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Introduction

Upheaval in the employment structure

This study enquires into the employment structure of four Western European countries. It starts out from the premise that labour markets constitute a central focal point of modern societies. Hence, involuntary exclusion from the labour market such as unemployment is, by and large, experienced as a period of both economic and social hardship. Likewise, for individuals actively involved in the labour market, employment is not only a source of income, but also defines status and position in social stratification. A job thus conveys a wide range of information about the incumbent's (probable) educational background, financial standing and social belonging. Consequently, when children ask their school-mates about their parents' jobs, they intuitively enquire about something close to the *social class* of their peers' families. For analogous reasons, in the social sciences, occupational data is considered as a useful shortcut for a series of socio-economic characteristics of individuals, characteristics commonly subsumed under *class differences* (Müller, 1997: 759).

In empirical research on class differences, the most widely used schema in Europe is arguably the one associated with the writings of Robert Erikson and John Goldthorpe (Goldthorpe, 1980; Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1993).¹ While this schema continues to be highly influential, it is uncertain whether it continues to represent *contemporary labour markets*. Its conceptual bases were laid during the late 1970s, with the aim of reflecting the employment structure prevailing up to the mid-1970s, typical of high industrialism (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1993: 237). Similarly, the principal class schema in American sociology, the Wright schema (1980, 1985), was elaborated during the 1970s and early 1980s. In this context, Breen and Rottman note that 'the major comparative findings of class analysis still rest on data ... collected during the Golden Age of Capitalism' (1998: 16). It is not going too far to add that the major *analytical tools* of class research continue to mirror 'Fordism' and the male breadwinner model, aspects emblematic of

industrial society. Accordingly, it is one of the arguments of this study that the employment structure of Western Europe has been substantially altered over the last 30 years by a series of socio-economic trends that are not easily summarized by the dominant class schemas. More particularly, it will be argued that changes such as service sector growth, welfare state expansion, rising female participation rates and increases in educational attainment have caused considerable upheaval in European labour markets.

By way of example, a look at the joint impact of tertiarization and feminization on the British and Swiss labour force is illustrative. In 1970, men working in the industries accounted for 35 per cent of total employment in Britain and Switzerland. Thirty years later, their share has dwindled to 20 per cent in both countries. Over the same period, women working in the services have increased their share in total employment from 25 to 40 per cent in Britain and from 20 to 35 per cent in Switzerland (OECD, 1984a, b; 2002). This evolution is not only due to the spectacular expansion of service jobs, mostly taken on by women. It also derives from de-industrialization: in manufacturing, new technologies have accelerated the automation of the work of assemblers, labourers, packers and other member of the unskilled industrial workforce. In consequence, stereotypical blue-collar workers as they emerge from 'the pages of the history of industrial capitalism' (Myles and Turegun, 1996: 116) have declined to a small minority. In parallel, new production methods have led to a skill upgrading of the reduced industrial workforce and thus decreased the social distance between blue-collar workers and white-collar employees (Gallie, 1996a; Kern, 1998). As a result, the distinction between *worker* and *employee* status has become progressively more blurred (Müller and Noll, 1996: 11).

In terms of class analysis, these developments have made the employment structure increasingly opaque, as low-skilled occupations have not disappeared from labour markets dominated by large service sectors: sales assistants, call centre clerks or assistant nurses are all employed in jobs to which no middle class status attaches. Yet these mostly female workers do not fit easily into established class schemas. Division lines typical of industrial employment such as the blue-collar/white-collar boundary or the manual/non-manual divide are of little use when dealing with these occupational groups. Abandoning these distinctions can give surprising results, as low-skilled service workers may well experience employment relationships that are no more advantageous than those applying to manual manufacturing workers (Crouch, 1999: 165).

An analogous problem of analytical opacity emerges when shifting the focus to the *salaried middle class*. Educational upgrading, service expansion and welfare state development have fostered the growth of managerial and, above all, professional occupations (Crouch, 1999). The result is to tilt the employment structure towards the middle class and, at the same time, to promote increasing heterogeneity within its ranks. In consequence, it has

become quite unpromising to account for the political behaviour of the salaried middle class conceptualized as *unitary category*: variance in party support within the middle class has come to approximate variance within the entire population (Kriesi, 1998). Yet while it is apparent that the salaried middle class is made up of factions that occupy very different positions in the labour market, attempts in the literature to account for this heterogeneity have been few and, to a large extent, focused on the sole difference between professionals and managers (Savage et al., 1992; Brooks and Manza, 1997). The bulk of research into social mobility and electoral behaviour continues to rely on the manual/non-manual divide and to treat the salaried middle class as a monolithic bloc (e.g. Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1993; Shavit and Müller, 1998; Evans, 1999a).

Nonetheless, the challenge posed to class analysis by mounting employment differentiation has been taken up by a number of authors. Thus, some important inroads have been made into the 'disordered' structure of contemporary societies with respect to either the middle class or the 'twilight zone' below it. In an attempt to illuminate the black box of the middle class, several contributions have emphasized work setting differences between management, technical professions and socio-cultural professions (Kriesi, 1989; 1993; Müller, 1999; van de Werfhorst and de Graaf, 2004). With regard to political orientation, these efforts have shown promising results (Kriesi, 1998; Güveli et al., 2002). Relating to the working class, the distinction between jobs in a 'Fordist' division of labour and jobs in a 'post-industrial' service hierarchy has pointed to the possible existence of a low-skilled service proletariat, stuck in auxiliary dead-end jobs (Esping-Andersen, 1993a; Blossfeld et al., 1993). Moreover, attention has been drawn to the segregation between low-skilled women in personal services and low-skilled men in goods production, leading to a 'bicephalously gendered occupational structure' (Crouch, 1999: 113).

However useful, none of these contributions has tried to offer an *overall view* on social stratification in contemporary labour markets. Moreover, these theoretical developments have, with a few exceptions (Joye and Schuler, 1995; Rose and O'Reilly, 1998), not been accompanied by empirical analysis of the criteria on which new division lines are expected to rely. This is the range of problems on which this study focuses in a first step: it proposes to develop and examine a new class schema that aims at conceptualizing an employment structure marked by the phenomena of tertiarization, feminization and welfare statism.

The challenge to embedding institutions

Shifts in the employment structure do not only pose an analytical challenge to class theory; moreover, they also raise a political challenge as they confront labour market institutions with problems for which they were not

prepared. European welfare states, being the product of the 1930s Depression and the post-war economic 'miracle', were primarily designed for men working in industrial production (Esping-Andersen, 1999a: 33). Likewise, European trade unions had their traditional strongholds among semi-skilled male production workers (Regini, 1992; Waddington and Hoffmann, 2000). While de-industrialization has caused severe cuts in the numerical strength of this category, service jobs mainly filled by women have made spectacular inroads into Western European labour markets. However, very different characteristics apply to work careers in these expanding female services than to those in male production jobs and management, and it is an open question whether institutions have succeeded in adapting to the new situation reigning in European labour markets.

This is where politics needs to be introduced. In the literature, it is widely acknowledged that an individual's life chances do not solely derive from his or her labour market position. Besides the household, institutions such as the welfare state or trade unions significantly modify the outcomes of market relations in Western Europe. Class divisions produced by the market may thus be softened or reinforced by the institutional setting, depending on whether institutions promote economic equality or uphold social dualism (Esping-Andersen and Korpi, 1984; Orloff, 1993). In consequence, it appears difficult for an enquiry into social stratification to ignore the role of institutions.

In this study, three institutions in particular are expected to have an effect on the labour market situation of individuals, namely the welfare state, the trade union movement and political citizenship. When looked at from the perspective of the individual – and this study will follow a micro-sociological level of analysis throughout – these three institutions share a common quality: they confer rights to individuals and thus limit inequality generated by the employment system (Marshall, 1981 [1950]). To begin with, modern *welfare states* reduce the economic vulnerability of wage-earners by guaranteeing a minimum income independent from the market (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Similarly, through collective bargaining, *trade unions* enable workers to use their rights collectively and thus attempt to overcome power asymmetry between individual worker and employer (Marshall, 1981 [1950]: 26). Finally, *political citizenship* gives individuals the right to participate in elections. Thus, it allows wage-earners, who may be weak in terms of economic resources, to use their political resources (votes) to influence market conditions (Korpi, 1989: 312).

It is undisputed that these three institutions potentially enable individuals to diminish their dependence on the labour market. However, depending on country, class and gender, the degree to which different population groups are integrated into these institutions and benefit from these rights varies substantially. Hence, some welfare states offer optimal coverage for individuals having worked full-time, without interruptions and

from an early age on. This sort of coverage does not pose problems as long as full-time employment, continuous working careers and family stability are the rule: by guaranteeing an income to the male breadwinner, the welfare state is able to reach virtually everyone (Bonoli, 2002). Yet the standard employment relationship is not the rule anymore. Alongside the rise of the service sector and women's labour market participation, non-standard career patterns have multiplied and, for the categories concerned, increased the risk of insufficient welfare coverage.

Comparable factors have affected trade unionism. In their relationship with employers, low-skilled workers depend most heavily on collective organization. As they do not possess any specific skills, they are not of strategic importance for firms and thus lack individual bargaining power. It is no surprise, then, that trade union recruitment has traditionally met with most success among semi-skilled production workers. Yet the size of this traditional union constituency is strongly declining under the influence of industrial restructuring and workforce upgrading (Kern and Sabel, 1992). The opposite situation applies to low-skilled service workers: while their number is on the increase (Goos and Manning, 2003), unions in most countries encounter difficulties when trying to organize this category, which evolves in small businesses and often works unusual hours (Ebbinghaus and Visser, 2000).

Consequently, low-skilled service workers, unlike the industrial proletariat, may be unable to compensate for their relatively disadvantaged labour market position by using the institutional resource of collective organization.

Finally, the right to vote is a resource that in theory may allow less advantaged groups of individuals to obtain some correction of labour market inequalities through electoral influence. However, a large body of evidence indicates that class differences remain of central importance as far as integration into the political system is concerned. This is due to two factors: first of all, Western European countries comprise sizeable numbers of foreign nationals who, while fully participating in the labour market, are excluded from political citizenship; these forced abstainers to a large extent cluster at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy (Soysal, 1994; Charles, 2000). Moreover, depending on the country, the opportunity to vote may not be seized evenly across different social groups; political apathy and electoral abstention seem to be more widespread among disadvantaged than among privileged classes (Verba et al., 1978; Lijphart, 1997). Hence, it is an entirely open question whether class differences are mitigated, or on the contrary reinforced by, democratic political participation.

In sum, this study wishes to combine the enquiry into the employment structure with the analysis of how different classes are embedded in institutions. Thereby, an institutional layer of analysis shall be added to the enquiry into the structural layer of stratification. Yet by examining the

embeddedness of individuals in the institutional setting, our main interest does not lie in the institutions *per se*. Rather, the primary objective is to find out more about the degree of adaptation of different institutions to different *segments in the labour market*. This interest is guided by an implicit hypothesis: class theory may not be alone in lagging behind shifts in the employment structure. Depending on the country, change in the labour market may have outpaced institutional inertia as well.

Plan of the book

The aim of this book is twofold. In a first step, we wish to single out changes having occurred in the employment structure over the last 30 years, and to sketch out a class map that accurately translates these shifts into analytical language. We shall then empirically explore how such a class map relates to other socially relevant dimensions such as gender, income, promotion prospects or political orientation. In a second step, our enquiry shall be extended to the institutional setting. We thereby wish to examine both theoretically and empirically the integration of different classes into the welfare state, the trade union movement and the electoral system.

There is little doubt about the fact that this set of questions is most usefully tackled from a comparative perspective. Hence, the empirical chapters of this study will cover four Western European countries that have in common political democracy, an advanced market economy and a system of social values that could perhaps be labelled as 'occidental': Britain, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland. Our research set-up follows thus the *most similar systems design* (Przeworski and Teune, 1970). Yet while these four nations are highly comparable as regards the fundamental axis of social organization, on a lower level, they are representative of the variation found in Western Europe with respect to characteristics held to be influential for the research problematic of this study. This is notably the case concerning the welfare state (where conservative regimes contrast with liberal and social-democratic counterparts), the system of industrial relations (where an uncoordinated system stands out against coordinated systems) and the type of democracy (where bipartisan systems compare with multipartisan systems). As a consequence, this study hopes to arrive at findings that are not strictly limited to a particular country but are, to a degree, generalizable to the Western European context.

Besides theoretical concerns, our country selection is also motivated by more practical matters of data accessibility, as for these four nations, individual datasets are available that are both nationally representative and include detailed information about employment, education, income and political behaviour. The empirical chapters of this book will rely on the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS), the German Socio-Economic Panel

(GSOEP), the Swedish Level-of-Living Survey (LNU) and the Swiss Household Panel (SHP). Although these surveys are organized as panel data and are – with the exception of LNU – collected annually, the study adopts a purely cross-sectional perspective and limits analyses to data collected either in 1999 or 2000.

The two objectives of the study, outlined above, define the structure of the book which is divided into three parts. Part I starts out with a summary of the conceptual foundations of existing class schemas (Chapter 1) and a review of the shifts having occurred in Western European labour markets over the last 30 years (Chapter 2). This provides the basis for a thorough discussion of the problems female employment in general, and low-skilled service work in particular, pose to class analysis (Chapter 3). Moreover, it opens the black box of the expanded salaried middle class, rendering visible its heterogeneity (Chapter 4). Part I will be closed by the attempt to develop a new class schema that responds to the challenge of an increasingly educated, feminized and tertiarized employment structure (Chapter 5).

Part II confronts the theoretical expectations with the data. For that matter, questions of methodology will be dealt with in some detail in order to shed light on the classification process of occupational information (Chapter 6). This will enable us to map out, in some detail, the distribution of the labour force of Britain, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland across the class schema (Chapter 7). Subsequently, we wish to examine whether this new class map effectively measures what it is intended to measure. We will therefore turn our attention to the question of how the schema relates to indicators of hierarchical advantage such as work income and promotion prospects (Chapter 8). Next, focus is shifted to structural divisions within the workforce that do not necessarily follow hierarchical lines: this applies to variables such as party support, public sector employment or company size (Chapter 9). Part II closes with a look at less extended, so-called collapsed, versions of the class schema, briefly comparing their explanatory performance with results found for the Erikson and Goldthorpe schema (Chapter 10).

In Part III, we shift our attention to the relationship between individuals' class positions and their integration into the institutional setting. It starts out with a theoretical discussion of the concept of institutional embeddedness, set on the micro-sociological level of analysis applying to individuals (Chapter 11). Based on this concept, we will examine to what extent class differences are likely to spill over from people's working careers to their coverage with pensions in old-age (Chapter 12). The analysis of welfare state coverage will be completed by an enquiry into the determinants of trade union membership: are some classes more likely to benefit from collective organization than others? (Chapter 13). Finally, with respect to integration into political citizenship, our focus will be on class differences in electoral participation. Our interest is not limited to voluntary abstainers,

but also centres on forced abstainers, namely resident members of the population without citizenship rights: immigrant workers (Chapter 14). Part III concludes by simultaneously exploring integration into the welfare state, the union movement and the political system. Here, the aim is to examine whether disadvantage in the employment structure and disadvantage in institutional embeddedness are cumulative (Chapter 15).

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