Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Studies 27 (1995) 65-90. 

# OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN BRITAIN

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## *Class Analysis and Fuzzy Boundaries*

It is widely believed that in British society class distinctions are notoriously wide and deeply entrenched. Yet on the basis of their systematic cross-national study of occupational mobility in the 1970s Erikson and Goldthorpe (1993) concluded that, in comparison with other Western and Eastern European countries, with America and Australia and with Japan, the rigidity or impermeability of class boundaries in Britain was in no way exceptional.

In ordinary everyday speech in England we tend to use the word "class" to refer to questions of social status in the sense of differences of life-style, of values and culture or of social esteem, at least as much as to the essentially economic relationships that are the core of Marx's and Weber's concepts of class. For Weber all forms of stratification are power relations between groups differentiated in terms of the kinds of resource to which they have access. Classes are distinguished from one another by the different resources they bring to the market and stratified economically by the price they can obtain there or, in social terms, by the collective freedom from control by other groups which the possession of the resource provides for them (Weber). In the analysis of social structure the Marxian or Weberian concepts of class draw our attention to the relative powers of groups identified by their different resources.

In following Weber's emphasis on power relations, rather than regarding inequalities as differential individual attributes or continuous variables in a multidimensional social space (see eg. Runciman 1968; Hope 1972; Featherman et al. 1975; Hauser and Grusky 1988), we are in broad agreement with Goldthorpe and Marshall (1992) regarding the continuing importance of the idea of class in social analysis. There may be more difference between us however when it comes to the continuing substantive importance of class divisions in present-day Britain. It is, nevertheless a major part of the analytic importance of the concept that it enables us to estimate how far that may or may not be true.

We can agree with Runciman's argument (1993) that the fundamental structure of British society is marked by a strong continuity firmly set on the same economic and political foundations since the end of the First World War. Yet there are signs of accelerating change in the post-Second World War period. While we can also agree that these are not a matter of "Thatcherism" (ibid. p.63), major changes in the composition of classes appear to be tak-

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This paper was presented Hitotsubashi University, November 1994, as part of Joint Hitotsubashi and Sheffield Universities Research Project "Structure and Change in Modern Society-a comparative study of Japan and the UK"

ing place which are not merely cyclical, and their qualitative repercussions, cultural and political, are likely to be far reaching.

Wealth is still very unequally distributed. But the shape of the distribution has become appreciably less skewed in the course of the twentieth century. The fortunes of the moderately prosperous have grown and account for an increasing proportion of all the wealth in private hands. In 1923 the richest one percent of the population owned 61 percent of all marketable assets and the richest ten percent held nine tenths. Now, in the 1990s, one must include half the population before accounting for a similar proportion of all wealth and the richest one percent own 18 percent of marketable wealth. The greatest changes took place after the Second World War. (Atkinson and Harrison, Table 6.5). Rising living standards and the spread of home ownership have much to do with that. Two-thirds of all households were in owner-occupied dwellings in 1990 (*Social Trends 24*, Chart 8. 8). But the ownership of productive wealth has become more widespread too. Following on the privatisation of formerly nationalised industries after 1983, share-holding increased from 7 percent of the adult population in 1979 to 25 percent in 1991, with 40 percent owned by occupationally working-class shareholders (*Social Trends 24*). Together with indirect ownership through superannuation pension schemes, insurance and building society funds, unit trusts etc., it has been estimated

TABLE 1. INCREASE IN REAL EARNINGS OF EMPLOYEES 1970 - 1990
Percentage increase above or below the increase in RPI)

| | 1970 - 75 | 1975 - 80 | 1980 - 85 | 1985 - 90 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *MEN* | | | | |
| Higher Professions | 17.4 | 31.9 | 8.0 | 39.2 |
| Lower Professions | 18.6 | −5.6 | 14.4 | 28.5 |
| Management | −3.7 | 29.0 | 8.0 | 35.2 |
| Clerical | 5.0 | 6.7 | 16.1 | 27.4 |
| Foremen/Supervisors | 11.7 | 7.5 | 10.0 | 26.9 |
| Skilled Manual | 27.5 | −1.2 | 8.9 | 28.4 |
| Semi-Skilled | 24.4 | 2.2 | −7.3 | 33.0 |
| Unskilled | 19.6 | 1.3 | −2.0 | 25.4 |
| All Men | 21.4 | 5.2 | 13.0 | 32.8 |
| *WOMEN* | | | | |
| Higher Professions | -- | -- | 16.9 | 37.2 |
| Lower Professions | 54.7 | −13.6 | 16.7 | 43.9 |
| Management | -- | -- | 68.4 | 46.2 |
| Clerical | 30.5 | 11.1 | 18.2 | 31.1 |
| Foremen/Supervisors | 57.4 | −4.3 | 9.5 | 40.6 |
| Skilled Manual | -- | -- | -- | 22.1 |
| Semi-Skilled | 46.2 | 8.5 | 13.3 | 23.3 |
| Unskilled | 72.1 | 8.7 | 4.8 | 20.4 |
| All Women | 57.7 | 11.2 | 18.6 | 37.4 |
| Retail Prices Index Percentage increase | 80.0 | 100.0 | 41.7 | 21.6 |

Calculated from: *New Earnings Surveys*
The Classification of occupations is that employed in Routh's study of occupations and pay in the earlier part of the century and fully described in Routh (1987) Appendix.

that at least a third of the population have a mediated, but real, material interest in the market value of stocks and shares. As Ivor Crewe has noted, "When Mrs. Thatcher became prime minister, trade unionists outnumbered shareholders in the electorate by four to one. When she left Downing Street, shareholders outnumbered trade unionists by five to four" (1993, p.116).

But while ownership has become more widely distributed the composition of capital ownership has changed. The individual investor has come to play a reduced role in the ownership of the economy. As Sampson pointed out, "... over thirty years the holdings of individual shareholders, despite their growing numbers, have been going down by one percent a year, down from 70 percent to 20 percent of the total value of shares" (1992, p.91). The growing importance of the institutions, banks and pension funds, insurance companies and other institutional investors may only be an example of the receding locus of power (Noble 1981, p.301). To consider even the richest one percent of the population, however, we are looking at more than half a million people. This is a far greater number than would normally be considered as constituting the wealth elite or the dominant capitalist class. Beresford's study of the 400 richest people in Britain (1991) is nearer the mark, though to keep a sense of proportion, it is as well to bear in mind that in this case we are concerned with less than 0.001 percent of the population. Even this small fraction, containing the most economically powerful in the land, the degree of social closure (Parkin 1971, 1979, Murphy) is low.

TABLE 2.

A. PERCENTAGE INCREASE IN RETAIL PRICE INDEX AND GROSS WEEKLY HOUSEHOLD INCOMES 1970 - 1990

| | Retail Price Index Increase % | Increase in Gross Weekly Household Income Lowest Decile % | Lower Quartile % | Median % | Upper Quartile % | Highest Decile % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1970 - 80 | 260 | 284 | 248 | 317 | 331 | 333 |
| 1980 - 90 | 72 | 76 | 89 | 108 | 129 | 139 |

B. GROSS WEEKLY HOUSEHOLD INCOME AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE MEDIAN

| | Lowest Decile | Lower Quartile | Upper Quartile | Highest Decile |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1970 | 31.4 | 60.1 | 141.0 | 194.4 |
| 1980 | 28.9 | 50.1 | 145.7 | 201.9 |
| 1990 | 24.6 | 45.7 | 160.7 | 232.2 |

Calculated from *Family Expenditure Surveys*

While living standards rose for everyone except at the lower quartile between 1970 and 1980 the improvements have been much greater and increasingly so for the higher income households. Part of the widening inequality reflects the growing number of one person households dependant on welfare benefits and the higher levels of unemployment at the later dates while among the higher income households a growing number benefit from the increasing proportion with several earners as more married women go out to work in paid employment. However as Table 1 shows inequality in earnings between better and worse paid jobs has been widening so the greater dispersion in household incomes is not simply the outcome of structural changes.

Amongst the people with personal fortunes of £20 million or more in 1990, who constituted Beresford's population of the rich, half had inherited wealth but half were substantially self-made fortunes.

These trends in the distribution and concentration of wealth, especially in the ownership of productive capital, indicate an increasingly depersonalised structure with the division of society into identifiable classes of property owners and propertyless decreasingly relevant as a useful model of social process.

Looking at incomes, the division of society into income classes determined by the labour market is similarly in decline. Boundaries become more and more blurred (Table 1) the distribution of manual working-class incomes increasingly overlap and not just at the level of routine white-collar jobs where skilled manual workers earnings on average have exceeded

TABLE 3.

A: SELECTED CONTRIBUTORY BENEFITS PER RECIPIENT AT 1992 - 3 PRICES

| | 1976 - 7 £ | 1981 - 2 £ | 1992 - 3 £ |
|---|---|---|---|
| Retirement Pensions | 2397.8 | 2479.9 | 2710.0 |
| Widows Benefit | 3159.2 | 2769.6 | 4317.6 |
| Invalidity Benefit | 4035.3 | 3827.3 | 4094.0 |
| Unemployment Benefit | 3147.2 | 2572.1 | 2570.6 |

*Source*; calculated from *Social Trends 24*, 1994 Table 5. 10

B: SELECTED NON CONTRIBUTORY BENEFITS PER RECIPIENT AT 1992 - 3 PRICES

| | 1976 - 7 £ | 1981 - 2 £ | 1992 - 3 £ |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Non - income related Benefits* | | | |
| Child Benefit | 278.8 | 473.0 | 461.9 |
| One - Parent Benefit | --- | 279.9 | 309.4 |
| Non - contributary Retirement Pension | 1587.5 | 1440.0 | 1200.0 |
| War Pension | 2400.0 | 2559.4 | 3122.6 |
| Disability Allowances * | 1502.7 | 1581.2 | 1666.7 |
| *Income Related Benefits* | | | |
| Supplementary Benefit, Supplementary Pension, Income Support | 2022.5+ | 2395.4+ | 2718.2+ |
| Family Income Supplement, Family Credit | 900.0+ | 976.0+ | 2057.1+ |
| Housing Benefit-rentrebates and allowances | --- | 563.0 | 815.8 |

*Source*: Calculated from Social Trends 24, 1994, Table 5.9

+ Changes over time as new benefits have been introduced and others withdrawn are reflected in aggregated figures.

* Includes Attendance Allowance, Invalid Care Allowance, Severe Disablement Allowance, Mobility Allowance, Disability Living Allowance, Disability Working Allowance.

clerical workers for many years. There are no discontinuities. On the other hand inequalities are growing within occupational groups and overall as the dispersion of earnings-that is the gap between highest and lowest-widens (Table 2). This underlines firstly, that class and inequality are not the same thing and secondly that market forces play a growing part in determining living standards. The real gap in the distribution of incomes is that between those in the labour market and those outside it-largely dependent on welfare benefits-whose living standards have lagged behind those in employment. At the other end of the scale those rich enough to be relatively independent of the labour market have done very well from tax changes and in some sectors the ability largely to determine the level of their own remuneration.

There is no well established evidence of a systematic political attack on the welfare state. Government expenditure in 1990 as a proportion of GNP was only four percent less than it was in 1980 while as a proportion of General Government Expenditure spending on health and social security increased from 38 percent in 1981 to 47 percent in 1992 (*Social Trends 24* table 6. 21). Taxes remained at about a third of GNP throughout the 'Thatcher' years and welfare expenditure increased in proportion to, or better than, inflation. Some groups, notably the disabled, have gained while others, particularly the unemployed, have fallen behind in real terms but Income Support, the basis for poverty rate calculations, has risen in real terms since 1981 (Table 3). In other words, we can quarrel if we want to with government policy and priorities but overall the role of redistribution through the Welfare State has grown in response to increasing market-determined inequalities. The ratio of equivalised household original incomes in the poorest and most prosperous fifths of households was 1 : 22 in 1979 and 1 : 24 in 1991. After taking direct and indirect taxes and benefits into account, the ratio of final incomes in the bottom and top fifth of households was 1 : 4 in 1979 and again 1 : 4 in 1991 (calculated from *Social Trends 24* table 5. 18). One may be astonished by the size of the reduction in inequality or shocked by the amount of inequality that persists, but the fact of significant redistribution remains. The growing disparities in preredistribution incomes between rich and poor is due to higher incomes increasing faster than lower incomes and not as a consequence of the immiseration of the poor.

Inequalities in education have been declining. It is not just that more children are staying on at school beyond the minimum leaving age or that more have been obtaining better educational qualifications and proceeding thereafter into higher education. International comparisons suggest there is still much room for improvement there. There is however compelling evidence of a growing convergence of educational attainment levels between children from different social backgrounds. An analysis of 5 year birth cohorts born between 1910 and 1964 by Jonsson and Mills revealed a continuous narrowing of class inequalities in educational attainments in Britain in contrast with France, Italy and West Germany, USA and Japan where the evidence suggests they are stable or even worsening (Jonsson and Mills 1993).

In employment the spread of information technology, the emergence of new jobs and re-definition of skills in existing jobs and changing working practices (see Institute for Employment Research 1991) has had widespread effects on class differences in work life experience and work related benefits and conditions. At the same time the growing number of dual earner households multiplies the complexity of occupational class differences when husbands and wives in manual and professional jobs share the same breakfast table.

TABLE 4. DISTRIBUTION OF THE WORKING POPULATION BY INDUSTRIAL GROUPING IN GREAT BRITAIN.

(Percentages)

| | 1938 | 1951 | 1961 | 1971 | 1981 | 1991 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Agriculture, Energy, Water and Construction | 19.0 | 17.1 | 15.5 | 11.1 | 10.1 | 7.6 |
| Manufacturing | 36.6 | 39.3 | 38.5 | 36.4 | 28.4 | 21.6 |
| Services | 44.4 | 43.6 | 46.0 | 52.5 | 61.5 | 70.8 |
| Total (millions) | 17.4 | 22.2 | 23.2 | 22.1 | 21.9 | 22.2 |

*Source*; calculated from *Annual Abstracts of Statistics 90*, 1953 Tables 119, 120; *100*, 1963 Table 132; *Social Trends 23*, 1993 Table 4.2. Changes in the Standard Industrial Classification in 1948 and 1970 more detailed comparisons across these dates uncertain.

Unemployment it is true, though falling in 1993 and 94 is a much greater hazard for the manual working class and remains at a historically high level. But employment, particularly of women and especially in the services sector, has grown. The trends in earnings, however, contradict the classical Marxist view that the unemployed constitute a reserve army of labour in the interests of capital. Real incomes have, on the contrary, risen rather than fallen as the "reserve army of labour" thesis would lead one to expect. The widening dispersion of incomes within both the working class and the middle class, the changing patterns of property ownership and the continuing de-alignment of class position and voting preferences indicate an increasing impact on British society of economic and social change. Even the leadership of the Labour Party has come to recognise this after four successive General Election defeats. The view that society is in essence a zero-sum confrontation of two antagonistic principles, capital and labour, has come to seem increasingly anachronistic in an era of growing structural complexity.

I described this blurring of sharp divisions, the trend toward increasingly fuzzy boundaries in my 1981 book on British social structure (Noble 1981). These tendencies have intensified over the past fifteen years and have become part of the received wisdom of postmodernisation theory (though I had not heard of the term then). Lash and Urry's account of the end of organised capitalism (1987) makes many of the same points in more general terms. Crook, Pakulski and Waters stress the process of dedifferentiation as the key element in postmodernisation (1993, p.228). They describe how postmodernisation is characterised by

"an unprecedented level of unpredictability and apparent chaos. Action is divorced from underlying material constraints (or rather these constraints disappear) and enters the voluntaristic realm of taste, choice and preference. As it does so the boundaries between determined social groups disappear. So class, gender and ethnicity decline in social significance and so also do some of their characteristic forms of expression, including class-based political action and the distinction between high and popular culture" (*ibid.* p.35).

In contrast with our attitude towards the work of Goldthorpe (*vide supra*), I think it is possible, as I have already suggested, to agree with much of this at a descriptive level but still

believe that adducing structural factors to account for these changes is both possible and, in the interests of understanding the process, necessary.

## *Structural Change in the Distribution of Occupations*

Changes in the occupational structure during the twentieth century have been the prod-

TABLE 5.

A: OCCUPATIONAL CLASSES IN GREAT BRITAIN 1911 - 1991

(Percentage of Economically Active Population)

| | 1911 | 1931 | 1951 | 1961 | 1961 | 1971 | 1981 | 1991 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employers, Managers and Professionals | 11.1 | 11.5 | 12.4 | 13.2 | 11.1 | 13.1 | 15.3 | 19.9 |
| Other Non-manual | 14.3 | 18.2 | 23.4 | 27.5 | 29.7 | 39.2 | 34.8 | 40.8 |
| All Non-manual | 25.4 | 29.7 | 35.8 | 40.7 | 40.8 | 46.0 | 50.1 | 60.7 |
| Skilled Manual | 30.5 | 26.7 | 24.9 | 25.3 | 26.7 | 23.7 | 20.1 | 15.3 |
| Other Manual | 44.1 | 43.5 | 39.2 | 34.0 | 32.4 | 30.3 | 29.7 | 24.1 |
| All Manual | 74.6 | 70.3 | 64.2 | 59.3 | 59.1 | 54.0 | 49.8 | 39.4 |
| Economically Active Population (millions) | 18.3 | 21.0 | 22.5 | 23.6 | 24.0 | 25.0 | 25.4 | 25.9 |

B: OCCUPATIONAL CLASSES OF ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE MEN 1961 - 1991 GREAT BRITAIN

(Percentages)

| | 1961 | 1971 | 1981 | 1991 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employers, Managers and Professionals | 14.3 | 17.3 | 20.3 | 25.5 |
| Other Non-manual | 20.9 | 22.8 | 22.8 | 28.2 |
| Skilled Manual and Foremen | 34.9 | 33.6 | 30.0 | 24.3 |
| Other Manual | 29.9 | 26.3 | 26.9 | 22.0 |
| All | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| N=100% (millions) | 16.2 | 15.8 | 15.5 | 14.4 |

*Sources:* 1911-61 derived from Richard Brown "Work" in Philip Abrams (ed.) *Work, Urbanism and Inequality,* Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978, Table 2-8 p.75; 1961-1971 from Trevor Noble *Modern Britain,* Batsford, 1977, Table 5.9 p.168; 1981 calculated from *Census 1981 National Report: Great Britain, Part 2,* HMSO, 1983, Table 46; 1991 calculated from *1991 Census Report for Great Britain Part 2,* Table 92, HMSO 1993.

The occupational classes are condensed from the seventeen socio-economic groups used in the census tables as follows:

Employers, Managers and Professionals: SEG's 1-4, 13

Other Non-manual: SEG's 5, 6, 12, 14

Skilled Manual: SEG's 7, 10, 11, 15-17.

Other Manual: SEG's 8, 9.

uct of two separate but interrelated processes. The first is the transformation of the industrial economy with the resulting decline of employment in the manufacturing sector, together with dramatic declines in mining, agriculture, (in any case fewer than ten percent of the labour force throughout the century-see Routh 1987) and railway transport and the growth of service sector jobs (Table 4). The second is the changing pattern of employment within industries as a consequence of technological and organisational change reducing the need for manual workers but increasing employment proportionately and, even within many declining industries, some times even absolutely, of managerial, professional, technical, financial and clerical workers. The growth of employment in the services sector, however, really only took off in the 1960s. The rapid contraction in manufacturing employment began in the 1970s and accelerated in the 1980s. Most of the alteration in the pattern of employment before then is therefore attributable to organisational changes within industries rather than to sectoral changes.

In the early years of the century, before the 1914-18 war, most workers, about 75 percent, were manual workers and even after the Second World War two out of three British workers were in manual jobs (Table 5A). The number of managers and professionals grew only slowly during the first half of the century. The growth rate only accelerating from the 1960s. Clerical workers, sales-workers and the minor professions increased their numbers much more rapidly at first though their growth rate slowed down to something close to that of the professional and managerial group in the 1970s, speeding up again afterwards. The numbers of skilled manual workers and foremen declined slowly at first, and even increased for a time after the Second World War but dwindled more rapidly from the 1960s. The greatest period of decline in semi-skilled and un-skilled manual jobs before the 1980s was during the 1950s and the contraction in this group continued at a slower rate until the major reductions in the most recent period.

The growing number of women in the labour force, from 32 percent in 1957 to 43 percent in 1991, heavily concentrated in clerical and secretarial, sales and personal services and in the minor professions in education and health care, over 60 percent women in 1991, adds an additional dimension to the occupational transition however. Amongst men taken by themselves (Table 5B), professional and managerial employment increased rapidly after 1961, from 14.3 percent of men in that year to 25.5 percent in 1991. It was only after 1981 that the numbers of men in other non-manual jobs began to increase rapidly. Male manual employment also decreased more slowly until the 1980s but in the ten years from 1981 fell from 57 percent of all men's jobs to 46 percent in 1991. Women's employment in manual jobs decreased more slowly in this latter period and so accounted for a larger proportion in 1991 than formerly. Those classified as skilled manual workers and foremen however still represented less than 10 percent of women workers at the latter date.

The earlier part of the series presented in Table 5 can be thought of as the changing social origins from which recent recruits to the working population have been drawn. The later part of the series portrays the changing pattern of opportunities within which they have pursued their careers. With the industrial and organisational changes taking place in the 1980s and the 1990s the change in the pattern of opportunities has accelerated. Unfortunately, however, most of the evidence we have about the relationships between social origins and career destinations derives from the earlier 1970s before this acceleration got under way.

## *The Significance of Occupational Mobility*

The position of the various occupational groups in the labour market is still associated, however much the associations may be loosening, with inequalities of income, respect and the influence which their membership collectively can command. But as M.G. Smith pointed out almost thirty years ago, it is not just the facts of inequality which are important structurally. Inequalities between individuals or groups of individuals may be a matter of luck, temperament, skill, hard work and so forth and may be accidental or temporary. It is the institutionalisation of these inequalities which divides a society into social strata and "stratification is the restriction of access to positions of varying advantage" (Smith 1966, p.162). Thus, it is when the division of labour in society constitutes a set of boundaries which divide the society into segregated strata that we can speak of classes. As Blackburn and Mann put it "social stratification involves two elements, inequality and segregation" (1979, p.23) and segregation is measured by the amount of movement between the unequal locations.

If the pattern of inequality is growing more complex with increasing inequalities of income but a blurring of boundaries between occupational classes, what of the other element in stratification, the question of access to more advantaged or less advantaged social positions?

Payne (1987a and b, 1990) believes that structural changes in the economy with growing numbers in professional and managerial jobs and a shrinking manual working class must inevitably generate more intergenerational mobility, with widening opportunities for working-class children to match the careers of their middle-class age-peers. Westergaard, on the other hand, making use of one of the findings of Payne's own Scottish Mobility Study (Payne 1987a) argues that these structural changes have meant that middle-class children, with all their initial social advantages, have been able to make equal or even greater use of these opportunities so that relative inequalities have been maintained (Westergaard 1990). In an earlier discussion Westergaard argued that "Capitalism... sets up pressures to ease mobility as well as to limit it" (Westergaard and Resler 1975, p.318). Thus, on the one hand, continuing low rates of long-range upward mobility in capitalist societies demonstrates the continuing domination of the propertied class while, on the other hand, any increase in upward mobility of the gifted, ambitious or technically qualified would only serve to strengthen that domination (cf. Mach and Wesolowski, p.89). The logical problems of combining these arguments are obvious. Certainly they are irrefutable since no conceivable observation could undermine them. The shift in focus to relative mobility chances and away from absolute rates would appear to be an attempt to resolve these contradictions and to rescue the earlier orthodoxy that any reduction in inequality, particularly in access to more privileged positions on the part of the children of the proletariat, is incompatible with the theory of class struggle.

Goldthorpe's focus on relative mobility chances (eg. 1980, Erikson and Goldthorpe 1993) though explicitly not grounded in a Marxist commitment, has, as Payne has several times observed (1987b, 1990), also emphasised the persistence of inequalities of opportunity rather than the increases in absolute mobility rates. This is not just a matter of the descriptive presentations of the data from the Oxford Mobility Study in which absolute rates are scrupulously reported, but, I believe, is reinforced by the measures contrived to compare mobility

chances. The elaborate statistical analyses based on log-linear models may sometimes obscure the nature of the social processes they purport to measure. In stressing the concept of fluidity Goldthorpe and his colleagues stress continuities rather than change and inequalities rather than growing opportunities.

I remain sceptical about the value of the concept of fluidity. Fluidity or "pure mobility" cannot be partialled out as separate from structural mobility (Noble 1978). Individuals, of course, experience mobility or the lack of it and Goldthorpe argues, quite rightly, that it is absolute mobility rates which are relevant to questions of class formation and action (1980, p.121). He describes fluidity as a property of the occupational division of labour, taken as a whole, relating to the relative accessibility of positions of origin or destination positions accounted for by the various classes. Fluidity for Goldthorpe and his colleagues is therefore a matter of relative mobility rather than absolute rates and is measured in terms of "odds ratios" whereby the chances of eg. men from what Goldthorpe describes as "service class" origins, that is with fathers in professional or managerial jobs, gaining such positions themselves, rather than ending in manual work, is measured against the chances of men from working-class origins reaching service class positions rather than following their fathers as manual workers. Using odds ratios Goldthorpe and his colleagues unsurprisingly confirm for England and Wales, as Hauser *et al.* did for the USA, what is termed the "constant fluidity model". But for odds ratios to show an increase in fluidity it would be necessary that, to confine ourselves to this example, the chances of men from working-class origins moving into professional and managerial jobs rather than into manual work should increase more than the corresponding chances of the sons of "service class" fathers themselves following such occupations rather than manual work. Now the minimal assumption of mere difference between occupational groups, even without the reinforcement of social, economic and cultural resources, means that this could only arise under two polarised sets of circumstances. These are, firstly, where the chances of self-recruitment into the advantaged group cannot increase because they are already maximal; or secondly, where having a father in one group was a disqualification for an individual's own membership of it, the kind of situation prevailing in an immediately post-revolutionary period. Odds ratios on the other hand would indicate a decrease in "fluidity" where social difference between classes increased. A decrease in social differences alone, however, which simply increased mobility into more desirable positions would thereby give no positive advantage to the formerly less privileged group and would therefore not show up in the odds ratios as an increase in fluidity. The odds ratio, in other words, is a statistic that, other than in exceptional historical circumstances (when there would be simpler ways of discovering what it indicates), can only vary in one direction. While Hauser was seeking to test the expectation that class differences in the USA had widened, Goldthorpe sought to show that despite increasing mobility from working class to "service class" this had not reduced inequality. These calculations serve only to obscure the changes in absolute mobility rates and the degree of inequality which persists could be more easily discerned in the degree of homogeneity of recruitment to professional and managerial jobs which a simple inflow analysis would reveal. As a property of the social system as a whole, the consequences of fluidity for actors within the system are invisible to them and hard to identify for the sociological observer. Absolute mobility rates by contrast indicate real opportunities and the evident continuities and discontinuities of class composition. Absolute rates can themselves motivate or discourage personal aspiration or social rebellion,

they are part of the real experience of social actors. They are, that is, a "social fact" rather than a procedural artefact. I am not convinced the same can be said of "fluidity".

## *Interpreting Mobility Trends*

From almost any theoretical point of view an overall reduction in the amount of movement between different origin and destination classes would be a sign of widening class divisions, or in Giddens' terminology, of an intensification of class structuration (Giddens 1973, p.107). Equally it can be argued that equality of opportunity cannot be wholly independent of equality of condition, and an increase in mobility across stratum boundaries can be taken as an indication of their declining salience.

Measured rates of occupational mobility are, of course, the product of the number and definition of the occupational categories within which a sample is classified. Equally important, but less frequently recognised in the literature, is the problem of the validity of the sampling proportions in relation to the population parameters (but see Noble 1972 and Payne 1987b) which can seriously distort reported rates. While this has been noted as a severe problem in evaluating Glass's pioneering 1949 survey, it also affects more recent data. If any reported measure of mobility is therefore, to some extent, artificial, it may be difficult to judge

TABLE 6. CAREER MOBILITY 1971 - 81

(Persons Economically Active for 10years × social class)

MEN 16yrs +

| 1971 Class | 1981 Class Professional and Managerial | Other Non-manual | Skilled Manual | Other Manual | All |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Professional and Managerial | 19.1 | 2.0 | 1.9 | 1.2 | 24.2 |
| Other Non-manual | 14.7 | 5.6 | 1.1 | 1.0 | 12.4 |
| Skilled Manual | 4.6 | 2.0 | 27.2 | 7.0 | 40.9 |
| Other Manual | 1.8 | 1.2 | 6.5 | 12.9 | 22.4 |
| All | 30.2 | 10.8 | 36.8 | 22.8 | 100.0 |
| N=100% | | | | | 99,495 |

WOMEN 16yrs +

| 1971 Class | 1981 Class Professional and Managerial | Other Non-manual | Skilled Manual | Other Manual | All |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Professional and Managerial | 14.5 | 2.7 | 0.6 | 1.2 | 19.0 |
| Other Non-manual | 5.9 | 28.6 | 1.1 | 5.1 | 40.7 |
| Skilled Manual | 0.8 | 1.8 | 3.4 | 3.5 | 9.5 |
| Other Manual | 2.3 | 4.8 | 3.5 | 20.3 | 30.9 |
| All | 23.5 | 37.9 | 8.6 | 30.1 | 100.0 |
| N=100% | | | | | 40,277 |

Calculated from: *Census 1971-1981 The Longitudinal Survey*, HMSO 1988, Table 2

whether the underlying reality is a high rate or a low. Cross-national comparisons may be relevant but within any given social order the most important perception may be a matter of whether mobility is increasing or decreasing. That is whether social divisions are becoming sharper or less restrictive. A study of mobility rates at a particular point in time may be much less revealing about a given social structure than a comparison of rates at different times in the past and the (more or less) present day.

Glass (1954), Payne (1987a), Goldthorpe et al. (1980) and Erikson and Goldthorpe (1993) sought to estimate mobility trends by comparing age cohorts within their respective samples. There are two main limitations of this procedure. Firstly, class differentials in mortality rates will affect the older cohorts in particular and in general exaggerate the proportions who are middle class since working-class men have a lower life expectancy (Goldblatt). Secondly, the uncompleted career mobility of the younger cohorts will reduce the total amount of mobility which is recorded amongst them with the effect of flattening out any over-time trends. Goldthorpe (1980) and Erikson and Goldthorpe (1993) have argued that most men have gained "occupational maturity" by their early thirties, so the effect on the younger cohorts in a sample of men aged 20 to 64, as in the Oxford Mobility Survey, are likely to be slight. This assumption is based on a survey of labour mobility in Britain 1953-1963 (Harris and Clausen). The more recent British *Census Longitudinal Survey* (OPCS 1988) however, indicates that, for men upwardly mobile in their careers between 1971 and 1981, 39 percent were already over the age of 35 and 77 percent of those downwardly mobile over the same period were already 35 or more in 1971. Amongst women who experienced upward career mobility between 1971 and 1981, 50 percent were 35 or more in 1971 as were 61 percent who experience downward career mobility in the same period (Table 7).

The only way to make confident statements about whether mobility has been increasing or decreasing is to compare independent population samples at different points in time. Goldthorpe and Payne (1986 and see Goldthorpe et al. 2nd Edn. 1987) made use of a reclassified sub-sample from the 1972 Oxford Mobility Survey and a sample of respondents from the 1983 British General Election Study to make just such an over-time comparison. There are, however, some problems which arise when comparing this analysis with other sources of information. Both 1972 and 1983 estimates of the professional and managerial "service" class are about half as big again as our census-based estimates in Table 5B. But that is perhaps only a matter of the differences between the definitions of Goldthorpe's 7 Occupational Classes and the Socio-economic Group basis used in the census, and at least both 1972 and 1983 data are coded and counted in exactly the same way. More unsatisfactory is the three class collapse of Goldthorpe's categories which is used, with an intermediate category combining clerical workers, self-employed workers below the professional level and manual foremen. Happily in later studies (eg. Erikson and Goldthorpe) this forced match has been sundered.

Over the eleven years of the comparison, 1972-83 downward mobility of men whose fathers were in management and the professions declined while the upward mobility of the sons of manual working-class fathers increased so that fewer than half had themselves become manual workers and more than one in five in the 1983 sample were in professional and managerial jobs.

It is difficult to relate this data directly to other studies in the past or to extend it over a longer time-span without access to the very considerable resources needed to mount a tailor-

made survey, in very large part, due to this idiosyncratic categorisation. Resorting to somewhat cruder methods however, it is at least possible to sketch longer term trends. Differences in elaborate and expensively derived classifications can be reduced to negligible levels by using only a manual/non-manual subdivision of the available data. Careful examination of the classifications used in the original studies will permit regrouping where necessary so that these two classes can be defined in a closely consistent way from one sample to another. The use of only two categories will tend to reduce the numerical rates of mobility recorded as much movement will be embraced within the limits of any one class. Any emerging trends are therefore likely to be conservative estimates rather than exaggerations of what ever the "real" pattern of mobility might be. Furthermore, the consistency of results over a series of studies will increase our confidence in the reliability of any one finding, where the vagaries of sampling might well produce a misleading result taken in isolation. In the graph the anomalous findings for 1975 suggest not only that that sample is in some respects not representative, but also serves to emphasise the consistency in the pattern of results revealed in the other five studies.

The graph (Fig. 1) plots intergenerational mobility outflows from non-manual to manual and from manual to non-manual classes. The first points in each trace are derived from Glass's 1949 survey of *Social Mobility in Britain* (1954) as reclassified by S.M. Miller (1960) into manual and non-manual categories. The sample has been criticised in the past and most severely by Payne (1987b). My own reservations (Noble 1972) are serious but the proximity in scale to those of Benjamin's 1951 analysis of census and birth records convince, me at least, that the 1949 figures are not in fact greatly misleading. Benjamin's estimates of upward

FIGURE 1. SIX ESTIMATES OF MANUAL - NON - MANUAL MOBILITY RATES IN BRITAIN (Outflows)

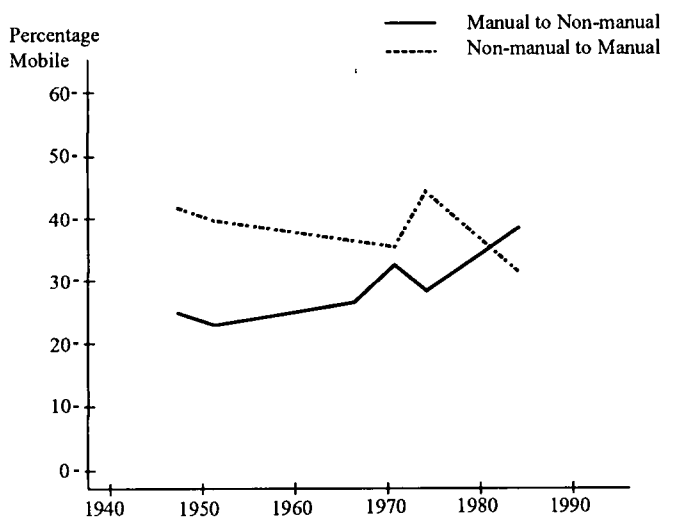


TABLE 7. CLASS MOBILITY AMONGST THE ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE 1971 - 81

*MEN*

| | Percentages | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Upwardly Mobile | Downwardly Mobile | No Change | All Economically Active 1971-81 |
| Aged in 1981: | | | | |
| 16−24 | 23.9 | 17.9 | 58.2 | 0.1 |
| 25−34 | 32.5 | 17.3 | 50.3 | 23.1 |
| 35−44 | 25.3 | 15.8 | 59.0 | 26.9 |
| 45−54 | 20.1 | 26.8 | 63.1 | 25.7 |
| 55−64 | 17.0 | 19.2 | 63.8 | 21.3 |
| 65+ | 12.2 | 30.0 | 57.8 | 2.9 |
| All 16+ | 23.5 | 17.5 | 59.0 | 100.0 |

*WOMEN*

| | Percentages | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Upwardly Mobile | Downwardly Mobile | No Change | All Economically Active 1971-81 |
| Aged in 1981: | | | | |
| 16−24 | 34.4 | 15.6 | 50.0 | 0.1 |
| 25−34 | 22.8 | 20.7 | 56.4 | 22.7 |
| 35−44 | 24.8 | 16.8 | 58.4 | 22.1 |
| 45−54 | 21.6 | 15.5 | 62.9 | 30.9 |
| 55−64 | 17.0 | 16.1 | 66.9 | 21.2 |
| 65+ | 11.5 | 20.6 | 67.8 | 3.0 |
| All 16+ | 21.3 | 17.3 | 61.4 | 100.0 |

*Source*: Calculated from: *Census 1971-1981 The Longitudinal Survey*, HMSO, 1988. Table 2.

TABLE 8. NON-MANUAL AND MANUAL OUTFLOWS IN SIX BRITISH STUDIES OF OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY 1949-1984

| England and Wales 1949 | | sons | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Non-manual % | Manual % | |
| Fathers | Non-manual | 57.9 | 42.1 | 100.0 |
| | Manual | 24.8 | 75.2 | 100.0 |

| England and Wales 1951 | | sons | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Non-manual % | manual % | |
| Fathers | Non-manual | 60.6 | 39.4 | 100.0 |
| | Manual | 23.0 | 77.0 | 100.0 |

| Five Boroughs 1967 | | Sons | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Non-manual % | Manual % | |
| Fathers | Non-manual | 64.2 | 35.8 | 100.0 |
| | Manual | 26.8 | 73.2 | 100.0 |

| England and Wales 1972 | | Sons | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Non-manual % | Manual % | |
| Fathers | Non-manual | 64.7 | 35.3 | 100.0 |
| | Manual | 33.3 | 66.6 | 100.0 |

| Great Britain 1975 | | Sons | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Non-manual % | Manual % | |
| Fathers | Non-manual | 54.8 | 45.2 | 100.0 |
| | Manual | 29.0 | 71.0 | 100.0 |

| Great Britain 1984 | | Sons | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Non-manual % | Manual % | |
| Fathers | Non-manual | 68.5 | 31.5 | 100.0 |
| | Manual | 38.5 | 61.5 | 100.0 |

Calculated from: Glass (1954); Benjamin (1958); F. Noble (n. d.); Goldthorpe *et al.* (1980); Layard *et al.* (1978); Marshall *et al.* (1989).

TABLE 9. NON-MANUAL AND MANUAL INFLOWS IN SIX BRITISH STUDIES OF OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY 1949-1984.

| England and Wales 1949 (Glass) | | Sons | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Non-manual | Manual |
| Fathers | Non-manual | 58.0 | 24.8 |
| | Manual | 42.0 | 75.2 |
| | | 100.0 | 100.0 |

| England and Wales 1951 (Benjamin) | | Sons | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Non-manual | Manual |
| Fathers | Non-manual | 45.5 | 13.9 |
| | Manual | 54.5 | 86.1 |
| | | 100.0 | 100.0 |

| Five Boroughs 1967 (F. Noble) | | Sons | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Non-manual | Manual |
| Fathers | Non-manual | 44.2 | 13.9 |
| | Manual | 55.8 | 86.1 |
| | | 100.0 | 100.0 |

| England and Wales 1972 (Goldthorpe et al.) | | Sons | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Non-manual | Manual |
| Fathers | Non-manual | 50.0 | 21.4 |
| | Manual | 50.0 | 78.6 |
| | | 100.0 | 100.0 |

| Great Britain 1975 (GHS) | | Sons | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Non-manual | Manual |
| Fathers | Non-manual | 45.9 | 22.2 |
| | Manual | 54.1 | 77.8 |
| | | 100.0 | 100.0 |

| Great Britain 1984 (Marshall et al.) | | Sons | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Non-manual | Manual |
| Fathers | Non-manual | 49.0 | 21.7 |
| | Manual | 51.0 | 78.3 |
| | | 100.0 | 100.0 |

*Calculated from sources as for Table 8.*

and downward mobility are both somewhat lower than Glass's but bear much the same relative relationships to one another as in the earlier study. Together they show about 23-25 percent of working-class sons upwardly mobile into middle-class jobs and 39-42 percent of middle-class sons downwardly mobile into manual working-class jobs. The 1967 estimates based on a re-analysis of data from Rose's racial prejudice survey of Five English Boroughs (see Noble 1975) show rates of downward mobility falling and upward mobility rising. The 1972 Oxford Mobility Survey (Goldthorpe *et al.* 1980) indicates a slight but continuing decline in downward mobility and an appreciable rise in upward mobility so that the two rates almost converge. Of course in all these surveys the manual working class outnumbers the non-manual middle class so that the total amount of upward mobility exceeds the downward.

In comparison with census-based estimates the Oxford Mobility Survey sample seems to over estimate the size of the professional and managerial group and under-estimate the numbers of manual workers (see Noble 1981, pp.202 and 208) but the idiosyncratic classification used in the study make any precise estimate of the discrepancy almost impossible. However, while this would distort estimates of total mobility in the resulting contingency table and probably also odds rations calculated from it, it is unlikely that it should affect the observed outflow and inflow rates in any very obvious way. In the complete $7 \times 7$ category table the 1972 survey showed a great deal of intergenerational mobility and in none of the occupational classes were there more than a minority of men at the same level as their fathers. At the same

time the study provides evidence of continuities in class position, particularly at the top and the bottom of the scale. Thus, if we combine categories into slightly broader groupings, 59 percent with professional and managerial fathers (Class I and II together) were themselves at a similar occupational level, and exactly two out of three of the sons of working-class fathers (i.e. in classes V to VII together) were themselves in working-class jobs in 1972.

The 1975 figures, based on Layard's re-analysis of data from the 1975 General Household Survey, indicate a much higher level of downward mobility and a much lower level of upward mobility-than the Oxford study. In this sample, of 5000 male full-time employees under the age of 65 in 1975, only 38 percent of the sons of professional and managerial workers were to be found in a similar range of jobs and almost as many were in manual jobs. In comparison with our census-based series (Table 5), the 1975 GHS sample presents an even greater discrepancy with about 11 percent too many manual workers and 11 percent too few non-manual workers and that may account for its inconsistencies with the other results.

The 1984 estimates, based on the survey by Marshall and his colleagues (Marshall 1988) show downward mobility falling to a new low level and substantially exceeded by the upward mobility rate at a new high level. Overall the graph confirms Goldthorpe's conclusion based on his cohort comparisons but extends the trends over a series of population estimates from 1949 to 1984. It provides strong support for the view that upward mobility from working-class origins has continued to increase while intergenerational mobility in the other direction, from middle-class origins to working-class destinations, has continued to decline.

Excluded from the graph, Britten's account of the occupational distribution of 2973 men in the National Survey of Health and Development at age 31 in 1977 can be compared with the youngest 25-34 year old cohort in the 1972 Oxford Mobility Study. The NSHD sample, all born in the first week of March, 1946, were more working class in background (57 percent) than the men in the 1972 survey born 1938-1947 (52 percent), but were considerably more middle class in their own occupations with 37 percent in the professions and management against 30 percent of the youngest Oxford Mobility Study cohort. Of these, 41 percent of the 1977 31 year old managers and professionals had fathers who were manual workers compared with 33 percent of the 1972 25-34 year old's (calculated from Goldthorpe et al. 1980 and Britten 1981). Downward mobility from professional and managerial middle-class origins showed no change, while upward mobility from intermediate origins appeared to have increased and downward mobility decreased. These results are consistent with the evidence of trends presented in Figure 1 though one might be surprised at the size of the differences over only a five-year interval. However the cohorts are only approximately comparable and their comparative youthfulness clearly excludes an unmeasured amount of mobility which could occur in the course of a working life-time.

## *Career Mobility*

Of a sample of 142 managers interviewed in the Peterborough area in 1969-70 only 18 percent began their working careers as managers, management trainees or as a professional employee. Twenty-eight percent started out as clerks and 37 percent were originally manual workers or apprentices. Stewart and his colleagues concluded that "direct recruitment into management had not increased as predicted" (Stewart *et al.* 1980, Table 7.1, p.1787 and

p.190). Those upwardly mobile by these indirect routes naturally tend to be somewhat older before reaching their positions than those who begin their careers at this level. On average those who have worked their way up into management from working-class origins and manual or clerical first jobs are 29 before becoming managers as against 22 for those starting out at that level. They also tend to be older than those counter-mobile into the professional and managerial class who in the 1972 survey had achieved the return to status level of their fathers at an average age of about 25 (Goldthorpe *et al.* 1980, p.137).

Of the men in professional and managerial jobs in the 1984 study, 57 percent had reached these positions only after starting out in manual or clerical jobs. Of those in these jobs who were working class in origin 63 percent had started out at a lower level. Mobility between classes in Britain is thus not primarily determined in the course of education and before entering employment and improvements in educational opportunity and gains in educational equality have not yet been counterbalanced by the elimination of career mobility or promotion "from the shop floor" (Goldthorpe 1980; Noble 1974 and 1981).

The best recent source of information on career mobility in Britain is provided by the longitudinal survey carried out by the Registrar General's department of 400,000 people whose birthdays fell on four specific days and were identified in the 1971 and 1981 censuses. Of these 99,495 men and 40,277 women were recorded as economically active in both years and were categorised by Registrar General's social class. An abridged version of this scale is used in Tables 5, 6 and 7. Over the ten-year period there was an increase in the numbers in management and the professions, especially amongst the men; a decline in the numbers in other non-manual and in skilled manual jobs while the numbers in semi-skilled and un-skilled jobs remained at much the same level. Of those who were in the professions and management in 1971 about 79 percent of the men and 76 percent of the women remained in such jobs through the whole ten years. However, as a result of the growth in these positions by 1981 37 percent of the men and 38 percent of the women at this level who had been in employment for ten years had been recruited from other occupational classes. In fact 21 percent of these men had been manual workers ten years earlier. Three out of four men in skilled manual jobs and a similar proportion of women in lower grade non-manual jobs had remained at the same level as ten years before.

Overall, as we would expect, there was more upward career mobility than downward but these moves were differentially distributed within occupational careers and differently so for men and women too. For men upward mobility tends to occur early in their career and the rate of mobility declines with age. However one in eight men who were in their later fifties and one in six in their late forties and early fifties in 1971 experienced upward mobility in the next ten years. As already noted 39 percent of the upwardly mobile men were already 35 or more in 1971 as were three out of four of those who experienced some downward mobility in the period. Half of the upwardly mobile women were already 35 in 1971 as were 61 percent of those downwardly mobile. Except for a very small number of very young workers, women were less likely to be upwardly mobile in the first few years at work but thereafter their rates differed little from those of men. Downward mobility rates, however, were greater for young women than for men at the same ages, again except for the handful who had started work in their mid teens. On the other hand, men were more likely to be downwardly mobile than women at older ages, reflecting the more homogeneous occupational distribution of women's employment. Where women, therefore, tend to remain in clerical and secretarial jobs, sales

and the minor professions throughout their working lives, many men move to less demanding semiskilled or routine clerical work in their later years with higher rates of downward mobility for men who were in their later 50s in 1971. These late career moves reinforce doubts and reservations about the validity of inferring secular trends of comparisons of younger and older cohorts and cast further doubts on the notion of "occupational maturity". Since the upward mobility of men from working-class origins is more likely to take place in the course of their working lives rather than in a single step via education and into a first job, cohort comparisons are particularly prone to underestimate changes in mobility rates over time.

If cohort comparisons and estimates of relative mobility tend to flatten out secular trends in total mobility, it is in any case questionable what meaning, if any, total mobility rates have anyway. Erikson and Goldthorpe concluded that contrary to Marxist or Liberal (Functionalist) expectations, on the one hand of a decline, and on the other an increase in total mobility rates in industrially developed societies, Lipset and Zetterberg's argument, later elaborated by Featherman and his colleagues that there is no general trend was confirmed by their 9 country cross-national analysis (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1993). However total mobility rates are the net outcome of upward and downward movements within the occupational class hierarchy. Only when the occupational structure is unchanging will trends in upward and downward mobility rates be additive. Given proportional changes such as those summarised in Table 5 trends in upward and downward rates will appear to cancel one another out over time as upward mobility increases and downward mobility declines. What we are really concerned with are the growing opportunities or the lack of them for, say, the son of a bus driver or a factory worker to become a marketing manager or a surgeon. Conversely is the risk of the manager's son or daughter being able to find no employment except as a shop assistant or on the assembly line increasing or decreasing? Increases in upward mobility represent real increases in opportunity for working-class children even if the same opportunities reduce the risk of a lower grade job for middle-class children. Indeed it is hard to imagine, given the usual economic, cultural, motivational and other advantages of a middle-class upbringing, in what circumstances widening opportunities to pursue an interesting and well-paid career would not also be available to middle-class children.

Trends in upward and downward mobility reflect the changing occupational structure (Payne 1987b). Following Mach and Wesolowski's admonition that any understanding of social mobility needs to be located within a more general theory of stratification (1986 and *cf.* Noble 1974b) we must ask what other social process could account for them anyway. The alternative view, that access to positions of differential advantage is not rooted within the distributive processes of class structure, implies an idealist conception of inequality which, so far as I am aware, has not been theorised by any of the writers on social mobility writing in, or translated into, English.

The evidence of mobility trends in Britain then, indicates that opportunities for those born in working-class families have been increasing since the Second World War while simultaneously the risks of downward mobility for middle-class children have been declining. Both have benefitted from a non-zero-sum realignment brought about through the accelerating processes of economic change.

## *Class Composition*

As important for an understanding of social change in British society as the changing pattern of opportunities indicated by the outflow analysis of the basic occupational mobility contingency tables which relate the occupational distribution of the surveyed sample to their social origins indicated by father's occupations, is the inflow analysis which presents the social composition of each class in terms of the degree of heterogeneity of their social background. Five of the six studies summarised in Figure I above reveal two surprisingly consistent results. The exception is the first in 1949 by Glass and his colleagues which presents a picture of a more homogeneous middle class and a more diverse manual working class than the two succeeding cases from 1957 and 1967. From Benjamin's 1951 study onwards in every case half or more of the growing non-manual middle class originated from working class families. Though upward mobility increased so did the size of the destination class but that class has not been predominantly self-recruiting for more than thirty years. In the working class the proportion of men with middle-class parents (Glass's 1949 estimate apart) seems to have increased after the 1960s rather than declined as the falling rate of downward mobility might have led us to suspect. The manual working class has contracted faster so that the declining numbers of middle-class recruits to manual jobs have never the less become a larger proportion of the class as a whole. Just the same, the working class is much more self-recruiting than the middle class and far more homogeneous in social background. This is confirmed in Goldthorpe and Payne's 1972-1983 comparison (1986) and also by a matching three-class analysis of the 1984 data from Marshall *et al.* (1988). It refutes Goldthorpe's conclusion, on the basis of the 1972 Oxford Mobility Survey cohort comparisons, that with falling rates of downward mobility the working class was becoming increasingly self-recruiting and therefore likely to develop an increasingly proletarian class-consciousness and political militancy as a result (1980). If the results of the elections in the 1980s and 90s dented that expectation then perhaps the evidence from these mobility studies can in part explain why. The importance of occupational mobility and the consequent class heterogeneity cannot be exaggerated. Even in the so-called service class less than a third of men in the surveys of 1972, 1983 and 1984 had grown up in service-class families (Goldthorpe and Payne, Marshall *et al.*). For the socially stable as well as for the mobile shared experience of upbringing and education, common cultural assumptions and values, shared political orientations between colleague and colleague, neighbour and neighbour, cannot be taken for granted. The 1974 follow-up study to the Oxford Mobility Survey found that the occupationally mobile usually maintain their family connections across the class boundaries (Goldthorpe *et al.* 1980). Cross-class affiliations with relatives, between parents and grown-up children, between spouses and siblings and with friends are strongly associated with the de-alignment of class position and political partisanship. The structural basis for a strongly developed class-cultural identity has been absent in the middle class for more than a generation and is weakening in the working class too. The cultural uncertainties which intellectuals characterise as postmodernity, the loss of traditional reference points, the growing need to make individualised choices without a common set of value assumptions from a shared culture have their structural bases in these accelerating discontinuities in personal life histories separating, but not completely, generation from generation and diversifying the experience of those who seem to be social peers.

## *Anticipating Change: The Mobility Transition*

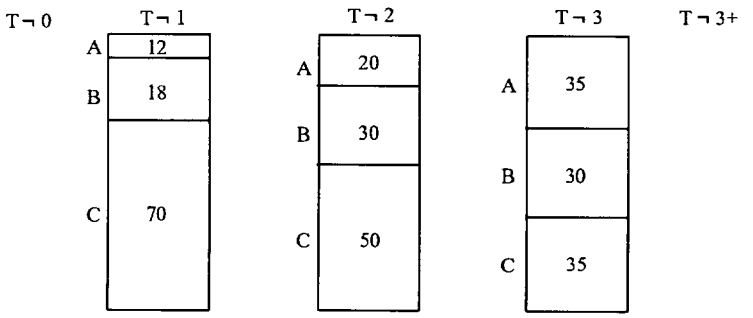
Notwithstanding Runciman's insistence that "sociology is not and cannot be a predictive science" (1993, p.66), it is possible to anticipate further developments in mobility between the classes. If current trends are the product of social change, then, in so far as we can make projections of the future pattern of employment, something may also be said about the future of mobility, albeit more in the way of a forecast rather than a prediction. Thus the current pattern of change in the occupational structure must sooner or later come to an end. What Table 5 shows is not part of an unlimited linear trend but rather an incomplete self-limiting process. The expansion of the service class and the decline of the manual working class have an ultimately logical termination but are, realistically, likely to reach a practical limit well short of that. Though it may not be possible to determine before hand at what level the currently accelerating change in their relative proportions will stabilise we can with some confidence expect that point to be reached in the course of the next century. Over the long run, class mobility is likely in some ways to be analogous to the familiar model of the demographic transition proposed by Thompson(1929). Like the demographic transition there are likely to be many local exceptions and variations, but as an ideal-typical description I believe its heuristic value is equally worth while exploring.

In this case the transition also moves from relative stability through a phase of upheaval and change. From a comparatively small and closed elite alongside a large labouring class, the transition through structural changes in the labour market arrives at a large, educated professional/technical/managerial group with a small residual class of operatives with relatively low-level skills supplying the irreducibly necessary physical manual labour in a largely capital intensive, mechanised and automated economy. In Britain the first phase lasted through most of the first half of the present century. The second phase of transition began to accelerate after the 1950s and the final phase is still some way ahead.

Boudon has shown how a simple causal model can illuminate structural change (1974). This is a simple arithmetic procedure which he developed in order to explore the stages in the mobility process but which, I think, can be adopted to a consideration of secular changes in mobility rates. The suggestion is at an early stage of development and may appear some what crude to those familiar with econometric modelling. However the possibilities of such a model might in time be refined to provide a more powerful analysis of change than we have been accustomed to in sociological discussion.

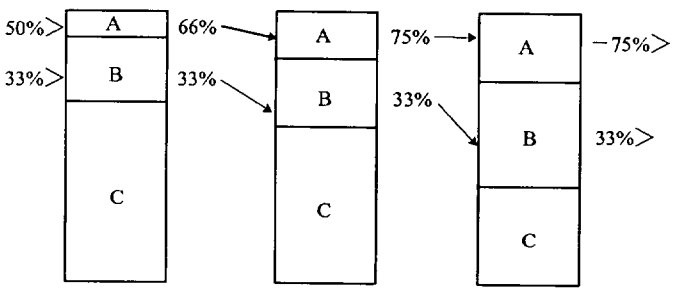
The model is as follows. Let there be, say, three hierarchically ranked classes A, B and C; that is to say, the advantages and desirability of membership of class A are greater than those of class B and those of class B greater than those pertaining to membership cf C. At time T$\neg$1 the respective classes comprise 12, 18 and 70 percent of the population and these proportions have not changed for a generation or more, since that is, time T$\neg$0. The changing occupational structure alters these proportions so that at T$\neg$2 the membership of the classes is distributed 20 ; 30 ; 50. At T$\neg$3 it has become 35 ; 30 ; 35 and then stabilises at these levels indefinitely thereafter. These proportions correspond approximately to the class distribution in Britain in 1950, 1980 and hypothetically, to a time in the early years of the next century. Following the trends in self-recruitment apparent in Goldthorpe and Payne's

FIGURE 2.




1972-83 comparison (1986) we can establish self-recruitment to class A is at first (T¬0 − T ¬1) 50 percent but, with declining downward mobility, this increases to 66 percent at T¬2, to 75 percent at T¬3 and remains at that level (T¬3+). Downward mobility from Class A is distributed between Classes B and C in a 2 : 1 ratio. Self-recruitment to Class B remains at 33 percent throughout the transition and the outflow is evenly divided between upward and

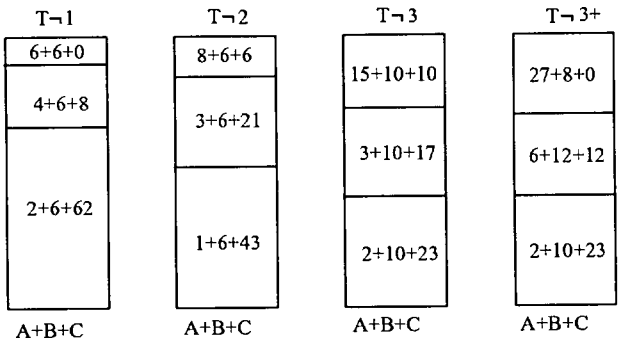
FIGURE 3.




downward careers. Whilst rough and ready these proportions also extrapolate those established in Goldthorpe and Payne (ibid.). Mobility upward from Class C is a result of shortfalls in the supply of recruits from A and B.

The outcomes of all this are that outflows from Class A to Class B halve from T¬1 to T¬3 and then level out while, over the four points T¬1 to T¬3 +, outflows from A to C decline by almost two-thirds. Outflows from Class C, the least privileged class, are deter mined by the structural changes in the relative sizes of the classes. Outflows from C to A are zero at T¬1 corresponding to the negligible rates of long-range mobility from working-class origins in the early years of the present century. From T¬1 to T¬2 mobility into Class A increases significantly and then doubles from T¬2 to T¬3 but, with the stabilisation of the occupational structure after T¬3, long-range upward mobility from class C virtually ceases. And after at first increasing, mobility from C to B increases only slowly from T¬2 and levels out after T¬3. Class homogeneity in Class A falls from T¬1 to T¬2 to less than half self-

FIGURE 4.




recruited but levels out and then rapidly increases as the occupational structure ceases to change. In the shrinking Class C homogeneity of origins or self-recruitment also falls from T¬1 to T¬3 but, more surprisingly, with the stabilisation of the occupational structure, Class C remains at the same lower level.

The consequences of the mobility transition would appear to be, as a result of the reduction in long-range mobility, an increasing division between classes. At that point, if no sooner, one of the structural conditions of postmodernism will have gone. The diversity of origins of the present-day middle class will be replaced by a socially and culturally far more homogeneous grouping who will share a similar education, similar occupational career, and similar social origins. Increasing opportunities for women in management and the professions are likely to accelerate this process. Other things being equal, cultural theory-the opiate of the intellectual middle classes-will then tend to focus on continuity and sameness rather than on individuality, discontinuity and disorder. The great reductions in size of the working class will not however bring about a greater cohesiveness or political solidarity. The continuing presence of a large proportion of the downwardly mobile will inhibit the emergence of class consciousness and class action. Politics will not return to the class politics of the past but is likely increasingly to reflect single-issue campaigning unrelated to market determined interests.

When all this is likely to come about it is, of course, impossible to say but there are signs that in Japan, where the recent succession of generations has experienced a more compressed history of economic change, the situation in some respects much closer to realisation. In Ishida's 1975 survey manual workers already only account for 37 percent of the population of economically active men age 20-64 and a similar proportion in the 1984 ILO figures for the working population quoted by Routh (1987). Only 10 percent of the Japanese service class originated from manual working-class families (Ishida, Erikson and Goldthorpe 1993) and the level of working-class self-recruitment is low. That is largely due, it is true, to the large proportion from farming origins but, though Ishida concludes that class position is the critical factor in determining inequality (1993, p.238), Erikson and Goldthorpe point to the heterogeneity of background of the Japanese working class and its implications for political mobilisation (1993, p.360).

If the mobility transition seems to have been much more rapid in Japan, we may have

much to learn from Japanese class-structure in countries like Britain where the process has been more long drawn out. On the other hand the wealth of material and debate on social mobility and class structure in British sociology may provide, if not parallels, at least some insights into social processes that are of more general relevance. In this context at least we can agree with Kumar's view that the future is unlikely to turn out to be merely an extension of present day trends (1978). Looking at recent trends, however, may still help us understand our changing world within a framework of structural variables which are at least theoretically intelligible rather than confronting the future as a torrent of wholly unpredictable events to which much current theory would abandon us.

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