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Book Reviews

R. Crompton (2008), *Class and Stratification*, 3rd edition. Cambridge: Polity. £17.99, pp. 192, pbk.
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This is a new third edition of Crompton's well-established textbook on class. The second edition was published ten years ago by Cambridge so this is a welcome, and somewhat overdue, update. It is also an extensive update. The book has been much revised and extended to take account of both theoretical debates and empirical changes over the last decade, with new material and some reduction on the older, more dated, summaries of previous work. The book is mainly intended for a sociological audience – indeed, it remains a core sociological text – but it will also be of significant interest to social policy readers. Class remains a central feature of policy analysis and a focus for policy action; and yet appreciation of how we should understand and measure class structures is frequently a marginal issue in social policy curricula.

The book opens with a new scene-setting chapter, which situates later discussion within the ideological and social context of twenty-first century Britain. This includes the influence of neo-liberalism and the impact of individualism, as well as the implications of the 'new' Labour governments; but also, of course, the changes in social and economic patterns within society more generally. Crompton suggests that in this new context, despite the continuing importance of class division, 'the *idea* of "class" has lost its importance as a central discourse, or political organizing principle, in contemporary societies' (p. 3, emphasis in original). To illustrate these changes she employs an analogy with the organisation of professional football, where 'local heroes have been replaced by international celebrities' (p. 4) – although, not in my club, worst luck!

Despite these shifts towards individualism, Crompton argues that class is not 'dead', and indeed that a return to analysis of social structures and stratifications is required to restore a 'cutting edge' to a sociology which has sometime come to focus too closely on 'culture' and 'identity' (p. 5). Perceptions and policies may have changed, but we still live in a society stratified by class; and it is the job of sociologists to help us to understand this – and its implications for policy.

Crompton explains that there is no one 'best way' of approaching the analysis and measurement of class; and most of the substance of the book comprises chapters outlining and explaining the major different approaches, and the strengths and weaknesses of each. However, the focus remains specifically upon class. While there is some discussion of the intersection of gender and class (an abiding interest of Crompton's), there is no systematic treatment of other social divisions such as ethnicity or age. Readers wanting an introduction to these wider dimensions of social difference must look elsewhere.

Following the introduction then, Chapter 2 summarises the historical development of different approaches to stratification. Chapter 3 explores key theories of class analysis, including Marx and Weber. Chapter 4 looks at 'structural' accounts and attempts to operationalise or measure stratification, including the recent ONS Socio-Economic Classification (the ONS-SEC). Chapter 5 summarises (though in less detail than in earlier editions) the

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'employment-aggregate' approaches of Goldthorpe and Wright, and challenges the notion that there has been a demise of class analysis in sociology. Chapter 6 (largely new) investigates the cultural challenge to traditional class analysis, including Marshall's conception of citizenship and the influential work of Bourdieu. From this Crompton argues that culture, and agency, do clearly influence class experiences and class outcomes; but that these perspectives can operate alongside structural approaches to provide us with a more rounded overall understanding of modern society.

Chapter 7 (again largely new) looks at recent evidence on social mobility and the influence of family on class destination. As social policy readers will know, this can make for grim reading, as social mobility has widely been on the decline in the UK. But then, arguably, this makes an understanding of the dynamics of class all the more important. The final chapter builds on this examining in a bit more depth the widening of class inequalities, and providing critical analysis of the 'underclass' thesis and the policy focus on social exclusion. This latter part of the book will be likely to be of particular interest to social policy readers; but they should not just rush to read this more familiar discussion. The great strength of Crompton's book remains its commitment to providing a rounded analysis of both theoretical and empirical understanding of the continuing importance of class within contemporary society – together with the ability to present this in clear and accessible terms. When we understand this, we are closer to knowing why inequalities have been widening, and therefore may be better equipped to do something about them.

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M. Koch (2006), *Roads to Post-Fordism: Labour Markets and Social Structures in Europe*. Aldershot: Ashgate. £50.00, pp. 190, hbk.
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To start with, the book bridges an important gap in research on post-Fordism in at least two respects. First, it analyses the varying expressions of Fordism in Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom and empirically shows that there can be successful alternatives to neo-liberal post-Fordist restructuring. Second, it applies the regulation approach, which, to date, had its strongest moments in detailed case studies, to a comparative analysis in social structure and labour market regimes.

Koch starts with a theoretical synthesis of the writings of Marx and Weber and thereby develops an understanding of social structure as a dynamic plurality of exclusionary social relationships that are both expressed at the point of *production* and at the level of the *distribution* of wealth. He then goes on to introduce the regulation approach as a mediating research tool which allows for a combination of the *general* character of capitalist development and power relations and the analysis of *specific* national paths of regulation that also include non-economic motivations and struggles. In order to analyse these specificities, regulationists offer two intermediary concepts, namely regimes of accumulation and modes of regulation, the latter comprising five sub-dimensions or institutional forms which are the wage relation, the enterprise form, the nature of money, the state, and international regimes. Of these, Koch focuses especially on the state and the wage relation, and here mainly on the procedures and contents of wage determination. At this point, however, the author unnecessarily limits the explanatory power of his approach. For why, after all, should we apply the concept of mode of regulation if we do not take account of its central characteristic, that is the dialectial relation between its institutional sub-dimensions, their relative autonomy

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