

Changing social classes –
uncertainties, continuities
or continuing uncertainties?

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Introduction

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- Social concern, no solution from emigration

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- Spanish Flu epidemic 1918-1920

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- Flu: 20 000
- No direct effect — but the problem of extra population ceased to exist

Class based uncertainty

- Huge and growing class based inequalities were not the only but *necessary* conditions to the Civil War
- Inequalities had been growing since the famine of 1866-68

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- However, differences in wealth, health had grown esp. among the farming population
- The key was relative inequality rather than absolute poverty

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- In absolute terms, overall standard of living and well being has been growing for the whole Second World War period
- In relative terms, key class based inequalities have been growing

Examples

- Life expectancy grows in all socio-economic groups, but least among the uneducated workers
- The longer trend towards increasing relative income differences

So...

Are we heading at the societal turmoil
similar to 1918?

Current class structure

Expectations

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- Rapid “postmodernization”, collapse of working classes

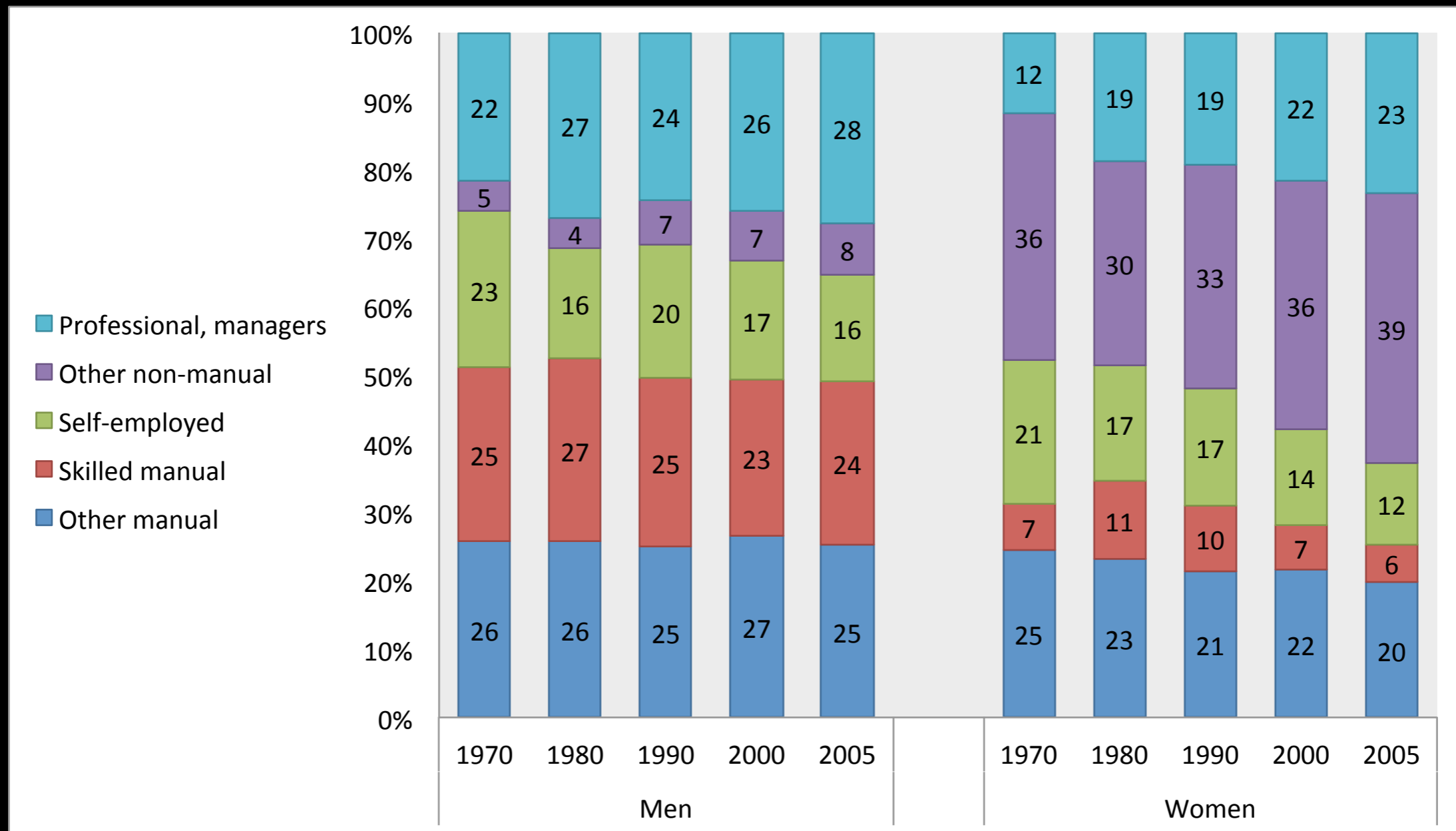
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- The emerging routine non-manual work
- Professional occ. growth

The class of structure of 21-65 year old Finns



Observations

- No rapid structural change
- The opposite: class structure persistent, changing only slowly
- Working class substantial in size esp. for men

A possible conclusion

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- No uncertainties related to class structure
- Rather the opposite, the changes are obvious and fairly predictable
- For instance, manual working classes are still comparatively big in Finland => expect to slowly shrink
- So no worries, right?

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- There was no rapid turmoil in class structure itself prior to 1918
- Rather slow and persistent changes
 - Urbanization, modernisation to some extent
 - Bigger change: growth of farm manual work
- So the change in class structure is not that relevant but rather the other uncertainties

Key question

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If class structure does not change,
do the changes in class based inequality create
uncertainties?

Unfortunately...

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Yes...

...but the outcome would be totally opposite to the
1918

The goals of the Nordic welfare societies

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- Reduce absolute poverty of the working class
- Protect families against the uncertainties related to unemployment
- Compensate the other extreme losses during the life course
- Both egalitarian and economic goals, all met

Pre welfare state



Pre welfare state



Emerging welfare state



Growing inequality

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Growing inequality

- Increasing inequality has not meant the impoverishment of the poorest
- Rather it has meant the increasing wealth and other forms of wellbeing of the top elite

Emerging welfare state



Emerging welfare state



Current society



What means in practise

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- The social distance between an average citizen and the elite grows

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- The social distance between an average citizen and the elite grows
- Increases the likelihood of social closure

Social closure

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Social closure

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...to the rest of society

- The middle income classes adopt similar strategies towards the bottom

What follows

- Reduced generalised trust throughout the strata
- Fenced societies

Current welfare state



Current welfare state



Fenced future



Current welfare state



Fenced future



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- Examples: UK, US

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- Reduced social mobility
- Less emphasis on achievement, more on luck
- Reduce of average wellbeing

Conclusion

- The social changes related to social classes do not lead to the revolution or radicalisation
- Rather, we are heading at stagnation — unless something is done