

E) Outline and assess sociological explanations why the class structure is changing in the contemporary UK

There are many reasons why you could argue the 'Class Structure' is changing in the Contemporary UK.

Firstly, up until the 1980's wealth was becoming more fairly distributed across the population, however since the 1980's this trend has reversed and the gap between rich and poor has rocketed. Now a days, most wealth remains in the hands of a tiny minority whilst the majority float above the fine line of poverty.

New Right sociologists claim that the old ruling class has disintegrated and a share owning expanded middle class has emerged. Peter Saunders now claims minority rule by a minority class has been replaced with a nation of stakeholders.

However the continued existence of a 'power elite' controlling the majority of wealth and power has been well documented by John Scott.

Manual work patterns have changed also, i.e. in the primary and secondary industry manual jobs have declined significantly, whilst service sector jobs have increased. The expansion of the Welfare state has caused professional and non manual jobs to increase, results in a bloated middle class.

The traditional working class has also changed, with women becoming a more influential and important member of the work force. Part time work has increase too.

As a result of a rising global economy a geographical shift in the traditional working class has emerged. In the West there has been a growth in non manual employment with an extension of state services, in particular teachers, nurses, clerks etc

There has also been an increase the employment of women and part time low insecure employment.

Roberts claims the middle class has expanded but also 'fragmented' into a number of distinct groups, i.e. professionals, managers, self employed. Roberts call these strata within the middles class 'class fractions' each with its own culture, norms and values.

Professionals tend to employ internally, therefore if your father is a professional you are much more likely to be employed.

Savage suggest that professionals have a strong sense of class solidarity as evidence of their willingness to take collective action to protect their values, i.e. Occupational Associations-BMA, law society and lower down the NUT

There has been a significant increase in self employed people, especially in the areas of consultancy in the finance, ICT areas. Large numbers of employed managers have their own consultancy business too.

It is understood that Henry Ford shaped the traditional working class with his first moving assembly line in the 1914. Work was divided up into much more manageable loads and presented to a much lower skilled work force in return for lower labour costs. Fordism shape both working class and its sense of solidarity. However with manufacturing in decline this class has also begun to decline.

Henry Braveman argues that Fordism still impacts working class as workers are constantly de-skilled with the introduction of technology.

This introduction of technology has also dented the middle class occupations as white collar clerical/ technical are subject to proletarianisation by the impending application of technology. Marxists suggest that revolutionary class consciousness will be the result of such trends.

Daniel Bell suggests that we are now living in a post fordist or post industrial age where work is based intellectual creativity rather than physical effort. Businesses also take more care of their workforce through better conditions, pay and concern for professional development.

To support these claims by Bell the primary and secondary industries have declined whilst tertiary have expanded, as a result fewer people in Western Europe now work more with their brains than with their hands. Service sector workers lack the old structures of union and solidarity, thus seemingly becoming more privatised. There has been a growth of highly skilled new technology workers (wired workers) whom work from home, enjoying increased flexibility, challenge and autonomy. However there is strong evidence against Bell's theory, i.e. some sociologists argue that manual work has simply followed market conditions to low labour costing parts of the world. Also some argue the point that most computer workers sit in fact sit front of computers to input simple repetitive data, in poor conditions and for low pay.

