee education level should be not lower than the secondary vocational one.

The education level is a necessary, but not sufficient criterion for referring the employees to the middle class in terms of the position held at the labor market and in the sphere of employment. It is also important how the given educational potential is implemented by the employee. Employment situation criterion reflecting employment characteristics is proposed as a sufficient criterion for middle class identification with respect to its labor market situation in the sphere of employment.

The main standard employment situation criterion has established the following requirement for wage and salary workers employment: availability of employment as highly skilled workers or managers of organization/organization department. The additional standard employment situation criterion consists in the fact that an employee can have average qualification level.

There has been grounded and determined the potential of middle classes among the employees, meeting the criteria of education and employment situation, consisting of the core, extended core and peripheral part.

The middle class core includes the employees meeting both the main standard criterion of education and the main standard criterion of the employment situation. That is, the employees with educational level not lower than the higher vocational education, holding work positions which require high skills, or the managers of organizations and organization departments.

The extended core is represented by the employees meeting one of the main standard criteria — education criterion or employment situation criterion, and one of the additional criteria. These are the managers of organizations and organization departments, higher qualification specialists with secondary vocational education, as well as average qualification specialist with education not lower than the higher professional one.

The middle class periphery includes the employees which strictly meet the requirements of two additional standard criteria — education criterion and employment situation criterion. Accordingly, the peripheral part of middle classes is formed by the employees who are specialists having an average qualification level, with secondary vocational education.

Table 1

Potential middle class boundaries determined on the basis of standard education and employment situation criteria*

Middle class (MC) formation versions	Middle class boundaries (in percentage of the number of employees)
First version (MC core)	15.3
Second version (with MC extended core taken into account)	27.1
Third version (with MC extended core and periphery taken into account)	35.0

* Calculated by the authors on the basis of the data of the Russia Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (RLMS), the 20-th wave.

As of 2011 the middle class core included 15.3 % of the total employees. The extended core included 11.8 % of employees, and the middle class periphery constituted 7.9 %. The estimations carried out showed that the total middle class (including the core, the extended core and the periphery) comprised 35 % of the number of employees (please refer to Table 1).

The potential available for employees to enter the middle classes, determined on the basis of education and employment situation criteria, can be considered significant, and in the long term, when fulfilling other criterion conditions, its representatives could significantly enlarge the Russian middle classes.

One of such most important criteria supplementing the education level and the employment situation is a standard rate of wages. A standard employee's average income consumer budget (AICB) has been developed for the first time for the modern Russia conditions, taking into account the size and socio-demographic composition of household taken as the basis of the determination of the standard level of wages.

Unlike minimum consumer budgets, the AICB provides the extended reproduction of the employee and its household (family), affords opportunities for: supporting the competence of higher and secondary vocational education and increase of skill level; supporting health, active recreation and satisfaction of other needs required for family worker. The worker's AICB includes the common family expenses for the household from four persons — two adult persons and two children. The standards for comfortable housing provision have been established: the total housing area is 30 sq.m. per person, the availability of central water supply and water disposal, central heating, hot water supply, telephone line, as well as the requirement

Table 2

Losses of average classes among the employees due to the inconformity of employment situation with the education criterion^{*}

Middle class (MC) formation versions	Middle class boundaries (on the basis of education and employment situation criteria) (in percentage of employees)		Losses of Middle Class (in percentage of potential boundaries of middle classes)
	Actual	Potential	
First version (MC core)	15.3	29.2	47.6
Second version (with the extended MC core taken into account)	27.1	33.4	18.9
Third version (with the extended core and periphery of MC taken into account)	35.0	41.3	15.3

^{*} The indicators of tables 2 and 3 were calculated by the authors on the basis of the data of the RLMS, 20-th wave.

Table 3

The losses of middle classes among the number of employees due to the inconformity with the standard level of wages

Middle class formation versions	Employees, referred to middle classes on the basis of education and employment situation criteria (in % of the number of employees)	Among them the share of workers with wages meeting the average standard level of wages for reference to the middle classes [*] (in % of the middle class boundaries on the basis of education and employment situation criteria)	Losses of middle classes ^{**} (in percentage of the boundaries of the middle class on the basis of education and employment situation criteria)
First version (MC core)	15.3	3.3	96.4
Second version (with the extended core of MC taken into account)	27.1	2.6	97.2
Third version (with the extended core and periphery of MC)	35	2.2	97.7

^{*} The workers with higher wages compared with the given standard were not considered here.

^{**} Calculated as the share of workers with lower wages compared with the standard.

for the number of rooms in the housing – not less than one per household member [5, p. 191-220].

This consumer budget allows having an appropriate housing thanks to savings, credits or rent. Measured in 2011 rubles, such AICB constituted 59723 rubles. (or 8.7 minimum wages of able-bodied population). The average monthly nominal wage determined on the basis of the AICB of the worker of full household with two children constituted 10.1 minimum wages of able-bodied population, which was 69642 rubles measured in 2011 rubles. 69642 rubles. It allowed providing the equivalent per capita income in full household with two workers and two children at the rate of 44930 rubles, which was 7.1 minimum wages and is the criterion boundary of per capita income. When this income is achieved, the household (family) shall be included in the middle classes with regard to the material provision.¹

At the following stage, there were determined the losses of potential middle classes among the

employees due to inconformity of their actual characteristics with the standard criteria of professional education, employment situation, wages and housing provision. It has been established that due to the inconformity of the employment situation with the main standard education criterion, up to half of the number of employees potentially referring to the middle classes is lost (refer to Table 2).

Therefore, the core of middle classes among the employees could be 29.2 % instead of 15.3 %. In case of two other versions of middle class identification their boundaries could achieve 33.4 % and 41.3 % of the number of employees, respectively.

The main reason of the losses of middle classes among the employees is a low wage that does not meet its standard level (refer to Table 3).

Due to low wages, the employees among the managers of organizations and organization departments, as well as the higher and middle qualification specialists with higher and average vocational education, having full households with two children, constitute from 2.2 % to 3.3 % of the to-

¹ Calculated by the authors.

tal number of employees, whether the matter concerns the core or the extended composition of middle classes.

One more specifically Russian cause of the losses of middle classes among the employees is the absence of rental housing market, which does not allow the employees satisfying the education, an employment situation and wage criteria to rent adequate housing. They have to save money, or solve this problem by means of mortgage lending. Thus, among all employees constituting the middle class potential with regard to the education and employment situation criteria, and meeting the standard criterion of wages, only 18.6–21.9 % had standard housing provision.¹ And among the employees who have two-parent families with two children, meeting these three criteria, those who had the necessary housing provision were not identified. Therefore, the nonconformity with housing provision criterion narrows to even more extent the number of the category indicated employees included in the middle classes, and for those of them who have established households with two or more children the entering the middle classes is practically impossible.

All these provide evidence of extremely irrational use of the education and occupational skill potential of the most of intellectuals among the employees, as well as the working class segment, who have higher and average vocational education and hold the company manager or specialist post or perform the work requiring higher and average qualification, and also give evidence of the low level and quality of their living in modern Russia.

Beyond the scope of this survey are the employees among managers, specialists and government authority employees, local officials and public association officials, as well as the company employees meeting the education and employment situation criteria, the material criteria of reference to middle classes. They were not considered because with respect to the labor complexity they should be referred to upper classes within the group of employees. A part of them is de facto referred to middle classes rather than to upper ones, but their number is insignificant compared with the quantity of the employee categories considered.

4. Reality and Official Forecasts of the Russian Society Social Structure Dynamics

The official Forecast of long-term social economic development of our country up to 2030 has determined the boundaries of achieving the

number of middle classes constituting, according to different forecast versions, from one third to more than a half of the population [14, p. 29]. In the statement of question of the composition and number of middle classes, in the official Forecast, the matter concerns the entire population rather than the economically active one. This means that the middle classes include the household members which the authors cannot agree with. The declared boundaries of the middle class number rest upon understated, or non-specific criteria of their identification: the incomes — the minimum wage budget, and the rest standards (housing standards, recreation standards, etc.) are not determined clearly. The authors' assessments based on the above-interpreted criteria of middle class identification show that their specific weight in the Russian society social structure, judging by the forecasting dynamics of other indicators of the economy and social sphere development is unlikely to achieve the anticipated boundaries and is likely to constitute other lower values [16, p. 25-48].

Conclusions

— The multicriteria social class structures identified on the basis of interaction of factors characterizing the economically active population living are an important tool for working out the national scientifically grounded social policy. It is necessary to come down from the analysis of social class structures formed mainly on the basis of distribution of personal money incomes to their identification on the basis of the multiplicity of criterion factors, as well as to refer to the objective nature of social structures varying due to people's behavior evolution, setting new goals by them which are aimed at achieving higher quality and level of living.

— Among various social theories of identification of social class structures those of them are presently prevailing which consider human material and ideal needs as the basis of unification of people in social classes. The material needs in these theories are associated with the presence or absence of property of means of production and labor market situation and the resulting people's life chances. Among ideal needs the preference is given to the attitude towards the authority and social status.

— With liberal theories prevailing, the Russian scientists carry out the structuring of the society mainly within the framework of place and role of the economically active population at the labor market and subjective assessment given by them to their economic and social situation. In this con-

¹ Calculated by the authors.

text, there can be distinguished a great number of social strata holding the upper, middle and lower position on the wealth-poverty scale and the respective status positions. The middle classes are assigned with a particular social mission, which finds its expression in the state social policy aimed at increasing their sizes and role in the society.

— The middle classes in modern Russian surveys and practical social policy are mainly associated with personal business proprietors (the core is represented by medium, small and partially big business) and professionals who are not referred to employees. The working class and the mass presented intellectuals among professional employees are taken out in the liberal paradigm of the capitalist society development from the sphere of the priority scientific analysis and are excluded from the sphere of economic and social policy of creating conditions for entering the middle classes.

— With a huge role in the society, available high professional and educational potential of the employees, their representation among the middle classes is presently hardly visible, and among

the families with two and more children they are almost absent within the economically active population categories considered by the authors.

— It is necessary to implement sufficiently radical changes in the state social policy priorities in order to create the conditions for the conformity of the employee family living standards and quality with the middle class social standards.

— The following remains important a) continuation of the development of methods and tools of learning the interaction of criterion factors related to different components of identification of social class structures of the society; b) explanation of quantitative characteristics of the obtained results, including carrying out of econometric, qualimetric and other evaluation of social class structures; c) carrying out of multicriteria modeling of social class and other social structures.

— It is necessary to review the forecast of long-term social and economic development of the Russian Federation till 2030 with regard to the social structure of the society, taking into account more grounded and specific criteria of identification of middle classes.

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