

maintained. For example, in Britain over the last quarter of the twentieth century class inequalities in income from employment widened sharply but with little effect on class differences in security and stability of income and in lifetime income prospects (Goldthorpe and McKnight, 2006). Moreover, a cross-national perspective might be expected to reveal an analogous situation: that is, that variation in the degree more than in the pattern of class inequality may be produced as the same situational logic of class relations works itself out in national societies with differing political economies, industrial relations systems and social welfare regimes.²⁷

Esping-Andersen (1993: 2, 8) has complained that class theory, from Marx and Weber down to the present day, tends to assume that 'classes emerge out of unfettered exchange relations, be it in the market or at the "point of production"', and is thus 'nested in an institutionally "naked" world'. Regardless of how far such a characterisation is in fact correct, it is, I believe, still a mistake to see it as pointing to a deficiency. Rather, it would seem important that any theory of social class *should* aim to be as general as possible—to require only minimal assumptions about the institutional forms of labour markets and production units—precisely so that the impact of wider institutional variation, and likewise of underlying political and cultural factors, can then be assessed.²⁸ And the further question can of course in turn be raised of how far this variation, and also that in the differing shapes of national class structures previously referred to, are in fact themselves open to general theoretical explanation or have rather to be accounted for in more specific historical terms.

CHAPTER SIX

Class Analysis

New Versions and Their Problems*

Of late, sociologists have engaged in animated debate over the question of the continuing relevance of class analysis in contemporary, postindustrial, or postmodern societies (see, e.g., Lee and Turner, eds., 1996; Marshall, 1997; Evans, ed., 1999; Clark and Lipset, eds., 2001). For those who believe that in such societies class, as a social phenomenon, is in steady and inevitable decline, class analysis is merely a relic of the sociology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that must now give way to 'new paradigms'. But for those who would reject the idea of the decline of class, class analysis remains central to the sociology of contemporary societies, even though needing—as ever previously—to adapt its focus to changes in the forms of class structures and in the modalities of class relations.

In the present essay my concern is not with this debate, which has, I suspect, by now been pursued to the point of diminishing returns. I have, I hope, made my own position clear enough elsewhere: in short, that class and class analysis are of abiding importance (Goldthorpe and Marshall, 1992; Goldthorpe, 2001; and cf. also vol. I, ch. 5). Here, I seek to move on to a range of issues that have arisen among sociologists who would broadly share my view that class analysis retains its relevance but who would differ from me, and from each other, in the ways in which they would understand the nature and objectives of class analysis and wish to see it develop. I concentrate on

*This essay draws at various points on papers that appeared in the *American Journal of Sociology*, 105 (2000) and in *Acta Sociologica*, 45 (2002a). I am indebted to Tony Atkinson, Richard Breen, Robert Erikson, David Grusky, Stephen Morgan, Aage Sorensen, Kim Weeden, and Herman Van de Werfhorst for helpful conversations, information, criticism, and advice.

the strong, but contrasting, programmatic statements that have been made in this regard, and with the backing of at least illustrative empirical work, by two leading American sociologists, Aage Sørensen and David Grusky.¹

However, the debate on the decline of class cannot be entirely ignored. This is so because the arguments of those who have sought to defend class analysis are rather systematically influenced by their evaluation of this debate. More specifically, insofar as class analysis is regarded as a project of inescapably Marxist inspiration, the more seriously has the charge to be taken that it is now outmoded, and, in turn, the more radical are the changes that seem necessary if it is still to remain viable and valuable. Crucial in this case is the idea that an essential concern of class analysis is with tracing the main lines of economic division that define classes and with the consequent 'formation' of these classes: that is, with their emergence as groupings of individuals with a sufficient sense of shared identity and interests to be capable of engaging in collective action in which class is set against class and a potential for societal change thus created. This idea is clearly threatened insofar as classes, as understood in Marxist terms, have tended to show only rather low levels of formation and the working class in particular has failed to realise the historic significance that was scheduled for it. Thus, it would appear that class analysis in a *marxisant* vein can only be saved through some quite basic reformulation of the concept of class. And, as will be seen, both Sørensen and Grusky, who would alike wish to see a theory of class-based action remain at the core of class analysis, are led to propose new versions that would mark clear, and in fact rather startling, breaks with what has hitherto been attempted under this heading.

In contrast, if class analysis in contemporary sociology is recognised as having other sources than Marxist theory, and indeed as having in certain important respects developed *in opposition to* such theory, then the debate over class can be viewed with far less disquiet. In particular, it would appear that claims of the decline, or even 'death', of class can only be made by those who are blinkered by the supposition that the debate must remain one essentially with the ghost of Marx over issues of class action.² What might be described as the non-Marxist, or even anti-Marxist, tradition of class analysis—and within which I would situate my own work as represented here and elsewhere—comprises in fact a relatively wide span of interests. These extend from the differentiation of class positions by social relations in labour markets and production units (class structure), to the distribution

and redistribution of individuals and families among these positions over time (class mobility), and in turn to the consequences that then follow for a range of individual life chances and life choices.³ In this last regard, issues of the degree of class formation and of the extent of class-based collective action do of course arise. But these are seen as issues to be treated empirically: that is to say, it is to be determined under what conditions class formation and action are likely to occur. And should it prove to be the case that these conditions are quite special, so that high levels of class formation and action are historically exceptional rather than recurrent, this in no way constitutes a threat to the project of class analysis as a whole. From the standpoint of this tradition, therefore, no pressing need arises for the radical reconstruction of class analysis; it can, rather, be left to develop, as it has in the past, according to its own dynamic.⁴

The foregoing remarks should then be taken as important background to what is to follow. In the next section, I outline the proposals that have been made for radically new versions of class analysis by Sørensen and Grusky, and aim to bring out the main ways in which departures from existing versions of class analysis are involved. In succeeding sections I then present, from the standpoint of the non-Marxist tradition and, more specifically, of my own position within it, a critical response in which both empirical and conceptual issues are raised.

NEW VERSIONS OF CLASS ANALYSIS

Sørensen and Grusky are not of course alone in having argued the need for a renewal of class analysis. However, I choose to focus on these two authors on the following grounds.

First, a number of earlier contributions, notably Wright's various efforts (e.g., 1985, 1997) at revitalising the Marxist tradition and Bourdieu's attempt (1984) at transcending Weber's 'opposition' of class and status, while having already attracted a great deal of commentary, have led more to the modification or extension of existing research interests and practices than to their radical transformation in the way that would follow from the positions taken up by Sørensen and Grusky. At the same time, other more recent proposals, influenced, like those of Sørensen and Grusky, by the debate on the decline of class, lack the theoretical sharpness that characterises the work of these latter authors, and are thus less clear in their implications so far as the

transition from programme to performance is concerned (see, e.g., Crompton, 1998; Devine and Savage, 2000; Savage, 2000).

Second, Sørensen's and Grusky's proposals provide a marked and revealing contrast in their theoretical orientations. Sørensen is clearly an exponent of what I have earlier referred to, following Boudon, as the individualistic paradigm within sociology. He adopts in fact a rational action approach, draws freely on classical as well as Marxist economics, and comes in the end (2005) to label his approach as 'neo-Ricardian'. Central to Sørensen's understanding of class relations is the idea that actors in different class positions, which he defines in terms of property rights and assets, will seek to use whatever rights and assets they possess to their best advantage, and often, thus, to the disadvantage of others. It is then the structure of the 'antagonistic' relations that arise between classes and their representative organisations that Sørensen believes must be the main focus of class analysis. Inequalities in the 'life conditions' and life chances of the members of different classes and any associated subcultural variation are matters of only derivative interest. For Grusky, on the other hand, it is precisely the social processes that produce subcultural variation—processes of social selection, socialisation, and institutionalisation—that are essential to class analysis. In his view, it is only insofar as classes are formed as recognisable sociocultural entities that they can shape the life chances and the attitudes and behaviour of their members, and that the latter can pursue their shared interests through collective action. A major source of inspiration for Grusky is in fact Durkheim, the historic enemy of the individualistic paradigm. And in his most recent publications (see 2005a, 2005b) Grusky explicitly describes his position on class analysis as being 'neo-Durkheimian'.⁵

I turn now to a rather more detailed statement of the positions taken up by Sørensen and Grusky, with some comments on how these relate to those of various other authors.

Sørensen

Sørensen (2000b) distinguishes three types of class concepts, associated with ascending levels of theoretical ambition:

1. concepts that provide for a purely nominal categorisation of populations on some dimension or dimensions (e.g., occupational prestige or socioeconomic status) and that can then be used to display class inequalities in life conditions and life chances or class differences in attitudes and behaviour;

2. concepts that aim to delineate sets of positions (as, e.g., in the class schema discussed in the previous chapter), among which individuals or families within a population are distributed and can thus be recognised as empirical collectivities with a greater or lesser degree of sociocultural formation; and

3. concepts that aim to specify classes as collectivities within populations whose members are led to engage in conflict with each other in consequence of their interests being structurally opposed: that is, opposed by virtue of the positions that they hold and the social relations in which they are thus involved.

For Sørensen, the great virtue of Marxist class theory is that it treats classes in this last, theoretically most ambitious, sense. Classes are seen as collectivities engaged in structurally induced conflict as a result of their ownership or nonownership of the means of production and of the relations of exploitation that thus arise between them. In turn, a theory of societal change—indeed a theory of history—can be based on the logic according to which such class conflict is seen as evolving. At the same time, though, Sørensen recognises that the Marxist theory can no longer be sustained, not just because its historical predictions have evidently failed but, further, because exploitation as understood by Marx depends on a subsidiary theory, the labour theory of value, that is now quite discredited. Nonetheless, Sørensen believes that it is still essential, if class analysis is to survive, that it should maintain the Marxist emphasis on classes as collectivities in 'antagonistic' relations and on the idea of exploitation as the root cause of the conflict between class and class.

It follows, therefore, that a new understanding of exploitation is required, and it is this that is then basic to Sørensen's programme for the reconstruction of class analysis. What he proposes (2000b: 1532) is that while exploitation should still be seen, following Marx, as deriving from property rights, it should be recognised that not *all* such rights create exploitation but only those that provide for the ownership (or de facto use) of assets that produce *rents*. Sørensen defines rents in a rather catholic way but usually as returns on assets, the supply of which is limited or controlled so that it is not responsive to increases in price in the way that it would be in a perfectly competitive market economy. Those who hold rent-producing assets can thus be said to exploit those who do not hold these assets in that the former obtain economic advantage at the expense of the latter—in effect, by preventing them from realising the full return they would otherwise get from their own assets.⁶

Sørensen identifies many different kinds of rent in both modern and earlier forms of economy but concentrates on those that are chiefly to be found in labour markets (2000a, 2000b), namely, 'monopoly rents' and 'composite rents'.⁷ Monopoly rents arise where employees are able to restrict the supply of their labour, as, say, through controls exercised by trade unions or professional associations over levels of recruitment, training, and qualification, and in this way increase their pay above what would be the truly competitive rate. Composite rents arise where two different assets are more productive in joint use than separately, as where employees develop human assets specific to the work carried out in particular organisations and advantage thus accrues, via internal labour markets or bureaucratic hierarchies, both to employees in the form of pay or job security higher than they could obtain in the external market and to the employer in the form of increased profit.

For Sørensen, then, the primary concern of class analysis should be with conflict among classes over rents and the exploitation they imply: that is, conflict over the creation, protection, or destruction of rents. Sørensen acknowledges that differences and inequalities in the 'life conditions' and life chances, including the mobility chances, of members of different classes will be influenced by the outcome of such conflict, and that in turn class sub-cultural differences may be created through processes of socialisation under different life conditions. These phenomena can also be of interest to class analysts, but only, in Sørensen's view, in a secondary and in fact limited way. In this regard, he stresses that inequalities in life conditions reflect the 'total wealth' of class members—the total return from the use of *all* their assets—but that it is only certain assets that produce rents. In other words, insofar as inequalities in total wealth and thus life conditions derive from the use of assets that does not involve rent, and that therefore does not lead to exploitation, these inequalities cannot be regarded as a source of class conflict (cf. 2000b: 1525). While they may be relevant to the description of what Sørensen calls (2000b: 1526) 'the geography of social structure', through the use of type (i) or type (ii) concepts of class, as distinguished above, they have little relevance for the analysis of the actual dynamics of class—of structurally induced class conflict and of societal change following from it—which requires the use of type (iii) concepts.

Moreover, Sørensen believes that the value of type (i) and (ii) concepts even for descriptive purposes is likely to diminish on account of the course that is actually being followed by class conflict in contemporary societies.

For Marx, the internal logic of such conflict would lead to working-class revolution and the eventual establishment of a communist form of society. But, for Sørensen (2000b), the course of history is destined to go in a quite different, indeed contrary, direction: that is, towards the ultimate triumph of capital over labour so far at least as conflict in the labour market is concerned. Employers will progressively succeed in destroying employment rents previously secured by workers and in thus creating freer, more efficient labour markets that operate in ever closer conformity with the assumptions of neoclassical economics.

Sørensen would indeed regard this process as already well under way. On the one hand, workers' monopoly rents are being undermined through attacks on the power of unions and especially through restrictions placed on their ability to organise and mobilise workers. Sørensen points here to a general decline in union membership across advanced societies, to the greater difficulties experienced by unions in obtaining bargaining rights with employers, to widening pay differentials *within* occupations, and to falling strike rates. On the other hand, composite rents are being reduced by the redesign of jobs that previously created a basis for such rents and in turn by the breakup of internal labour markets and the downsizing and delaying of administrative and managerial hierarchies. These developments are reflected in the disappearance of well-defined career structures and in more frequent layoffs, decreasing job security, and more 'payment-by-results' in all grades of employment. As, then, labour markets are reduced to what Sørensen once memorably described as 'neoclassical soup',⁸ the economic fortunes of employees at all levels become overwhelmingly individualised—that is, determined by their own endowments and productive capacities. And, in turn, therefore, the very point of conceiving and representing classes by reference to occupations or differing employment relations is undermined. Economic inequalities are likely to grow but at the same time to take on an increasingly 'classless' character.

Finally, this scenario envisaged by Sørensen serves to bring out the point that the concept of exploitation that is basic to his proposed new version of class analysis has always to be understood in a strictly technical sense. It does not, as in Marxist class theory or the neo-Marxist version of class analysis pursued by Wright, serve to bridge analytical and normative concerns.⁹ In other words, it does not follow for Sørensen that the elimination of rents, and in turn of exploitation and class antagonism, is a goal to be

pursued—one integral, say, to the replacement of present-day capitalism by a more equal or in some sense a more just or more humane form of society. Exploitation is simply the outcome of assets being used in such a way as to create rents. And thus, insofar as it is the agents of capitalism who are destroying employment rents, it is they, rather than the revolutionary working class, who are removing exploitation and related conflict from labour markets and acting as the midwives of the classless society—a view that causes Wright (2000) some evident consternation. However, as Sørensen fully, and quite consistently, recognises, the new society may well prove to be more unequal and, by most criteria, more unjust and inhumane than that which it supersedes. Once employment rents are removed, the economic inequalities generated by the operation of the free market will be modified only through state welfare provision. And it is this, Sørensen suggests, that will in the future take over from the labour market as the main area in which class conflict as conflict over rents—rents deriving in this case from rights to welfare—is fought out.

Grusky

For Sørensen, one might say, class-based collective action must be the ultimate concern of class analysis, and his typology of class concepts is intended to underline this point. For Grusky, to retain a focus on collective action—or, as he puts it, to retain class analysis in its ‘strong idiom’ (Holton, 1996)—is crucial in defending it against its critics. And, if this is to be done, Grusky argues, it is essential to recognise a twofold conceptual distinction on somewhat different lines to Sørensen’s threefold one: that is, the distinction between *nominalist* and *realist* concepts of class (Grusky and Sørensen, 1998; Grusky, Weeden, and Sørensen, 2000).¹⁰ Nominalist concepts treat classes as being no more than simply aggregates of individuals who share a ranking on a scale or an allocation to a particular category of a schema of class positions (such as that discussed in the previous chapter). Realist concepts, in contrast, aim to identify classes that exist as actual sociocultural entities and, in particular, that are social groupings recognised by and meaningful to the individuals who make them up.

In Grusky’s view, the most powerful argument for the ‘decline of class’ thesis is that class, as understood in current analysis, whether Marxist or non-Marxist, is not now an idea that seems of any great importance in individuals’ everyday lives: that is, in shaping their own social identities

or the ‘cognitive maps’ by means of which they perceive and define others. Consequently, it is unclear through just what causal processes class could be expected to provide a basis for class-linked action of any kind. If, therefore, class analysis is to be protected against this argument, what is required is that concepts of class that are, today at least, no more than nominalist should be abandoned and a new, realist approach pursued. The way in which this can be done, Grusky then proposes, is by ‘ratcheting down’ the level at which class analysis operates: that is, from the level of classes understood as large-scale, societal aggregates, defined, say, in terms of property rights or employment relations, to that of classes understood as more disaggregated and primarily *occupational* groupings that ‘form around functional niches in the division of labor’ (Grusky and Weeden, 2001: 203).

Like Sørensen, Grusky recognises that the reconstitution of class analysis that he envisages does involve a major break with conventional thinking—and is likely to meet with resistance for this reason alone (cf. Grusky and Weeden, 2002). But, he maintains, if a realist approach is to be followed, then the ratcheting down that he advocates is an entirely appropriate move to make. For it is in fact at the level of particular occupations, rather than at the level of the ‘big classes’ of conventional analysis, that processes conducive to the formation of real social groupings, of significance to their members, are most evident. For example, recruitment to occupations goes on through specific processes of selection, including self-selection; occupational entry is typically associated with processes of socialisation, whether formal (i.e., via training and induction programmes) or informal; and it is occupations rather than ‘big classes’ that gain legal and other official recognition and are most often represented by organisations such as trade unions or professional bodies (Grusky and Sørensen, 1998; Grusky, Weeden, and Sørensen, 2000; Weeden and Grusky, 2005; and cf. also Weeden, 2002).¹¹

In turn, then, Grusky would argue, it is at the occupational level that one most readily observes collective action, in pursuit of interests created at ‘the site of production’, that is the ultimate concern of class analysis in the Marxist or at least *marxist* tradition. Occupational groupings may not be vehicles of revolution; but it is they, rather than classes understood as societal aggregates, that typically act in order to protect and improve the economic conditions of their members. Their organisations may engage in collective bargaining with employers but also operate more generally through various ‘strategies of closure’ aimed at the regulation of labour supply: for example,

through customary restrictions on recruitment, through credentialism and formal licensing, or by otherwise establishing 'jurisdictional' control over the kinds of work that they cover (see esp. Grusky and Sørensen, 1998; Grusky and Weeden, 2001).

In other words, Grusky would here emphasise what, for Sørensen, would be classic rent-seeking action.¹² But, unlike Sørensen, Grusky sees no reason to suppose that such action will become increasingly difficult to sustain. He notes the claims made by several authors of the emergence of a 'post-occupational' workforce as a result of the extensive deskilling of work or of its reorganisation into new polyvalent jobs. But, as strong countertendencies, he points to the specialised yet decentralised forms of work organisation of 'post-Fordism' (Piore and Sabel, 1984), which revitalise artisanal production methods and set a premium on worker solidarity and communitarianism, and again to the drive among managers and administrators and also many workers in technical and personal services to achieve 'professional' status and organisation. Indeed, once class analysis is relocated at the level of occupational groupings, Grusky believes, it will be found that collective action 'flows quite unproblematically' from such groupings. Thus, it will be possible to dispense with the argument, characteristic of the weaker idiom of the non-Marxist tradition, that class formation and collective action are to be treated not as theoretical expectations but rather as developments likely only under rather special conditions: 'The [occupational] division of labour is rife with collective action that occurs so predictably as to eliminate any need to deploy the rhetoric of contingency' (Grusky and Sørensen, 1998: 1206).¹³

Further, though, Grusky would also be ready to argue that even if class analysis is understood in a version that does not privilege issues of collective action, the disaggregated but realist approach that he favours still offers major advantages. For example, as regards class mobility, he observes that standard mobility tables, based on 'big classes', will often hide the fact that certain occupational groupings have particularly strong 'holding power'—far greater than that of any class definable at an aggregate level. And this is so because the processes of closure and thus of 'reproduction' to which conventional class analysts refer in explaining immobility operate primarily in particular occupational contexts rather than at a societal level. Mobility is in general 'governed by the deeply institutionalised boundaries between occupations rather than by the aggregate interclass boundaries fashioned by academics' (Grusky and Weeden, 2001: 208).

Likewise, insofar as interest centres on class as a determinant of life chances and, especially, of attitudes and behaviour, Grusky would claim that its effects will emerge most clearly and strongly if class is equated with occupational grouping. And again this is so because the causal processes that have to be invoked are ones most likely to be found at the occupational level. Thus, while aggregate classes are no more than collectivities defined in terms of 'nonorganic', *gesellschaftlich* relations, occupational groupings are of a generally more *gemeinschaftlich* character, and indeed genuine occupational communities can often be identified. Consequently, occupational groupings far more readily provide social contexts that can serve as the source of shared values and normative codes and in turn of distinctive lifestyles. In other words, occupational groupings, in contrast to 'big classes', tend to be both economic *and* sociocultural entities. Analysts who wish to follow the 'cultural turn' in sociology or the lead given by Bourdieu (1984) in seeking to overcome Weber's distinction between classes, which are 'not communities', and status groups, which typically are (Weber, 1922/1968: 927, 932), will therefore be best served by taking up the disaggregated approach (see esp. Grusky and Sørensen, 1998: 1192; Weeden and Grusky, 2005: 149–54).

This last point is of particular interest and merits a final comment. The view that it is desirable to conceptualise classes as sociocultural as well as economic entities is of course by no means specific to Grusky. Of late, a number of other authors have argued on similar lines, usually under the influence of Bourdieu and in reaction to the view that the sociocultural formation of classes should be treated as merely contingent (see, e.g., Devine and Savage, 2000; Savage, 2000). However, what is then important to note is that these authors have not been as ready as Grusky to consider the implications of this position. That is to say, they have tended to rely on the largely unquestioned assumption that distinctive cultures or subcultures can still be associated with classes as understood in some more or less conventional fashion (cf. ch. 4, this volume, pp. 81–4) and to neglect the possibility that, at least in the context of modern societies, what Grusky labels as a neo-Durkheimian approach to class analysis cannot in fact be pursued *without* the quite radical revisionism that is involved in his regrounding of the enterprise at the occupational level.

Having outlined the proposals that Sørensen and Grusky advance for the reconstruction of class analysis, I now turn to a critical evaluation from

the standpoint of my own position. From what has already been said, it will be apparent that some differences must from the first arise over the sociological purposes that class analysis is intended to serve. However, I wish as far as possible to avoid questions of what class analysis ought 'really' to be about. Rather, I organise my critique under the three substantive heads of class structure, class effects, and class action. In regard to the first of these topics I am chiefly concerned with various empirical issues that arise from the respective cases that Sørensen and Grusky make out for their new versions of class analysis. In regard to the second and third topics, I take up conceptual as well as empirical issues relating to the implications for class analysis that would appear to follow from their proposals and that I would regard as in various respects problematic. The upshot of my critique is that while research programmes associated with these proposals may well produce results of considerable sociological interest in, as it were, their own right, they cannot provide an adequate substitute for class analysis in the more conventional sense that I would myself favour.

CLASS STRUCTURE

Both Sørensen and Grusky are sceptical of, and seek to move away from, the idea of a class structure as this is understood in more conventional forms of class analysis: that is, as a structure of positions defined by social relations within labour markets and production units. For Sørensen, such an idea could be of value only in a descriptive sense—it would not in itself throw light on the sources and dynamics of class conflict—but it is now, in any event, being outmoded by the course of change in employment relations as contemporary capitalism creates its own version of the classless society. For Grusky, the conventional idea of a class structure is primarily a construct of sociologists, and one that, by the present time at least, does not map at all closely onto the ways in which social relations at 'the site of production' are actually experienced and understood by individuals in their everyday lives. Occupation, not (aggregate) class, is the dominant subjective reality, and sociologists need to acknowledge this if they are to be more successful in analysing how employment and its consequences impact on individuals and how they respond.

The arguments that Sørensen and Grusky here put forward, and that play a large part in justifying their claims that class analysis requires radi-

cal revision, have clearly differing motivation and direction but they are, I believe, alike open to question on various empirical grounds.

The claims that Sørensen makes regarding the dissolution of class structure, despite their different—and more rigorous—theoretical derivation, show evident affinities with those of globalisation theorists (as examined in vol. I, ch. 5) and also with those of authors (referred in the previous chapter, such as Halford and Savage), who believe that what I have called the service relationship is now being eroded as the typical form of regulation of the employment of professional and managerial staff. In my discussion of the supposed impact of globalisation on class structure (vol. I, ch. 5, pp. 1–107), I have already cited some of the evidence that, I believe, undermines such claims. Here, I refer back to this material and also note further relevant research findings.

The central issue to be considered may be set up as follows. In the previous chapter, I suggested that differences in employment relations should be taken as the basis for distinguishing class positions and thus for delineating the class structure. Sørensen's argument is in effect that these differences are fast disappearing as a result of the growing power of capital in labour markets. While the elimination of monopoly rents tends to widen inequalities in earnings within occupational groupings, the elimination of composite rents has a homogenising effect across different categories of employee as all employment contracts move closer in form to spot contracts and labour is in effect commodified. Thus, professional and managerial staff lose the well-defined career prospects that they previously enjoyed and become exposed to a similar degree of economic insecurity and instability as are rank-and-file workers. However, I would maintain that Sørensen's position here lacks adequate empirical support and indeed that the relevant research results that are available tell quite strongly against it.

First, as regards the risks of job loss and unemployment, there is, so far as I am aware, no consistent evidence to show that these are converging across classes in the way that Sørensen would suppose. In the case of Britain, where high quality longitudinal data exist, the most notable research finding is in fact, as I previously noted (vol. I: ch. 5, p. 103), the degree of stability over time that class differentials in these risks display, although large fluctuations may of course occur in the overall level of unemployment (cf. Gallie et al., 1998; Elias and McKnight, 2003). Moreover, the differentials are marked. Thus, being in unskilled wage work increases the odds of

experiencing recurrent or long-term unemployment almost fourfold relative to the odds for members of the higher salariat, and even when a range of individual attributes is controlled (Goldthorpe and McKnight, 2006).

Second, as regards career prospects, there would likewise seem no compelling evidence for Sørensen's position. Again as earlier noted (vol. I, ch. 5: pp. 103–105), claims of a decline in the stock of 'career-type' positions in the American economy have been strongly challenged. And, further, the results of a major survey of working conditions in Britain in 2000 have been summed up as follows (Taylor, 2002: 7): 'The evidence simply does not sustain the view that we are witnessing the emergence of a "new" kind of employment relations, seen in the "end of the career" and "the death of the permanent job for life"'. In fact, the research in question finds the average length of job tenure to be *rising*, and *especially among* professional and managerial employees. Moreover, the large majority of these employees reported that they were in jobs with promotion ladders and recognised career structures.

Third, while in many, but not all, advanced societies inequalities in earnings have of late tended to widen, and within as well as between occupations and classes, there is little indication that this is associated with any major change in payment systems. Thus, in Britain, despite some tendency for 'payment by results', in one version or another, to be extended to professional and managerial employees, it emerges (Goldthorpe and McKnight, 2006: Table 2) that this and other potentially variable forms of pay still average out, in the case of men, at only around 7 percent of the total earnings of these employees, in contrast to a variable component in the earnings of male manual workers averaging out at over 20 percent. Furthermore, it is also apparent that little change has occurred over recent decades in class differences in the relation between earnings and age. For manual workers, and also for women in routine nonmanual work, age-earnings curves tend to flatten out by around age 30, while for members of the salariat they continue to rise up to around age 50—consistently, that is, with the 'upward-sloping experience-earnings profile' characteristic of the service relationship (Goldthorpe and McKnight, 2006: Figures 3–6; and see further McKnight, 2004: ch. 4).

That Sørensen's position finds so little evidence in its favour reflects, I would suggest, the error of his assumption that employment rents, like all other rents, always and necessarily imply inefficiency. The service relation-

ship may indeed create composite rents, but it does not then follow that it involves an inefficient form of employment contract. Although employers have good reason, all else equal, to prefer approximations to spot contracts, with types of work that give rise to problems of human asset specificity and also of monitoring (which Sørensen tends to neglect), the rationale of the service relationship—relative security in working life and a steadily rising level of compensation in return for 'appraised' service in the interests of the employing organisation—is likely to provide a more efficient mode of regulation of employment: that is, one better suited to maximising the total value of the contract, even though employers and employees may well be in conflict over how this total value should be divided. And employers as rational actors will tend, overall, to recognise that employment relations embody positive-sum as well as negative-sum games.¹⁴

The same body of evidence that can be marshalled against Sørensen also provides a basis for questioning Grusky's rejection of the idea of a class structure. Although this evidence does not stand in direct contradiction to the position that Grusky takes up, it does serve to raise the issue of whether, in urging that class analysis be ratcheted down to the occupational level, Grusky is not missing something important: that is, features of their economic lives that individuals *across a wide range of occupations have in common*. Is it in fact the case that the differences in economic security, stability, and prospects that exist among members of 'big classes', as defined in terms of employment relations (cf. Goldthorpe and McKnight, 2006), are in fact present to no less a degree among their constituent occupational groupings, so that thinking in terms of classes adds little or nothing of value? Grusky has not in fact demonstrated that that this is so, and I would think it generally implausible.¹⁵

There is of course no reason why differences in occupational subcultures and social networks of the kind that Grusky emphasises should not coexist with similarities in economic circumstances deriving from similar employment relations. Thus, for example, factory machinists, bus drivers, and security guards could differ markedly in the former respects while still being quite comparable in the latter, as also could, say, plant managers, accountants, and librarians. And even if particular occupations may appear to have distinctive economic features—a high or low level of layoffs, especially favourable or unfavourable promotion opportunities, unusually variable

pay, and so on—it would still seem dangerous simply to discount the possibility that these may be no more than occupational variations on strong class themes.

Grusky could of course reply that, however this may be, it scarcely bears on his claim that sociologists' aggregate classes are insufficiently realist—that is, find insufficient correspondence in individuals' everyday social awareness. This may actually be a claim that Grusky pushes rather too hard,¹⁶ but, aside from this, a further, more serious issue arises. If it is the case that classes defined in terms of employment relations form collectivities of individuals and families whose economic lives do have much in common, underlying any occupational variation, then one may ask why conceptual schemes that represent such classes should not, on these grounds, be regarded as just as 'realist' as those representing occupational groupings. Or, as Grusky would seem to imply, is only what is generally recognised by 'lay actors' to count as social reality—thus excluding the possibility of sociologists identifying aspects of this reality that are not readily apparent to lay actors? In certain lines of investigation, in regard to class or more generally, it will clearly be essential for sociologists to take actors' concepts into account, and in turn how these concepts relate to their own. But for other purposes, I would maintain, it is entirely permissible and indeed desirable that sociologists should be free to develop concepts, and render them operational, without their degree of correspondence to those of lay actors being of primary concern. Class structure in a conventional sense I would see as being a concept of this kind. And it has then to be judged not by its degree of 'realism', in Grusky's rather special usage of this word, but by what it contributes to sociological understanding. This is a point that will recur with some importance in the section that follows.

CLASS EFFECTS

Both Sørensen and Grusky start out from the view that the central focus of class analysis should remain, as it was for Marx, on class-based collective action. The question of how class impacts on individuals, influencing their life chances and their attitudes and behaviour is, for them, of only secondary interest. Still, in advancing their proposals for new versions of class analysis, both do give attention to this question and, as will be seen, it is one that Grusky has taken up in systematic empirical research. In this section,

however, I seek to show that Sørensen's and Grusky's proposals alike carry troublesome consequences so far as the study of class effects is concerned.

To begin with Sørensen, the main difficulty to which I wish to point stems from his equation of class conflicts and conflicts over rents. What has to be recognised in this regard is that conflicts over rents are both highly heterogeneous and differentiated. Thus, conflicts over employment rents are conflicts that arise not only between employers and workers but also among different groups of workers. That is to say, those employees who gain monopoly rents or composite rents in labour markets do so not only at the expense of employers but also at the expense of—or, as Sørensen would say, through the exploitation of—other employees or potential employees, often ones in similar grades of work or with similar qualifications.¹⁷ At the same time, employers (or their agents) may of course be in conflict with each other over rents associated with the securing or terminating of business monopolies or of licenses, franchises, patents, and so on. And, further, the social welfare rents that Sørensen would see as destined to become increasingly important, and indeed to replace labour market rents as the main area of class conflict, are ones likely to set against each other any number of different categories of welfare claimants and taxpayers.

Now such conflicts over rents obviously do occur and sociologists should certainly pay more attention to them. Moreover, if Sørensen wishes to treat these conflicts as class conflicts, involving exploitation, there is little point in objecting in principle, despite the conceptual turbulence thus created. However, what can be pertinently observed is the following. If one were to take up Sørensen's innovation at the level of what he would distinguish as type (iii) class concepts—those aimed at identifying collectivities that are brought into conflict by structurally opposed interests—then the actual lines of class conflict that would be traced within a modern society would be of an extremely complex, cross-cutting, and probably quite unstable kind. Consequently, it is difficult to see how these lines of conflict could in any intelligible way map onto the inequalities in life chances—including chances of class mobility—or again onto the differences in attitudes and behaviour that would be established using any existing class concepts of Sørensen's types (i) or (ii). And it is likewise difficult to see how new type (i) or (ii) concepts could be derived from Sørensen's rent-based approach that would be serviceable and revealing in empirical research, and especially when one recalls that, for Sørensen, differences in individuals' total wealth, and thus

in their life conditions, stem only *in part* from their success in securing rents. The use of assets that does not involve rents may well lead to inequalities in 'total wealth' but, in Sørensen's view, without thereby resulting in exploitation or thus creating any objective grounds for conflict.

In sum, one could say, Sørensen's concern to provide a new basis for class analysis, understood primarily as the analysis of conflicts between collectivities arising out of structurally opposed interests, does not allow for this to be undertaken in an integrated way with the study of class effects at the individual level. The latter, under Sørensen's proposals, would not simply be relegated to a secondary place in class analysis; it would in effect have to be split off as a more or less separate area of enquiry.

Turning now to Grusky, his proposal for ratcheting down class analysis to the occupational level is also aimed at enabling classes to be seen as an 'unproblematic' source of collective action. But Grusky does at the same time maintain that class analysis in this new version will be better suited than more conventional versions to investigating class effects and, in particular, will allow sociologists to move more readily from establishing associations or correlations between class and 'outcome' variables to tracing the actual causal processes involved. Indeed, little progress in this latter respect is likely to be made 'without abandoning aggregate formulations' (Grusky and Weeden, 2001: 209; cf. Weeden and Grusky, 2005).

Behind this claim lies, of course, Grusky's conviction that it is only when classes can be treated as in some significant degree sociocultural as well as economic entities that it is possible to see how they might exert an influence over their individual members: that is, through shared values and social norms and institutionalised practices. However, as against this, I would wish to return to the general argument that I have already elaborated and applied in regard to class differentials in educational attainment (chs. 2–4, this volume, and also vol. I, ch. 8, pp. 172–3): namely, that adequate micro-foundations for class analysis can often be provided without appeal to causal processes that depend on classes possessing a high degree of sociocultural formation. Many kinds of social regularity can in fact be understood simply as the result of individuals acting in a (subjectively and boundedly) rational way in response to the differing patterns of constraint and opportunity by which their class situations are characterised (cf. Korpi and Palme, 2003).¹⁸ And what then, from this point of view, is chiefly important about concepts of class is that they should capture these differing patterns of constraint and

opportunity as effectively as possible, and not that they should relate to groupings that are 'real' in Grusky's sense. Indeed, it may sometimes be that the attempt to achieve such realism by ratcheting down class analysis to the occupational level rather than concentrating on what individuals across a range of occupations have in common, such as the form of their employment relations and its typical consequences, leads to a loss rather than a gain in explanatory potential.

This point is well brought out in regard to class mobility: that is, in regard to the effects of individuals' origin positions on their subsequent chances of remaining in these positions or moving from them. As earlier noted, Grusky contends that mobility is governed primarily by 'institutionalised boundaries between occupations' and that the effects of these boundaries in creating social closure and class reproduction are likely to be lost in work based on aggregate classes. However, the case he makes here rests largely on analyses of *intragenerational*, or worklife, mobility (Sørensen and Grusky, 1996) and is far more questionable when considered in relation to *intergenerational* mobility. It is true that some occupations tend, for various reasons, to have relatively high 'holding power' in inter- as well as intragenerational perspective: for instance, those of doctor or coal miner. But research into intergenerational mobility is concerned not only or even primarily with why doctors' children have a high propensity to become doctors or coal miners' sons a high propensity to become coal miners. More important are such questions as why those doctors' children (the majority) who do not become doctors are far more likely to move into other professional or managerial occupations than to become manual wage workers, or why those coal miners' sons who do not become miners (again the majority) are far more likely to move into some other kind of wage work than to become professionals or managers. And to treat these questions adequately, attention has then to focus on features of the *shared* class situations of members of the professional and managerial salariat and of the body of wage workers, and on central tendencies in the responses that they make to these situations (as I seek to show in the chapter that follows). The institutional boundaries of particular occupations or the closure practices of their members can be of little relevance.

Grusky does in fact recognise this difficulty but argues (Grusky and Sørensen, 1998: 1205; cf. Grusky and Weeden, 2001: 208–209) that the tendency to represent 'supply-side' effects in processes of intergenerational class mobility and immobility as being 'so diffuse in character that they

necessarily generate reproduction at the level of [aggregate] classes rather than occupations' may do no more than reflect the limitations of research to date; through further research, following a disaggregated approach, more 'occupation-specific' processes may be revealed. This must of course remain to be seen. But scepticism is, I believe, warranted, and primarily on the grounds that 'closure' and 'reproduction' do not in any event seem apt concepts to apply in the case of intergenerational mobility, whatever value they may have in analysing worklife mobility. In intergenerational perspective, classes are not in any meaningful sense closed nor is class membership reproduced—if only because of the absolute amount of mobility that is typically generated by class structural change (Goldthorpe, 1987: ch. 2; cf. Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992b: ch. 6; Breen and Luijkx, 2004a).¹⁹ Where some notable degree of reproduction, over both time and place, could be claimed is in the underlying mobility regimes of advanced societies, as defined in terms of relative rather than absolute mobility rates (again see Chapter 7, this volume). But it is then in accounting for this 'deep' reproduction that a reliance on occupationally specific factors, which are likely themselves to be quite variable over time and space, would seem especially inadequate and that more generalised class effects will be of primary importance.²⁰

It could perhaps be argued that mobility is a rather special case and that Grusky's approach, emphasising effects that could derive only from collectivities that have some degree of sociocultural formation, will prove more appropriate in other respects. Here in fact Grusky's own empirical work is relevant. Grusky has sought to investigate the explanatory power of 'big classes' as compared with that of a highly disaggregated, 126-category occupational classification in relation to a range of some 50 'outcome' variables, both attitudinal and behavioural, extending across four different 'topical domains'—with explanation being understood, for the time being, simply in terms of degree of association.²¹

Results so far available (Weeden and Grusky, 2005) indicate that, from domain to domain, a version of the class schema described in the previous chapter leaves unexplained from around half to three-quarters of the association that can be established between the occupational classification and the outcome variables. Grusky regards such results as strongly supporting his position: that is, as demonstrating that the explanatory power of any such 'nominalist' schema is necessarily limited. However, I too would regard the results reported as being encouraging, and especially when three further

points are noted. First, the version of the class schema here used excludes one class, the petty bourgeoisie, that has often proved to be highly distinctive. Second, many of the outcome variables considered are simply not ones in regard to which more conventional class analysts would expect any marked class effects to be present: for example, variables relating to marital history and status, satisfaction from family life, religious beliefs and participation, or attitudes to abortion, pornography, homosexuality, or the treatment of criminals. And third, it is in the one domain where such class effects *would* be expected, the domain of life chances, that they do in fact show up most strongly—the six-class schema in this case accounting for more than half of the association found with the 126 occupational categories—and even though the particular outcomes included here are still not those that, theoretically, should be most closely linked to class in the sense represented by the schema.²²

How, then, is it that I as well as Grusky can view his findings with some satisfaction? What has to be understood here is that Grusky seeks, ideally, to capture *all kinds of effects* deriving from 'the site of production'. This is, in his view, the task of class analysis, and his disaggregated occupational classification is designed to meet this task: that is, to pick up effects that are quite specific to particular occupations as well as effects that operate far more generally. The classification should therefore—and does—have more explanatory power, in the sense here in question, than the class schema. But the schema derives from a tradition of class analysis in which class positions are defined by reference only to *certain features* of social relations at the site of production—in my case, the kind of employment relations in which individuals are involved—that many occupations will have in common. And, in turn, class effects will be expected to show up only insofar as some plausible *causal* connection can be suggested between an outcome variable and these defining features.²³ Thus, while the schema does, unsurprisingly, explain less, in terms of degree of association with many outcome variables, than the disaggregated classification, it still should—and does—explain enough to show that 'aggregate' class effects are of real importance, and that conceptual clarity is seriously impaired if these effects are simply lost sight of in a plethora of more specific occupational effects of a highly heterogeneous character.²⁴

It could perhaps be held that the issue between Grusky and me comes down in the end largely to one of labelling and is not therefore of any great consequence. What he would present as a new version of class analysis, I

would rather see as a way of revitalising the sociology of occupations: in effect, by moving it on from a preoccupation with more or less ad hoc case studies. This does, though, still mean that I would have to view Grusky's proposed programme as being complementary to class analysis in some more conventional form and not as providing a substitute for it. And one other rather basic issue has in this connection to be raised.

This is that Grusky has, so far at least, given only very preliminary indication of how he would treat the question of *hierarchy* within the detailed occupational classification that he has developed (Grusky and Weeden, 2006).²⁵ Now from the standpoint of the sociology of occupations, there is in fact no requirement to take this matter further: occupations can and do differ from each other in many consequential ways that are not hierarchical, in the sense that they do not involve systematic social inequalities. However, while many conventional class analysts, myself included, would not envisage classes as always falling into a single hierarchical ordering (see chs. 2 and 5, this volume; and cf. Dahrendorf, 1959: 74–77; Giddens, 1973: 106), all would of course view class structures as being, preeminently, structures of social inequality. Thus, from my own position, members of different classes are advantaged and disadvantaged in differing, if not always entirely commensurable, respects as a result of the employment relations in which they are involved. And it is the inequalities that thus arise that are seen in turn as driving class differences in 'outcomes' across a range of life chances and life choices. But it remains to be seen just how, on the basis of Grusky's decomposition of class structure into occupational structure systematic social inequalities are to be recognised and, if so, in what terms they are to be understood.²⁶

CLASS ACTION

Sørensen would believe that the ultimate concern of class analysis has still to be with class-based collective action. Marxist class theory has manifestly failed but the spirit of Marx must in this respect be preserved, even if this means that class analysis has otherwise to be radically transformed. Thus, it is essential to identify as classes groups that are in conflict with each other on account of their structurally opposed interests—hence, the crucial role given to rent as the source of exploitation. Grusky would likewise believe that for class analysis to be securely defended against its critics, it should seek to

retain its 'strong idiom'. To make this possible, classes must be understood as groupings that show a significant degree of sociocultural formation and are thus meaningful to their members as well as to sociologists—hence, the need to ratchet down class analysis to the occupational level.

Taken on their own terms, both these strategies can claim some evident potential. Sørensen can point to numerous and varied examples of collectivities that are engaged in conflict over rents of one kind or another, and Grusky can point to the frequency with which occupational groupings pursue their interests through representative organisations and through formal or informal efforts at closure (cf. also Weeden, 2002).

However, what has here again to be noted is that the attempts that Sørensen and Grusky make to reconstitute class analysis carry their own limitations, and that, so far as class action is concerned, the limitation that they have in common is of a rather ironic nature. In attempting to overcome the problems of Marxist class theory by moving class analysis in a neo-Ricardian and a neo-Durkheimian direction respectively, Sørensen and Grusky alike make it difficult to give due recognition to class action of the kind that primarily concerned Marx: that is, class action occurring not at a sectional or local but rather at a *societal* level.

Sørensen wishes to treat all conflict over rent as being class conflict and, further, all class conflict as being conflict over rent. But since, as already noted, conflicts over rent are highly heterogeneous and differentiated, they are in turn essentially sectional and often, too, cross-cutting—so that some groups may be exploiters in one context but exploited in another.²⁷ It is then difficult to see how, in modern societies at least, conflict over rents could ever become class conflict on a totalising, societal scale. Sørensen does indeed appear to acknowledge this when he remarks that class conflict, in his conception of it, will be more severe under feudalism than capitalism precisely because, under feudalism, one axis of conflict, that arising over rents from *land*, is dominant. In advanced capitalist societies, where the distribution of advantage and disadvantage from rents is complex and changing, 'no revolution has occurred' (2000b: 1541).

The occupationally based action on which Grusky would focus, though perhaps on a less complex pattern in being largely restricted to labour markets, is likewise essentially sectional or, as Grusky himself often puts it, 'localised'. Occupational groupings pursue their particular interests not only against employers over pay and conditions but also, through their attempts

at controlling labour supply, against others who are seeking to sell their labour. And Grusky, in a somewhat similar way to Sørensen, would appear to believe that the counterpart to this occupational restriction of collective action—or that is, to labour markets becoming ‘Durkheimianised’—is the containment and reduction of class conflict at the macro-level, which, Grusky remarks, emerged in threatening form ‘for only a brief historical moment’. In general, micro-level organization ‘can crowd out and substitute for class formation of a more aggregate sort’ (Grusky: 2005b: 56).

What Sørensen and Grusky would both appear to assume here is that class conflict on a societal scale must involve, at least so far as the subordinate, working class is concerned, action that is revolutionary in character. In other words, they envisage no alternative to the full, and by now generally discarded, Marxist model. However, one of the main concerns of the non-Marxist tradition of class analysis has from its inception been with the possibility, and in some instances the actuality, of class action on a societal scale that is not revolutionary, at least in a Marxist sense: that is, action aimed at the radical modification of capitalism rather than its overthrow and pursued primarily through the institutions of liberal democracy.

In those cases where such action is most readily documented, labour movements have typically pressed for wide-ranging and redistributive developments in social welfare policy that in effect set up an opposition between ‘citizenship’ and ‘social class’ and that are aimed at ‘class abatement’ in regard to inequalities of both opportunity and condition alike (Marshall, 1947). And greatest success in this regard would appear to have been achieved where organised labour has been able to engage in a ‘political exchange’ (Pizzorno, 1978) with governments, especially social-democratic governments, in which it offers cooperation in macroeconomic policy—for example, over the regulation of pay increases and labour market flexibility—in return for advances in social welfare policy. The most notable examples of such a ‘democratic translation of the class struggle’, to use Korpi’s (1983) phrase, are provided by Scandinavian nations, most notably Sweden and Norway. But variants of essentially the same process have been widely discussed, most commonly under the labels of ‘social partnership’ or ‘neocorporatism’, with reference to a wider range of European societies.²⁸

Moreover, what emerges from the relevant body of research is that the effectiveness of such class-based action crucially results from trade union confederations having sufficient organisational and strategic capacity to be

able to overcome occupational or other sectional and localised interests in labour markets. This enables them to become credible and reliable actors in what Korpi refers to as ‘societal bargaining’ and in this way to pursue class interests of, precisely, an aggregated kind (see, e.g., Lehbruch and Schmitter, eds., 1982; Goldthorpe, ed., 1984; Garrett, 1998; and cf. vol. I, ch. 5, pp. 98–100).²⁹ Grusky is therefore supported in his view of micro- and macro-level organisation as being in some degree of tension, but not in supposing that, under some kind of Durkheimian law, the former must always and everywhere prevail over the latter. As Birkelund (2002: 219) has observed, in a critique of Grusky from a Scandinavian standpoint, national confederations representing organised class interests do there exist and clearly exert power at a societal level. Thus, even if classes, in the conventional sense, are only doubtfully formed as *gemeinschaftliche* entities, an awareness of class interests can still exist and find significant expression (see also Korpi and Palme, 2003).

As against such criticism, Grusky’s main line of defence (Grusky and Weeden, 2001: 214; 2002: 230–31) is that the continuing sociopolitical relevance of class organisation and action at a societal level may amount to no more than Scandinavian exceptionalism—itsself of questionable durability. And Sørensen, as already noted, would point to the growing ascendancy of capital over labour in the advanced societies of the present day as manifested in falling union membership and declining power, both industrial and political. These responses can certainly claim some degree of empirical support. Over recent decades a clear tendency has emerged for social partnership or neocorporatist arrangements, where they existed, to be weakened or less frequently used, and chiefly as a result of employers and governments being less ready to participate. At the same time, collective bargaining has become generally more decentralised on sectoral, industrial, or occupational lines. Nonetheless, on the other side of the argument, the two following points have to be stressed.

First, as was remarked at the outset, class analysis in the non-Marxist tradition does not carry the theoretical expectation that class action on a societal scale will in fact come about, whether in a revolutionary *or* a reformist mode. It is rather concerned with the conditions that make such action more or less probable. This may be seen as a resort to ‘the rhetoric of contingency’, to use Grusky’s phrase, when, by moving down to the occupational level, collective action could be treated as quite predictable. However, what

is required by the more conventional position is that classes should be so conceptualised that action that transcends sectional and localised concerns, insofar as it does occur, *can in fact be recognised* rather than being precluded from consideration *ab initio*—which would, it seems, be the case with the new versions of class analysis that Sørensen and Grusky propose.

Second, and by way of underlining the importance of this first point, it should be noted that not all current changes in the political economies of advanced societies do in fact run in the same direction. For example, *contra* Sørensen, it can be observed that the decline in the density of trade union membership is not universal. In a number of societies, mostly in fact ones with neocorporatist traditions, density has been maintained over recent years or has actually been increasing, chiefly through the wider recruitment of nonmanual employees (for statistics, see Ebbinghaus and Visser, 2000; Iversen and Pontusson, 2000). And *contra* Grusky it can be pointed out that two tendencies that *are* virtually universal are, on the one hand, that towards union amalgamation, which has seen the growth of general or ‘conglomerate’ unions at the expense chiefly of craft and other single-occupation unions, and, on the other hand, that towards a reduction in the number of affiliates that national confederations comprise (Ebbinghaus and Visser, 2000). These, then, are tendencies that should obviously facilitate rather than impede action at a supra-occupational level. And indeed, as several authors have recently argued, the extent to which processes of institutionalised class conflict—and compromise—have declined should not be exaggerated. Even if employers and governments have sought to withdraw from older forms of societal bargaining, there is little indication that in ‘coordinated’ as opposed to ‘liberal’ market economies—those, say, of northern Europe as opposed to those of the United States or Britain—either of these parties would wish to lose the ‘institutional comparative advantage’ of being able to engage in negotiations with organisations capable of representing labour at the level of classes and, increasingly, those of nonmanual as well as manual workers (see, e.g., Iversen and Pontusson, 2000; Hall and Soskice, 2001; Thelen, 2001). Moreover, from this point of view, the increased competitive pressures resulting from globalisation appear more as a conservative than as a destructive force.³⁰

In short, it would, as of now, still seem premature to suppose that if sociologists wish to retain an interest in class action on a societal scale, then

it is one that they will have to pursue in historical rather than contemporary contexts, and that class analysis for the future should be accordingly reconstituted.

The main lines of argument of this chapter might then be summed up in the following way. Both Sørensen and Grusky, in seeking to preserve a *marxisant* style of class analysis, with its primary emphasis on collective action, propose new versions that would, in effect, largely displace class analysis from the field of macrosociology. In particular, the idea of a class structure, identifiable at a societal level, would lose its significance.

In the case of Sørensen, this is the consequence of his concern that central to class analysis should be the ‘antagonistic’ relations that arise out of exploitation, which must then, in his view, mean relations that are expressed in conflicts over rent. But such conflicts are ones that, in modern societies at least, occur in several different domains, that at the macro-level are as likely to cross-cut as to aggregate, and that cannot therefore be easily related to the overall pattern of class-linked inequalities of condition and opportunity. And in any event such inequalities are, for Sørensen, only partially the outcome of success in securing rents. In the case of Grusky, the retreat from the macro-level is more deliberate. It follows from his concern to ground class analysis in real—that is, occupational—groupings, from which effects at the individual level and related collective action can be expected to flow in a far more regular way than from ‘big classes’. The latter, as primarily sociologists’ constructs, carry little subjective significance for the individuals who are corralled into them.

This downward shift in focus entailed by Sørensen’s and Grusky’s proposals may well in itself prove sociologically rewarding. The kind of action that Sørensen would regard as rent seeking is pervasive, and no doubt does occur as much or more *within* than between classes as conventionally understood. It would certainly merit more systematic study from those concerned with the sociology of economic life. And Grusky is surely correct in supposing that if one wishes to identify collectivities within labour markets and production units that have some significant degree of sociocultural formation, then occupational groupings offer more promising possibilities than do aggregate classes. To map out the extent of such formation across the occupational structures of modern economies could well provide a new starting

point for the sociology of occupations.³¹ However, this does not mean that either Sørensen's or Grusky's proposals amount to an adequate alternative to class analysis as more usually practised. Several implications follow from them that are problematic, especially in regard to the study of class effects, including on chances of mobility, and class action.

In Sørensen's case, the evident difficulty is that the analysis of class effects can no longer be integrated with that of class action. The patterns of inequality in individuals' life chances and of differences in their attitudes and behaviour that can be associated with different locations within the class structure need not have, and are indeed unlikely to have, any close correspondence with the structure of conflicts over rents. The latter will in only a quite limited way relate to the former as either cause or effect.

In Grusky's case, difficulties arise chiefly from the fact that his concentration on the occupational level leads to a neglect of what, at the level of class structure—as delineated, say, in terms of employment relations—members of different occupational groupings may have in common. In regard to class mobility chances, at least as viewed in intergenerational perspective, this neglect threatens a serious explanatory deficit, since 'aggregate' class effects would appear of far greater relevance than occupationally specific ones. And in regard to differences in attitudes and behaviour, the distinction between these two kinds of effects becomes obscured, and thus in turn the distinction between, on the one hand, effects that can be traced back to class-linked inequalities at the macro-level and, on the other, those stemming from distinctive features of particular occupations, including ones that may not imply social inequalities of any kind. Significant regularities in individuals' orientations and actions can in fact be produced simply in consequence of their rationally intelligible responses to the differing constraints and opportunities to which their class situations give rise. And while bringing in occupationally specific factors may well increase variance explained, and allow greater causal importance to be given to shared values and social norms, it is unclear what, from the standpoint of class analysis, is gained if links to an economically grounded structure of inequality cannot then be made.

Finally, in Grusky's approach as in Sørensen's, class action has to be seen as being of an essentially sectional or localised kind. Both would believe, if for differing reasons, that class-based action on a societal scale, organised and pursued in such a way as to overcome intraclass differences is, or is on the way to becoming, a thing of the past, and need not therefore figure on

the agenda of a class analysis for the future. This view would seem to be too much influenced by the historic failure of Marxist predictions of revolutionary working class action while giving too little weight to the far from negligible number of national cases in which still today societal bargaining, involving organisations capable of representing class interests at a macro-level, remains an important process within their political economies—and one therefore that class analysts will still wish to keep within their conceptual field.