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Social Mobility and Class Structuration¹

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The long tradition of empirical studies on social mobility has given us a rather comprehensive knowledge of that process. The relevance of this knowledge to class structuration is the main problem discussed in this article. Social mobility viewed as a phenomenon creating blurred class boundaries and a low level of class structuration is questioned. It is argued that the effects of social mobility are highly conditional. Primarily as a result of the decline in the farming population, a relative increase in the number of white-collar workers, and weaker market capacity for certain white-collar groups, the character and effects of mobility may change. These changes may in turn facilitate the acceptance of socialistic values among white-collar workers as well as create greater homogeneity among manual workers. Social mobility in the future is not assumed to be an obstacle, and may even contribute to a higher level of class structuration where the relevant working class is composed primarily of salaried employees and not just manual workers.

Mobility and class theory

The problem of homogeneity (or heterogeneity) of interests and values among people has been under continuous study. Many opposing views exist as to which dimensions are relevant in determining the main societal cleavages and which factors produce changes in them. In order to contribute to the development of theory in this area Giddens has introduced the concept of class structuration (Giddens 1973). According to him, one of the most important tasks of class theory, as well as one of its difficult problems, is to find, among all individuals and conflict groups in a society, ' . . . the theoretical transition from such relationships and conflicts to the identification of classes as structured forms. . . . In fact, one of the leading dilemmas in the theory of classes . . . is that of identifying the "reality" of class'. A class theory must solve this problem in order to be capable of handling its other tasks, for example, explaining the role of classes in the historical development of society.

The extent to which classes are observable social formations varies between different societies and within the same society over time. The concept of class

structuration is intended to cover this variation. What Giddens means by classes, as observable social formations, is not quite clear, but one important aspect is the presence of class-based patterns of behaviour and attitudes, an aspect of which is the organized behaviour of the members of certain classes and their class consciousness (Giddens 1973: 111). More concretely it may concern such questions as the extent to which political attitudes and other values differ between classes, the extent to which certain organizations recruit members on a class basis, etc. As far as I can see, class homogenization is one important aspect of the level of class structuration. The determination of class boundaries is another.

Classical theories have differing views on these questions and offer differing hypotheses to explain how the development of capitalist societies will influence class structuration. This is not an appropriate place for a thorough discussion of class theories, but a few short comments on my view of the main elements of these theories are necessary in order to state the general view of social mobility in relation to class.

First we have Marxist theories, which on a general level identify some important mechanisms for explaining class structuration in capitalist societies and the role of classes in historical development. The primary conflict is that between capital and labour. The fundamental processes in society are economic, which among other things bring about concentration and centralization of capital, these being a consequence of competition between capitalists and of the necessity for profit in their struggle for survival. The concentration and centralization of capital leads to concentration of workers in big plants and to urbanization. This fact will be of importance for the organization of the working class. More and more people will work under similar conditions. The homogenization within classes and the polarization between classes will increase. The growing difficulty encountered by the capitalists in maintaining their profit rate will sharpen the struggle on the part of the labourers for better real wages, working conditions and economic power. Many people engaged in white-collar work will have living and working conditions similar to those of the workers. This, in combination with an increasing degree of exploitation and the increasing wretchedness of advanced capitalism, will enhance class consciousness, and the conflict between classes will increase. Capitalism, characterized by this primary conflict, is therefore an unstable system. The historical development works for the working class. We shall reach a high level of class structuration.

An alternative view of the development of class structuration is found in Weberian theory, which maintains that the common interests of wage earners, based on their relation to capital, are not of the same fundamental importance as in the theories of Marx. There are great differences between employees, e.g. in terms of skill, education or life style, which give them differing market capacities and differing chances of gaining material reward for their work. In the process of economic development efficiency and rationality are important. Increasing efficiency in administration, bureaucracy, and production will lead to increased differentiation of labour, and expansion in white-collar professions. In the long run

such development yields more and more heterogeneity in the wage paid to employees, in the skill required of them, and in their working conditions, which eventually means increased differentiation of interests. We can therefore expect to find several different unions and/or a decreasing rate of participation in union activities. The historical trend will be towards more blurred class distinctions and less class-based organized activities (see Korpi 1978).

A similar process of differentiation is also found in the field of politics, where political interest groups base their activities not only on the economic interests of their members but also on 'non-economic' factors such as ethnicity, religion, social, cultural and regional background. What happens in the realm of politics is often of decisive importance to the development of society. Since so many interests, other than purely economic ones, determine the composition of political parties and political decisions, the economic processes do not have the overwhelming importance implied by the theories of Marx. The increased differentiation in political and economic areas will lead to a weakening of class-based organized activities and consciousness and thereby a weakening of class structuration.

Changes in these economic and political areas are of course fundamental to theories of class structuration. However, there are certain mediating factors which are of great importance in explaining how structural changes are transformed into various social structures. Social mobility is one of the most important, at least in theories of the Weberian tradition.

In the writings of Weber 'rationality' is one of the key words. In every field, successful competition means that, in the long run, rationality and efficiency win over irrationality and inefficiency. Increasing demand for skill and education makes it necessary to expand the educational system. As efficiency is important in competition, one can expect recruitment to be increasingly based on 'achieved' rather than 'ascribed' characteristics. Equality of opportunity is in accordance with the demands of capitalistic economic systems, as is an increasing rate of social mobility. This means that one can expect 'pure' or 'circular' mobility to increase. However, one can also expect structurally determined mobility to increase, that is, the minimum amount of mobility which must occur as a result of changes in the occupational structure. The effect of an increase in total mobility will be a weakening of class structuration. In Dahrendorf's words 'The more upward and downward mobility there is in a society, the less comprehensive and fundamental are class conflicts likely to be. As mobility increases, group solidarity is increasingly replaced by competition between individuals, and the energies invested by individuals in class conflict decrease' (Dahrendorf 1959:222).

Giddens also points out the relationship between social mobility and the level of class structuration, but he does not stress the individualism which mobility creates; rather he points out how difficult it is for class-based experiences to develop into class consciousness. He writes '... the greater the degree of "closure" of mobility chances ... the more this facilitates the formation of identifiable classes. For the effect of closure in terms of intergenerational movement is to

provide for the *reproduction* of the common life experience of the generations . . .' (p. 107).

The general conclusion therefore seems to be that the predicted increase in social mobility will contribute to a low level of class structuration.

In the theories of Marx, social mobility has not received the same attention. As far as I can see, the implication of his theories could perhaps be that the general conclusion presented above is not wrong but unimportant, because one cannot expect an increase in social mobility as a general feature of development in capitalist societies. In the maturity of capitalism the working class will grow in number and comprise various types of wage earners, white-collar groups and manual workers, and within the working class there will be a homogenization. As these changes will not give room for any increase in structurally determined mobility, and as there is no reason to believe that the capitalist class would not continue to reproduce itself, the classes would be self-reproducing and mobility would not reach any important magnitude. In certain stages of development or under specific circumstances mobility could of course occur but not as a general trait of economic development.

As assumptions about the effects of social mobility are essential to arguments that society is moving towards a low level of class structuration, and as Marxists on the other hand predict a high level of class structuration, it seems to me that it is important to put the role of social mobility under critical theoretical and empirical evaluation.

Is there really any reason to believe that social mobility in future capitalist development will act as an obstacle to class structuration and especially working-class organization and consciousness? In my attempt to answer this question I proceed in the following manner.

First of all one has to find out whether the amount of social mobility has increased or not. As this problem is one of the most closely studied in the field of social mobility, I only make a short summary of studies already carried out and then try to draw some conclusions based on these studies.

It is also important to know whether mobility is caused by changes in the occupational structure or whether it is pure mobility. In the case of pure mobility, downward mobility equals upward mobility in amount. The relative distribution between upward and downward mobility is of relevance for various reasons. The two types of mobility can be expected to influence the mobile people in different ways: the characteristics of the upwardly mobile differ from those of the downwardly mobile, and the upwardly mobile will be influenced by others and influence them in other ways than the downwardly mobile. These are the second type of questions that will be dealt with in this paper.

As the degree of 'self-recruitment' can be expected to influence the possibility of reproducing values and life styles within a class, the third problem that will be discussed is the change in composition of various social strata. Their composition will be affected in different ways, depending upon the change in total mobility as well as change in relative distribution between upward and downward mobility.

Has social mobility increased?

During the last three decades a great deal of empirical research has been carried out estimating the amount of social mobility in various countries. There have also been studies of changes in the rate of social mobility over time within a given country.

The conclusions drawn from these studies seem to be that there is a fairly large amount of total mobility. The proportion of the population belonging to social strata other than those of their fathers varies between 20–50% in industrialized societies (Miller 1960). Many authors also argue that mobility is increasing, but that this increase in total mobility is a result of changes in the occupational structure and not a result of increase in ‘pure’ mobility. Hauser *et al.* (1975) conclude in their study of occupational mobility in the United States that ‘. . . in the last two decades, it is a more favorable occupational structure, and only that, which has sustained or improved the mobility opportunities of American men’ (p. 597).

This means that if the increase in total mobility is a result of structural changes and not a result of an increase in pure mobility, then upward mobility is greater than downward mobility. ‘. . . the occupational structure has changed continually between and within cohorts, and in consequence of these structural shifts, upward intergenerational mobility appears to have increased and downward mobility to have decreased over time’ (Hauser *et al.* 1975:597).

As my empirical data in the following analysis are from the Scandinavian countries, especially Sweden, I will refer briefly to what is known about social mobility in these countries. Many studies of the subject have been undertaken (Carlsson 1958; Svalastoga 1959; Rogoff 1953 and 1977; Erikson 1971 and 1977; Pöntinen 1976). The study by Pöntinen concerns all the Scandinavian countries. One of his conclusions is that ‘. . . the inflow into the white-collar stratum has

Table 1. *Social mobility among Swedish men.*

	Mobility between worker and white-collar strata. Farmers excluded from the analyses			Mobility between worker and white-collar strata. Farmers included in white-collar strata		
	1950	1968	1974	1950	1968	1974
White-collar stable	15	26	26	24	33	31
Upwardly mobile	22	28	29	19	22	24
Downwardly mobile	07	11	12	18	19	19
Stable workers	56	34	33	40	26	26

A dichotomous class definition, based on Carlsson’s classification system, has been used. His categories farm labour, semi- and unskilled labour, and artisans and skilled labour constitute the working class. People belonging to the other categories are in this table called white-collar. (*Source:* Calculations from mobility matrixes based on Carlsson’s data and the level of living surveys 1968 and 1974. The matrixes have been given to me by Robert Erikson).²

grown in all countries, which is quite natural, when the development of the occupational structure is taken into account' (p. 137). He also concludes that 'the main differences in social mobility between the Scandinavian countries seem to be connected with differences in the occupational structures or, actually, in the stages of the development' (p. 128). Erikson's conclusion in his most recent study of mobility in Sweden is that 'Social mobility among men has increased in Sweden during the period covered. This holds for upward as well as downward mobility. The major cause of this change is certainly the change in the occupational distribution. This change in the occupational distribution has two major components. One is the restructuring of the Swedish economy with a diminishing agricultural sector, a first increasing and then slightly decreasing industrial sector and an increasing service sector. The other is the increase of women in the labor force' (p. 20).

The occupational change in Sweden, and in most industrialized societies, has first of all been characterized by a decrease in the agricultural population. In 1930, 38% of the labour force was employed within the agricultural sector. This figure had gone down to 8% by 1970. During the same period industrial employment increased from 30% to 40%. This structural change has been connected with a mobility-stream from farming to industrial work. In 1950 about 50% of the sons of farmers became workers, 19% obtained white-collar jobs, and the rest became farmers. During the process of structural change a declining proportion of the sons of farmers continued to be farmers and a growing proportion found white-collar work. The proportion that shifted from farming to industry seems to have been rather stable, about 50%. During the first part of this period of decrease in the agricultural population there was an increase in industrial work, and while this increase was slowing down, the white-collar strata continued to grow.

The expected future development is that these occupations will continue to grow, and that there will be a decrease in manual work (Berglund 1976). As structural changes seem to be the primary cause of variations in the amount of social mobility, one can expect mobility to increase further and upward mobility to increase more than downward mobility. This conclusion assumes that mobility from manual work to non-manual white-collar work is regarded as upward mobility.

This is a questionable assumption from the point of view of a class perspective. Among those who argue that the manual/non-manual distinction is a meaningful one, from a class perspective, is Giddens. He thinks that even if a relative diminution of the income of clerical workers, within the white-collar sector, has occurred, one cannot argue that the 'lower' part of the white-collar sector belongs to the working class. This is because they still have an advantage in terms of job security, because career earnings are still much lower among workers, because those in non-manual occupations are often in receipt of fringe benefits of various kinds, and because the lower white-collar positions are mostly occupied by women. There is also a clear distinction between office work and production in industrial organization. Office workers are more involved in the authority structure, and finally neighbourhood differentiation follows the manual/non-manual

dimension (Giddens 1973:179–184). If one accepts these arguments for a class boundary between manual and non-manual work, then mobility has increased.

The same conclusion about mobility can be drawn if one defines class boundaries in the way some Marxist writers have suggested. Poulantzas, for example, sees 'only manual, non-supervisory workers who produce surplus value directly (productive labour)' as belonging to the proletariat (Olin Wright 1976:4). Olin Wright has estimated the working class in the USA in 1969, following Poulantzas's definition, as forming less than 20% of the labour force while the petty bourgeoisie amount to 70%. By this definition one would find that the proportion of workers has decreased while the proportion of petty bourgeoisie has increased. This means that upward mobility must have been greater than downward mobility.

Braverman, on the other hand, suggests a definition of the working class as 'that class which, possessing nothing but its power to labour, sells that power to capital in return for its subsistence' (Braverman 1974:378). Braverman also argues that the distinction between productive and unproductive labour is no longer meaningful in deciding who belongs to the working class. He concludes '. . . the two masses (productive and unproductive labour) . . . form a continuous mass of employment which, at present and unlike the situation in Marx's day, has everything in common' (p. 423). His estimate of the development of the working class in the USA, to which belong those sectors of the white-collar strata which Braverman calls clerical workers and also service and sales workers, shows an increase from 50.7% in 1900 to 69.1% in 1970. With Braverman's class definition one would have come to the conclusion that social mobility has decreased rather than increased. Therefore, the question of changes in social mobility is to a great extent dependent upon which class definition one uses.

From the perspective of the relationship between mobility and class a broader class definition like Braverman's raises the questions of homogeneity within the class, and whether mobility between strata within the class tends to have negative effects on class-based organized activities and attitudes.

If one sees social mobility from the perspective of a class concept, where the distinction is between manual/non-manual work, then the question is whether the increased mobility really has the predicted negative relationship to class structuration and acts as an obstacle to a closer association between working class and middle class.

Therefore, it seems to me that, irrespective of class concept, it is important to study the political consequences of social mobility across the manual/non-manual border. As the class concept is a controversial matter and as I do not take any explicit position on a certain class concept, I will, in the following talk about social strata instead of class and concentrate on the two main strata – manual workers and white-collar workers.

The nature of social mobility

Before I go into the question of the effects of social mobility on some indicators of

class-based attitudes, it could be useful to have a description of who the socially mobile people are, their living conditions and background.

In his study of social mobility in Sweden, Erikson (1971) gives a great deal of interesting data about the association between such mobility and the standard of living indicators. This data could be used to shed light on the process of social mobility and class structuration. One conclusion drawn from many studies of social mobility is that most mobility occurs within a 'buffer zone' between social strata (Parkin 1972; Giddens 1973; Westergaard & Resler 1975). This is also the impression gained from Erikson's data. The upwardly mobile, moving from manual work to white-collar status, can be expected to be persons with weaker associations with other workers than is the case for those who stay within the strata. They can also be expected to be persons from the upper part of the workers.

One finds economic hardship during childhood more seldom among the upwardly mobile than among those who remain manual workers, whom I henceforth refer to, for the sake of convenience, as stable workers. In comparison with stable workers, the upwardly mobile more often inherit in excess of 10,000 Swedish crowns and more often have parents who have been educated beyond elementary school level.

The tendency for the downwardly mobile to come from the lower white-collar strata is even more pronounced. If we compare the downwardly mobile with stayers in white-collar professions, we find that they have more frequently experienced economic hardship, that fewer have inherited more than 10,000 Swedish crowns, fewer have property worth more than 100,000 Swedish crowns, and that they more seldom have parents with higher education.

Another comparison which can be made from Table 2 is between the situation of the mobile and that of the stable in the strata of destination. This comparison also strengthens the picture of social mobility as mobility within a buffer zone.

Let us look at the distribution of the mobile and the class-stable. If the white-collar strata is divided into two parts – an upper and a lower – we can see how the upwardly mobile are distributed between the two parts. Table 3 shows that the

Table 2. *Living conditions during childhood of the socially mobile and the class-stable. (Adjustment for age differences has been made. Calculated from Erikson 1971.)*

	A		B		C		D	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
White-collar stable	15	12	27	30	15	6	69	70
Upwardly mobile	44	20	15	14	7	4	13	18
Downwardly mobile	27	26	11	11	3	0	18	17
Stable workers	51	57	6	6	1	0	7	6

A Proportion who experienced economic hardship.

B Proportion who inherited more than 10,000 Swedish crowns.

C Proportion who have more than 100,000 Swedish crowns.

D Proportion who have parents with education higher than elementary school.

Table 3. *The distribution of the upwardly mobile to and the downwardly mobile from different levels of white-collar strata. Males only. (Calculated from Erikson 1977, Table 5.)*

	Upwardly mobile to			Downwardly mobile from			All		
	1950	1968	1974	1950	1968	1974	1950	1968	1974
White-collar									
upper	16	23	25	9	13	11	24	30	32
lower	84	77	75	91	87	89	76	70	68

upwardly mobile are distributed among the lower part of the white-collar strata to a greater extent than the relative distribution of upper and lower positions within that strata. The overwhelming majority of the downwardly mobile come from the lower part of the white-collar strata.

However, the proportion of the upwardly mobile staying in the lower part of the white-collar strata has been decreasing since 1950 owing to a relatively greater increase in the number of high positions to the number of low positions. Still, the majority of the upwardly mobile stay in the lower part of the white-collar strata and the picture of mobility as mobility within a 'buffer zone' seems reliable. The 'buffer zone hypothesis' has been questioned by Goldthorpe & Llewellyn (1977), but, as far as I can see, they have refuted a rather extreme interpretation of the hypothesis. What is important in this discussion is that we can believe that most of the mobility across the manual/non-manual border is of the short range type. The data presented here support such a perception.

From the point of view of attitudes, both material conditions and social networks can be expected to play an important role. A high degree of geographical mobility is significant for white-collar professions, including the upwardly mobile. Intergenerational mobility demands that one takes one's chances where they happen to be, which often is not at the place where one lives. So we find (Table 4) that white-collar people often live far from the places where they grew up, and that they have

Table 4. *Social relations of the socially mobile and the class-stable. (Adjustment for age differences has been made. Calculated from Erikson 1971.)*

	A		B		C	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
White-collar stable	29	28	45	53	77	79
Upwardly mobile	27	23	37	41	62	53
Downwardly mobile	16	16	29	25	58	58
Stable workers	22	15	29	25	49	46

A – Proportion who have lived in more than four places since 16 years of age.

B – Proportion who live more than 100 kilometers from the area where they grew up.

C – Proportion who have a brother or sister in white-collar professions.

moved more times than is usual among manual workers and especially among the downwardly mobile. As a rule, this means a break with the social relations of childhood and a decrease in contact with relatives. However, one can expect that at least parents, brothers and sisters, in spite of the fact that they live in different places, still play some part in forming a person's attitudes. Then it is interesting to notice that stable white-collar workers, the downwardly mobile, and the upwardly mobile more often than stable workers have sisters or brothers in middle-class positions (see also Sweetser 1975).

These data could indicate that the family in which one has grown up is not a serious obstacle to upward mobility provided that one wants to adopt the values of a higher strata. The mobile, as a rule, come from the upper part of the workers' strata, their higher geographical mobility has cut off many of the social ties of childhood, and their mobility seems to include most siblings.

The contrary seems to be true of the downwardly mobile. Low geographical mobility suggests that social ties from childhood have not been broken. Therefore family background can be expected to be a more efficient barrier to accepting the values of the strata into which one is moving, than is the case among the upwardly mobile.

Mobility and class-based attitudes

Dahrendorf's arguments in favour of a concept of social mobility as a transformer of class problems into individual problems and as a mechanism for diminishing conflict between classes, are based upon the assumption that if there are good prospects for mobility, people will find it more profitable to devote their energy to trying to make use of those opportunities instead of involving themselves in a collective struggle for better conditions. A good chance for mobility will thus promote individualistic values. One could therefore expect to find individualistic values more often among people where these chances are high.

Most people who have grown up in working-class families have lived in milieus where individual careers have not been a realistic possibility. Poor living conditions and a marked lower-class position have forced workers to fight for better wages and working conditions by strikes and other collective action, which demand solidarity and unity. Collectivistic values in accordance with the programmes of socialist parties have emerged.

Unlike the workers who have improved their conditions through a collective struggle, the white-collar strata reveal a fight for better conditions by separate individuals. The probability of success has been high. Few of them have had to live under severe conditions for long periods of their lives. The individuals have solved their problems themselves. It has often been assumed that individualism has been the predominant value orientation. Equality of opportunity has been more important than equality in structure. This view is assumed to fit a liberal ideology. The objective situation of the white-collar strata has contributed to their propensity to support bourgeois political parties.

From the perspective of class structuration party preferences as well as other political attitudes are of interest. However, in relation to the problem in this article party preference is a very useful attitude, given that a great deal of empirical information on that variable is available. It is also the best single indicator of the broader concept of political orientation. For instance, it has been shown by using Swedish data, that on the important dimension of individualism-collectivism, those who have preferences for socialist parties (social democrats and communists) are located on the collectivistic side of the scale (Lindén 1976). It has also been shown that attitudes in favour of more equality and in favour of more power to the state and unions are more often found among socialists than among those who have preferences for a bourgeoisie political party (Pettersson 1977).

In the formation of political attitudes socialization theory has played an important role. A person's attitudes are seen as being formed by influences from the groups he has belonged to, belongs to, or expects to belong to. This view has been expressed in many studies of social mobility and political attitudes.

People who have grown up in working-class or white-collar milieus and then obtained jobs in the same strata as their fathers will probably have a fairly homogeneous political socialization throughout their lives. Theories of political socialization often ascribe the decisive role in forming political attitudes to the family and the political conceptions of the parents. The other important factor is the present class position of the individual (Hyman 1959; Campbell *et al.* 1960). Therefore, one can expect workers who have grown up among workers to vote for socialist parties. However, how people with white-collar jobs whose fathers were workers or workers with a white-collar background will vote, is a more open question.

The relationship between social mobility and political socialization has been the subject of many empirical studies (Zetterberg & Lipset 1956; Stacey 1966; Butler & Stokes 1969; Barber 1970; and Abramson & Books 1973). Even if the results are not completely unanimous, these and other studies have at any rate resulted in the conception of the problem which Parkin summarizes in the following way: '... if upward mobility is frequently accompanied by a political shift from left to right, there is little of a compensating shift in the opposite direction among the downwardly mobile'. The political shift from 'left to right' among the upwardly mobile is a result consistent with the view of social mobility associated with individualistic values, and is an obstacle to the collective effort towards improving the working-class position. The explanation of the low probability of a voting preference for socialist parties among the downwardly mobile is not clear. It has been suggested that there is a personal tendency to emulate the behaviour of those in high-status positions (Lipset) or '... those who have been socialized into middle-class values have individualistic rather than collectivist leanings. Their response to downward mobility tends, therefore, to involve some form of personal adjustment or recovery, and not a demand to change the system of rewards through communal action' (Parkin 1972).

Irrespective of explanations, the consequence seems to be clear. If we recall a

result from part three, where it was posited that the downwardly mobile have stronger social ties with their family of origin than is the case with the upwardly mobile and combine it with the view of political attitude formation as a result of socialization, then the consequence of social mobility would be a weakening of the working class. But this conclusion can be questioned, both on empirical and theoretical grounds. The conclusion drawn by Parkin never seems to have been true for Scandinavia (Table 5). Further, one can argue that this somewhat mechanical view of political socialization is rather inadequate, primarily because it cannot explain *changes* in the propensity to vote for various parties among the mobile and the class-stable.

A more 'rational' way of looking at political attitude formation may be more effective where these matters are concerned. People are assumed to evaluate various parties according to their programmes and the consequences they are expected to have for the life situation of the individual (Korpi 1971). This approach would take into consideration the 'material' life situations of the individuals, the policies currently advocated by the parties, and the various factors affecting the way individuals perceive this situation.

From the hypothesis of political socialization one would expect the two mobile categories to be in between the class-stable as far as the proportion of socialists is concerned. The same prediction may be made when we compare the material life situation of the mobile with that of the class-stable. The mobile fall in between the two categories of class-stable when income, unemployment risk, proportion of subordinates, wealth, proportion of shareholders, landowners, career possibilities, etc. are considered. Consequently, they can be expected to occupy an intermediate position in terms of their interest in socialism. So far the socialization and the rational hypotheses go hand in hand. In fact the influence of parents, relatives and co-workers is probably the factor that most immediately determines the way an individual perceives the various parties in relation to his own interests. Empirical data (Table 5) show a remarkable consistency in the proportion of socialists among the stable and the mobile. The variations between the stable and the mobile can just as well be explained by occasional fluctuations in the political

Table 5. *Social mobility and political attitudes. Proportion of socialists.*

	Finland 1972 ¹	Norway 1957 ²	1972 ¹	1955 ³	Sweden 1964 ⁴	1970 ¹
White-collar stable	15	18	21	20	27	22
Upwardly mobile	43	50	48	49	51	51
Downwardly mobile	66	60	68	78	61	61
Stable workers	87	88	87	85	86	84

1 From the Scandinavian Survey, 1972. Males only.³

2 Calculated from Rokkan 1967.

3 Calculated from Karlsson 1959. Males only.

4 Calculated from Särilvik 1969.

climate when data were being gathered, as by any more fundamental change in the propensity of the stable and the mobile to vote for socialist parties. This is probably what one could expect both from a purely socializational perspective and a more rationalistic one.

However, certain changes have occurred during recent years, at least in Sweden. These changes could perhaps result in changes in the probability of a socialist vote if the rationalistic approach has any validity.

Giddens named a great number of differences that still exist between manual and non-manual work but, at least in Sweden, it appears that the pattern of consumption and life styles among workers have come to be similar to those of broad layers of the white-collar strata. Still there are differences between the jobs of workers and white-collar jobs, but no doubt many white-collar jobs are characterized by monotony, stress, and a limited opportunity for influencing one's own work situation (SCB 1976). Security in employment is almost no better (or no worse) among white-collar than among manual workers. The rate of unemployment can be seen as an indicator of the market capacity of a certain group. High risk of unemployment is probably also of importance to an individual's interest in cooperation with others in similar situations, and to his interest in union participation and perhaps to his class consciousness.

Since the Second World War, unemployment has been concentrated on manual workers. The expansion of white-collar jobs and the relative shortage of well-educated people has resulted in low unemployment among white-collar workers – even during periods of low general demand for labour. The expansion of the educational system and an increase in the potential amount of white-collar labour has probably changed this picture. Between 1968 and 1974 the number of people who have experienced unemployment has increased in the white-collar sector. As a rule economic depression is most likely to cause unemployment among young people who are looking for their first job. The inflow of vacancies has continually decreased since 1969, and this has resulted in an increase in the proportion of young people who have been unemployed. This increase has now also hit the white-collar strata (Table 6). This was not the case during earlier depression periods after the war. In the Swedish level of living survey the respondents were

Table 6. *Social mobility and the percentage of employees unemployed at least once during the last five years 1968 and 1974. (Source: Level of living survey 1968 and 1974.)*

	Men				Women			
	under 31		over 30		under 31		over 30	
	1968	1974	1968	1974	1968	1974	1968	1974
White-collar stable	9	22	4	4	7	19	4	5
Upwardly mobile	7	23	6	5	15	18	4	5
Downwardly mobile	18	30	14	18	10	28	8	10
Stable workers	24	30	19	17	19	32	13	10

Table 7. *Social mobility and percentage of employees ever unemployed more than two months. (Source: Level of living survey 1974.)*

	Men		Women	
	under 31	30-49	under 31	30-49
White-collar stable	14	8	12	10
Upwardly mobile	15	12	12	10
Downwardly mobile	18	22	23	17
Stable workers	24	22	23	17

asked if they had ever been unemployed for more than two months. If we compare the answer to this question given by young people and old people who could be expected to have entered the labour market after the war, the young white-collar workers have experienced long-term unemployment more often than the older ones. This is in spite of the fact that they have been in the labour force for a shorter period (Table 7).

This is probably a reason for the rising level of union organization among white-collar workers, which has increased from 25% in 1940 to about 65% in 1973 (Korpi 1978). Decreasing opportunity for improving living conditions by individual measures has necessitated collective effort. If these changes are to result in changes in political preferences, this can be expected to occur first among the young and upwardly mobile, partly because many of them are in lower parts of the white-collar strata, and partly because their backgrounds will not operate against socialistic value-orientations, and finally because the relative deterioration, indicated here by unemployment risk is most evident among the young people.

But, the 'rational hypothesis' also takes into account the politics that various parties stand for and the way the programmes of these parties are transmitted to the people. Therefore, it is impossible to make clear predictions how a certain group will vote based solely on knowledge of changes in its objective situation. What can be predicted is that there will be *changes* in the propensity to vote for the socialist block as material conditions, or the content of politics or the process of transmittance are changing. The 'socializational hypothesis', on the other hand, predicts a stability over time in voting preferences in groups specified by own profession, father's profession, and father's party.

However, these two hypotheses need not necessarily be in conflict with each other. Rather they can be seen as complementary. Political socialization at jobs and by family of origin are no doubt two important mechanisms through which politics are mediated to the people. When these two sources of political socialization are in conflict with each other, as they often are when the socially mobile are concerned, then the importance of other factors like the content of politics, the objective situation of the individual, and other mechanisms for mediation will become more influential. Therefore the mobile can be expected to be more sensi-

Table 8. *Social mobility, political attitude, and membership in a political party. Percentage of membership in a political party among Swedish men. (Scandinavian Survey, 1972.)*

	Political Attitudes	
	Socialist	Bourgeois
	N	N
White-collar stable	4 (26)	29 (91)
Upwardly mobile	27 (37)	11 (37)
Downwardly mobile	13 (39)	8 (25)
Stable workers	12 (97)	0 (18)

tive and more unstable voters than the stable, at least when they are young. When people grow older, on the job socialization will be more important than family of origin as a source of political socialization. (For empirical support, see Petersson 1977, Table 2.14.)

The implication of the cross-pressure hypothesis, as it is formulated by Lazarsfeldt et al. (1948), is that people with conflicting social affiliations will be indecisive and withdrawn. If we assume that cross-pressure is stronger among the mobile than among the stable, then our data do not support the 'withdrawal effect' (Table 8). Rather the effect of cross-pressure seems to be a greater instability in political preferences (Table 9).

Table 9b shows that in the general decline in the socialist vote in 1976, it was among the young mobiles that the losses were especially large. Many explanations have been given regarding the outcome of the historic election of 1976 (Zenit 1976; Indikator 1976; Lindhagen 1977; Korpi 1977; Petersson 1977). Some of the factors mentioned are the debates about nuclear power and wage earners' funds, the role of mass media, political scandals, the growth of bureaucratic power, etc. Whatever the reasons, they seem to have influenced the mobile more than others.

Table 9a. *Social mobility and political attitude among different Swedish age groups 1955, 1970 and 1976. Percentage of socialists.*

Year Age group	A	B	C	D	E
	1955 20-30 (N)	1976 41-50 (N)	1970 21-35 (N)	1976 31-40 (N)	1976 18-30 (N)
White-collar strata	29 (304)	23 (99)	26 (35)	23 (108)	38 (108)
Upwardly mobile	73 (148)	54 (71)	68 (22)	49 (68)	44 (114)
Downwardly mobile	60 (149)	54 (70)	58 (19)	40 (89)	39 (86)
Stable workers	88 (184)	83 (115)	84 (38)	80 (162)	79 (151)

Sources: A Karlsson 1959. Males only.
B, D, E Petersson 1977. Both sexes.
C Scandinavian Survey, 1972. Males only.

Table 9b. *Changes in percentage of socialists over time within and between age groups.*

	A-B	C-D	A-C	C-E
White-collar strata	- 6	- 3	-3	+ 9
Upwardly mobile	-19	-19	-5	-29
Downwardly mobile	- 6	-18	-2	-21
Stable workers	- 5	- 4	-4	- 9

The interpretation I want to give this observation is that the cross-pressure situation often found among the mobile makes the socializational hypothesis insufficient as an explanation for their political choices. The elements in the rational hypothesis become more important. As social mobility increases, changes in the objective situation of people as well as the content of politics grow in importance for the outcome of elections.

A diminishing validity of socializational theory for political attitude formation does not, however, mean that the influence from parents and co-workers is of no importance. On the contrary, they are still very important elements. This leads us to notice another change, which has occurred during the last few decades, concerning the downwardly mobile.

In the previous analyses a considerable part of the downwardly mobile are people moving from independent farmer to worker. This development has now come to an end. Now 5% of the population are farmers. Downward mobility in the future will be mobility from lower white-collar professions to manual worker. This can be expected to increase the proportion of socialists among the downwardly mobile. Independent farmers have very seldom been socialists in Sweden. In 1955 about 13% of them were socialists (Karlsson 1959; Petersson & Särilvik 1974). If we look at empirical data where farmers are excluded, mobiles into the manual working strata show a higher proportion of socialists than was the case when farmers were included (Table 10). It should be mentioned that Petersson shows that in the 1976 election the downwardly mobile from white-collar strata voted 55% for the socialists while of workers whose parents were farmers, 46% were socialists.

Table 10. *Social mobility and political attitudes 1970 among male Swedish population. Farmers classified together with white-collars and farmers excluded from the analyses. Percentage of socialists. (Scandinavian survey, 1972.)*

	Farmers and white-collar together	Farmers excluded
White-collar stable	22	31
Upwardly mobile	51	51
Downwardly mobile	61	73
Stable workers	84	84

This section could be summarized by an expectation of a change in the stable pattern of recent decades in the proportion of socialists among the stable and the mobile. In the case of the downwardly mobile the proportion of socialists can be expected to increase. The reason for this is that as a result of the decline in agriculture and as a consequence of the 'buffer zone hypothesis', an increasing part of the downwardly mobile will come from the lower white-collar strata. Their parents will to a large extent be socialists and the downwardly mobile will more seldom meet conflicting political value systems as a result of their mobility.

Among the upwardly mobile, we can perhaps also expect the proportion of socialists to increase. Objective factors as well as socializational factors are operating in that direction. Among the objective factors one can mention the deterioration of the labour market situation for white-collar workers. The process of socialization can also be expected to favour pro-socialistic attitudes among the upwardly mobile, provided that socialists gain ground among the white-collar strata. Then also the upwardly mobile will meet conflicting values more seldom than they did during earlier decades. More will be said about this point in the next section.

However, data from the 1976 election show that these expectations are conditional. The outcome of the process is finally dependent on the role of the political parties, their programmes and strategies. Predictions cannot be made on this point, but the factors mentioned above seem to be in favour of the socialist parties.

Social mobility and changes in the composition of social strata

As we have seen, the propensity to vote for the socialist block will probably change both among the upwardly and the downwardly mobile. Let us for a moment forget this and discuss the effect of social mobility on the composition of social strata with regard to political preferences. Stephens (1976) has expressed this relationship in a rather distinct form. 'If political choice is related to father's class when the respondent's class is controlled, an increase in social mobility will result in a decline in the relationship between class and politics' (p. 456). This means that an increase in social mobility implies an increase in socialist votes among white-collar people and a decrease in socialist votes among workers. Class vote can be seen as one important indicator of class structuration.

To Stephens' conclusion it should be added that the causes of the increase in social mobility are of importance for the effect social mobility has on the structuration of classes. If the main cause is a change in occupational structure, say an increase in white-collar strata relative to workers, then upward mobility will be greater than downward mobility. The following fictitious example will illustrate the consequences.

1. We have two strata, the workers and all the rest, which we will call white-collar. We will observe development in three stages. During the first phase (A) there are 60% workers and 40% white-collar. This distribution will be changed during

the second phase (B) in such a way that we will have 50% of each class at the end of this period. This distribution will be stable during the third period (C). The strata are assumed to have the same reproductive capacity.

2. The amount of social mobility is determined by a change in class structure and by 'pure' mobility. This pure mobility is assumed to be 15%, which will mean that 15% of the total population will move from the white-collar strata to workers. The same number of people with manual working background will obtain white-collar positions, but when the white-collar strata are growing in relative number, 'structural' mobility will result in further mobility from working-class to white-collar strata.

3. The propensity to vote for socialist parties is what we expected it to be around 1950.

White-collar stable 0.15
 Upwardly mobile 0.40
 Downwardly mobile 0.60
 Stable workers 0.85

At the end of each phase the class composition in terms of the stable and the mobile, the proportion of mobile persons within each stratum, the proportion of socialists in the whole population, and the proportion of socialists within each stratum will be the following:

Class composition	Phase		
	A	B	C
White-collar stable	25	25	35
Upwardly mobile	15	25	15
Downwardly mobile	15	15	15
Workers	45	35	35
Proportion of mobile persons within strata			
White-collars	28	50	30
Workers	25	30	30
Proportion of socialists within			
Whole Population	57	52.5	50
White-collars	24	28	23
Workers	79	78	78

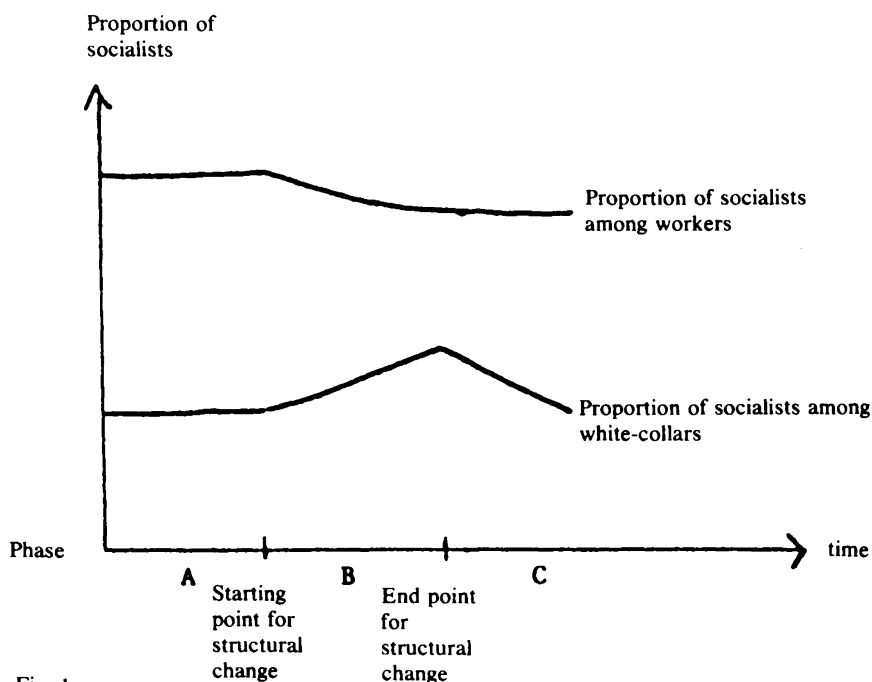


Fig. 1.

The predicted proportion of socialists within each stratum, given the same assumptions, can also be illustrated by Fig. 1. The purpose of this model is only to illustrate how a change in the occupational structure *can* affect class voting. During a period of structural change of the assumed character, the proportion of people with working-class values will steadily increase within white-collar strata. Within the whole white-collar sector this is probably not a very dramatic change. The effect is among other things determined by the rapidity of the change. Structural changes of this kind will take quite a long time. Nor can it be expected that the process will follow the linear patterns of development assumed in the model. The reasonable assumption is that there is cyclical development around a trend line. Even if the process is fairly smooth for a whole stratum, it is worth mentioning that the process within some segments can be much more dramatic as a result of structurally determined social mobility.

The implication of this example for class structuration during periods of change is primarily that, if social background has any importance, the distribution of 'working-class values' among certain sectors of the white-collar strata will be facilitated by upward mobility. Among workers, 'middle-class values' will gain ground.

Let us now discuss the validity of this model for changes in party preferences in Sweden since 1950.

Table 11. *Proportion of upwardly mobile among white-collar and farmers and proportion of downwardly mobile among workers. (From Table 1.)*

	1950	1968	1974
White-collar and farmers	44%	40%	43%
Workers	30%	42%	42%

Table 11 shows the proportion of the upwardly mobile among white-collar workers and of the downwardly mobile among manual workers. From this table we can see that workers have become more and more heterogeneous as far as class background is concerned. This is what we expect when downward mobility is constant and the workers are decreasing in relative numbers. What is more difficult to interpret is the stable proportion of the upwardly mobile among white-collar workers and farmers. One possible explanation is that 1950 and 1968 are two points on each side of a period of structural change (on each side of phase B in the model). In that case, the proportion of mobile persons within the white-collar/farmer strata

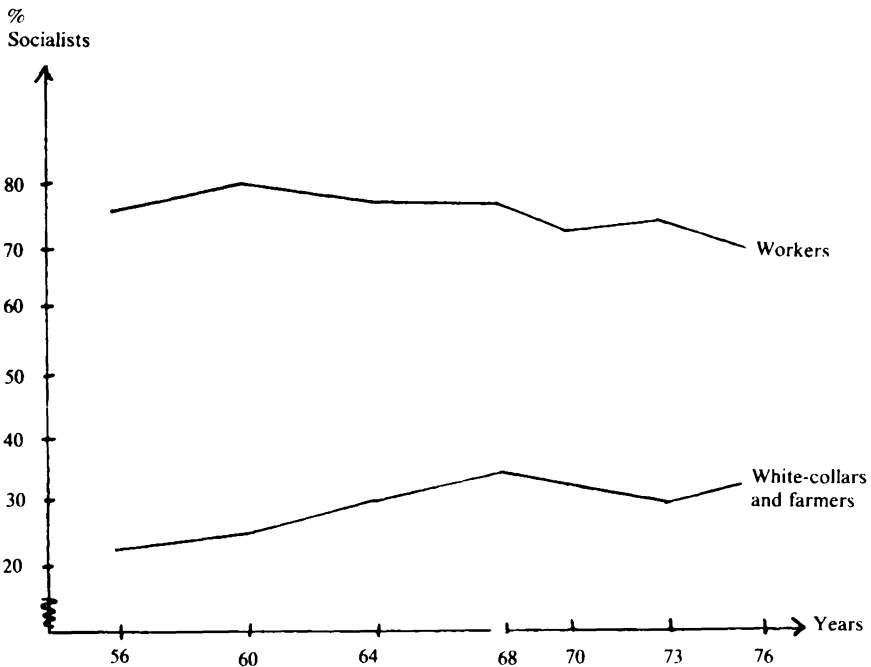


Diagram 1. *Percentage of socialist votes among workers and white-collar in the election years 1956–1976. (Source: Petersson 1977.)*

would have been at a peak sometime between 1950 and 1968. In fact, this should be the logical result when manual workers have decreased in relative terms and the proportion of the downward mobile has been constant (see Table 11).

In Diagram 1 we can see how voting behaviour has changed within each strata since 1956. The curves indicate a decline in socialist votes among workers and an increase among white-collars. The question is whether changes in class composition as a result of social mobility may have contributed to this.

As an explanation for the increase in socialist votes among white-collars, changes in class composition can be partly relevant. If we assume that there was a peak in the mobile share of the white-collar strata somewhere between 1950 and 1968, then the proportion of socialists among white-collars and farmers should increase between these years. This has also occurred. But, the proportion of mobile persons within the white-collar sector is almost the same in 1974 and 1950. Nevertheless more white-collars voted for socialists in the middle of 1970 than they did in 1956 and 1960. Possible explanations could be relative deterioration in living conditions in certain white-collar strata, increasing degree of proletarianization, etc. However, the purpose of this paper is not to give a full explanation of class voting, rather it is to explore the role of social mobility in relation to this problem. My conclusion is that it is very likely that social mobility has contributed to the distribution of more radical political opinions among white-collars, but other explanations must be given to the fact that socialist votes have remained on a rather high level.

Let us now turn to the workers. Social mobility can partly explain the change in class voting in this case too. We can see from Table 11 that the proportion of the downwardly mobile is considerably higher in 1968 and 1974 than it was in 1950. In Diagram 1 it is shown that the proportion of socialists among workers has decreased since 1960. As I see it, social mobility cannot be rejected as a factor which has contributed to this development.

Up to now we are left with the conclusion that social mobility and changes in the composition of strata with regard to social background can be a partial explanation of changing party preferences both among white-collars and workers.

In the future there will be one certain change in the pattern of mobility. Mobility from farming to manual work is no longer of any importance. In 1950 more than 70% of the downwardly mobile came from farming. This means that 20% of the workers were sons of farmers. In 1974, 49% of the downwardly mobile came from farming. While the downwardly mobile share of the manual working strata had increased, there was still 20% of the workers who had fathers who were farmers. This proportion will now continually decrease. As more and more of the downwardly mobile will come from lower white-collar strata and not from the farm population, they are expected to be socialists to a larger extent than formerly. In the lower part of the white-collar strata more than 50% are socialists (Indikator 1969). This would probably imply an increase in the proportion of socialists among workers.

In the case of the upwardly mobile we will probably find that they more often

move into positions where socialism is a rather strong political ideology. If this is true, one can expect that, even if the amount of mobility continues at the same level as before, the proportion of socialists among workers will increase. The same can be expected within some sectors of the white-collar strata. In fact mobility can contribute to political value homogenization between manual workers and parts of the white-collar strata. If the 'buffer-zone' hypothesis is correct, this is most likely to occur between workers and 'lower' parts of the white-collar strata.

These expectations are also limited by certain reservations. If socialistic values are in the long run going to get a foothold within additional parts of the white-collar strata, socialistic parties must of course design their policy so that it will meet the needs of these groups as well as those of the majority of manual workers. The possibility of doing that is in turn dependent upon the degree of similarity in the objective situations and interests of workers and white-collarists.

Summary and conclusions

In the first part of this paper it was asked whether there was any reason to believe that social mobility would in the future maintain the division between workers and white-collarists, thereby being an obstacle to political and social homogenization of wage earners across a border dividing the two strata. One of the reasons for such an expectation was the assumption of a positive relationship between mobility and individualism and a negative one between mobility and class identification. Secondly, high mobility rates would imply difficulties in the transmission of ideas from generation to generation. The consequence of an increase in mobility would be an aggravating circumstance for class structuration.

In the examination of the relationship between mobility and class structuration it could be worthwhile to distinguish between the effects of changes in mobility chances and the effect of mobility as such. In the second case I am thinking both of the way an individual is changed as a result of mobility and of the effect mobility has on the composition of social strata.

Those who move will be influenced both by their stratum of origin and their stratum of destination. The usual arguments are that if some of the mobile keep the value orientations of their original stratum, the result will be a mixed composition of strata. The greater the amount of social mobility the greater the proportion of people within white-collar groups with working-class values and the greater the proportion of people among the workers with middle-class values. This mixing of people will be an obstacle to both the structuration of classes and increased heterogenization within the strata. It should be mentioned that if an increase in total mobility is caused by growth in the white-collar professions, then the 'mixing effect' will be greater within the white-collar strata than among workers.

If we are going to subject these arguments to critical examination, it seems important to start with the question of whether mobility has increased or not. Most studies seem to have come to the conclusion that it has, and that it will continue to do so in the near future, the reason being a changing occupational structure, i. e. the

proportion of manual workers is decreasing. Pure mobility seems to be rather constant. The consequence would be a decrease in the level of class structuration unless certain other changes also occur.

First, an increase in mobility chances may not lead to an individualistic value orientation to the same extent now and in the future as was the case during earlier periods. The crucial thing in this respect is probably the social and economic distance between the positions. If individual mobility chances increase, but the mobility involved is between positions which are rather similar, then it can be expected that the propensity to improve one's situation by mobility will diminish. One conditional factor therefore seems to be the degree of equality between positions. Whether mobility in the future will become a threat to working-class strength is partly a question of equality between positions within the working class and between manual workers and white-collar workers. The impression is that such an equalization has occurred during recent decades. Whether it will continue is an open question. The other conditional factor is of a political and ideological nature. If the interests and objective situations of workers and white-collars will converge, it should be of importance to know to what extent this will be reflected in the political system.

Secondly, there might be a change in the way people who move will be influenced by that move. In parts four and five it was argued that a reasonable expectation is that both the upwardly mobile and the downwardly mobile will have socialist political preferences more often in the future, and that their participation in union and political activities is as high as among the class-stable. This is an indication of a change in the affect mobility has on class composition. If my expectation is correct, downward mobility will in the near future, no longer create value heterogeneity within the manual workers' strata to the same extent as before. It will also mean that mobility will continue to contribute to a spread of working-class values within the white-collar sector.

One interpretation of this could be that a process of homogenization between the manual working sector and lower white-collar stratum is going on. Bearing in mind that most mobility occurs in the zone between these two blocks, it can be surmised that mobility, rather than being an obstacle to class structuration, is an important contributor to a process of homogenization in attitudes and political orientations between manual workers and lower middle-class workers.

Consequently, social mobility can contribute to the transformation of economic relationships into social structures other than those which are prevailing today. Instead of functioning as an obstacle to class structuration, social mobility can in the future serve to increase the degree of class structuration where the relevant class boundary is not between manual workers and white-collar workers, but within a broader class containing most wage earners.

Notes

- 1 I am very grateful to Erik Allardt, Seppo Pöntinen, Sten Johansson and Robert Erikson, who made their data available for my analyses. I am also much obliged to Jonas Höög, Walter Korpi, Hans Zetterberg and those who criticized earlier versions of this paper at seminars at the Department of Sociology, University of Umeå and the Institute for Social Research, Stockholm (Autumn 1977). After this article was accepted by ACTA, Gunnar Persson's 'Essays on Mobility and Social Reproduction' came to my knowledge. Some of his conclusions are consistent with mine. The fact that our analyses are based on different sources of data improves the reliability of the conclusions.
- 2 The level of living surveys are interview studies undertaken 1968 and 1974. The interviews are based on a sample of 6000 Swedes between the ages of 15 and 74 (Norlén 1974).
- 3 The Scandinavian Survey is a cross-sectional sample survey carried out in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. About 1000 interviews in each country are completed. The population is limited to those between the ages of 15 and 64 (Kata and Uusitalo, 10, 1974).

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