

95 and Not Dead Yet: Karl Marx and my Mother were Alike

by [Reg Green](#) (May 2024)



Neither would have believed their eyes, reading a definition of the working class used recently in the *New York Times* as 'people without a bachelor's degree.' He, because it would have destroyed his predictions of the inevitable degradation of 'the proletariat' and therefore couldn't be true; she, because, like all her friends, she left school to join the working class when she was 13.

One night in her row house in a gray industrial city in Northern England, she heard a scrap of conversation between a woman and a small boy trudging by her window. "Tired, cock?" the woman asked. "Tired, mammy," he replied. "Aye, and tha' mammy's, tired too," she said.

Since I was told that story as a child, that fragment of sadness has summed up for me the chronic weariness of the bulk of the population in those days. That was what my mother and Marx meant when they spoke of 'the working class.'

Even in the US on the eve of World War II, only 25 percent of adults had finished high school. Five percent had a bachelor's degree or higher.

So when we complain how tiring our jobs are, how noisy the office is, how many times we've had to work late, let's never give up striving to improve working conditions but also let's never forget either how far we've come in some very important ways since that mammy and child walked slowly home.

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