

The older worker has not yet attracted much notice in the development of the sociology of work.<sup>1</sup> This is surprising, because of his significance for theories of change. On the one hand, seniority rights closely associated with age have been steadily established in industry, public administration and the professions, and a 'career structure' has come to characterize many types of work. On the other, a growing army of redundant and retired but active people of late middle age has been created partly by technological and scientific innovation and partly by the expanding educational opportunities for the young. These two trends are marked and might appear to be contradictory. How are they to be reconciled and explained? This chapter puts forward the hypothesis that they are causally related, and is based on a dual comparative perspective. Younger workers are compared with older workers and the structure of the workforce is compared at different points of time.

What is happening to the older worker can best be understood in terms of two possible developments in industrial society as a whole. One development might be described as follows. Society might become more of an 'unequal technocracy'. There may be highly paid elites of young wage-earners and salary-earners in various forms of skilled manual and non-manual employment. Except for a smallish sub-section of the middle aged, who fill key managerial, supervisory, professional and training posts, most of them and of the elderly will fall into a number of groups which are marginal to, or outside, the labour market. Thus there may be a large section of the middle aged, especially women, in unskilled service occupations with low pay and status; a large section of redundant and prematurely retired middle-aged people living on modest pensions (but also a small sub-section living on very high pensions and substantial capital gains); and a class of frail elderly people living on meagre pensions supplemented by public assistance or its equivalent. This would be a society in which adults were more commonly split into the proficient and the

<sup>1</sup> Compare, for example, Durkheim, E., *The Division of Labor*, The Free Press, Glencoe, 1964, with Caplow, T., *The Sociology of Work*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1954. In Britain there has been some, though not a great deal of, documentary and empirical work, notably by F. Le Gros Clark. See, for example, Le Gros Clark, F., and Dunne, A. C., *Ageing in Industry*, Nuffield Foundation, London, 1955.

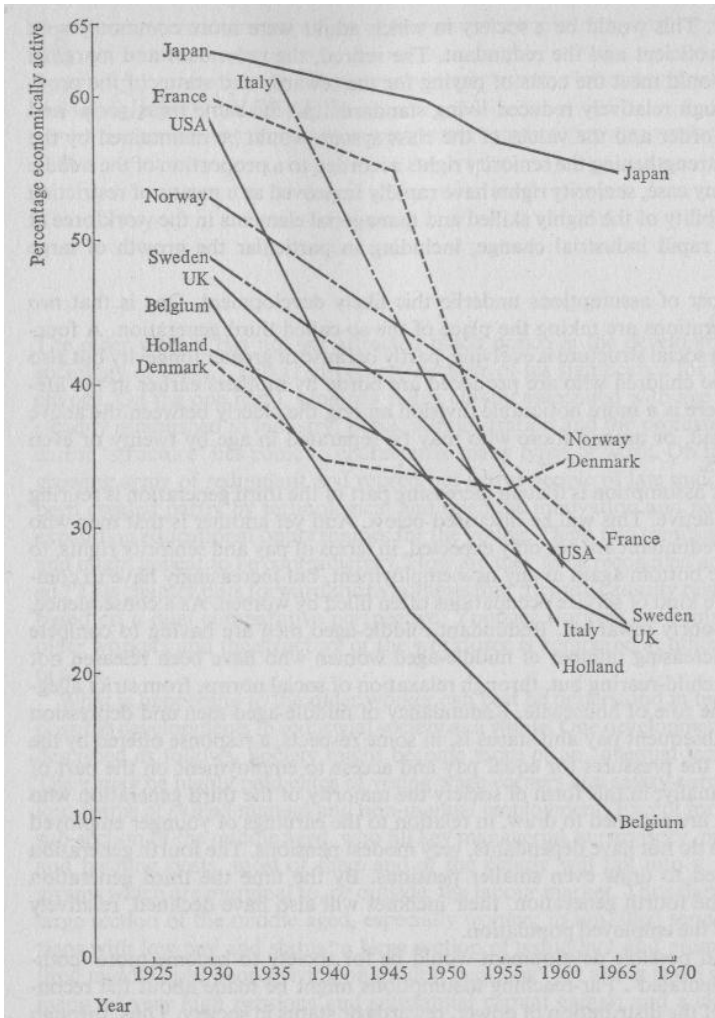
redundant. The retired, the redundant and marginal workers would meet the costs of paying for the rewards and status of the proficient through relatively reduced living standards. At the same time, social and industrial order and the values of the class system would be maintained by the device of strengthening the seniority rights accorded to a proportion of the middle aged. In any case, seniority rights have rapidly improved as a means of restricting lateral mobility of the highly skilled and managerial elements in the workforce at a time of rapid industrial change, including in particular the growth of large firms.

A number of assumptions underlie this likely development. One is that *two* older generations are taking the place of the so-called third generation. A four-generation social structure is evolving, partly because of greater longevity but also because the children who are produced are borne by mothers earlier in the life-cycle.<sup>1</sup> There is a more noticeable division among the elderly between the active and the frail, or among those who may be separated in age by twenty or even thirty years.

Another assumption is that an increasing part of the third generation is retiring while still active. This will be discussed below. And yet another is that men who are made redundant are not only expected, in terms of pay and seniority rights, to start at the bottom again in any new employment, but increasingly have to compete for the kind of service occupations often filled by women. As a consequence, they are poorly rewarded. Redundant middle-aged men are having to compete with an increasing number of middle-aged women who have been released not only from child-rearing but, through relaxation of social norms, from strict allegiance to the role of housewife. Redundancy of middle-aged men and depression of their subsequent pay and status is, in some respects, a response offered by the market to the pressures for equal pay and access to employment on the part of women. Finally, in this form of society the majority of the third generation who are retired are assumed to draw, in relation to the earnings of younger employed adults who do not have dependants, very modest pensions. The fourth generation are assumed to draw even smaller pensions. By the time the third generation becomes the fourth generation, their incomes will also have declined, relatively to those of the employed population.

A second possible development would be for society to become more 'community orientated'. Far-reaching assumptions might be made about the reconstruction of the distribution of power, rewards or status in society. Thus, through greater public control of employment opportunities, more middle-aged and older people would be offered work and work would be organized more commonly in work teams of men

<sup>1</sup> In 1962, 23 per cent of people over 65 with children in Britain, 23 per cent in Denmark and 40 per cent in the United States had great-grandchildren. See Shanias, E., *et al.*, *Old People in Three Industrial Societies*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1968, p. 141. There is good reason to suppose that these figures are increasing (*ibid.*, pp. 168-74).



**Figure 19.1.** Percentage of men aged 65 and over who are economically active.

SOURCE: International Labour Office, *Yearbook of Labour Statistics*, 1938, 1949, 1959, 1969.

NOTE: Some of the national statistics are based on estimates made by official sources in different countries, though others are drawn from census material. Among the qualifications that need to be made about the figures on which the graph is based are the following. *Japan:*

and women drawn from all the adult age groups. Thus, the still active members of the third generation might increasingly move to service occupations; some of which would be of new types, which would be generated deliberately by government. These would include relatively prestigious social service occupations designed to improve the quality of community life and the environment. But a deliberate attempt would be made to 'spread' the performance of skilled and interesting work. The more disabled members of the third and fourth generations would also have opportunities of participating in an occupational programme, though this might have to be restricted in many instances to sheltered workshops, outwork, play-centres, the household and the immediate environment of the home. Finally, the resources made available to the fourth generation would be increased by special measures, such as disability supplements, rent allowances and housing maintenance services and allowances. In these ways, occupational, social and financial divisions between the young and the old could be minimized.

The extent to which reality approximates to either of these models will depend on whether or not some current trends in industry and economic and fiscal policy are checked and social as much as economic values stressed in policy.

### **The Increasing Trend towards Retirement**

The proportion of the elderly population who are economically active has been falling rapidly, as shown in Figure 19.1. The direction of the trend is the same for all industrial societies. Although the fall has been relatively small in Japan and has ceased, temporarily at least, in Denmark, its extent has been very similar for the United States, France, Belgium, Sweden, the Netherlands, Norway, Italy and the United Kingdom.<sup>1</sup> From 40 to 65 per cent of men who were employed by 1930, the proportion had diminished to 10 to 38 per cent (excluding Japan) by the 1960s. During the 1960s and early 1970s, this trend continued. In the United Kingdom, for example, there was no slackening of the trend in the late 1960s. The percentage of

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1955, persons only over 15 years of age; the number of economically active does not include 659,073 unemployed. *France*: 1931: estimated in part; 1954: excluding personnel stationed abroad. *United States*: 1960: based on 25 per cent sample. *Denmark*: 1955: based on 17 per cent sample of census. *Sweden*: 1965: the number of economically active excludes persons on compulsory military service, persons seeking work for the first time, and those unemployed for more than four months. *United Kingdom*: 1931: estimated in part; 1966: based on 10 per cent sample of census.

<sup>1</sup> Part of the difference between countries is due to the adoption of different retirement or pension ages and part to the structure of the economy. The proportion of men remaining at work tends to be higher in countries with a relatively large part of the labour force engaged in agriculture. This is also related to the question of self-employment. The proportion of the self-employed who remain economically active after the age of 65 is relatively large.

men aged 65 to 69 last birthday who were not retired was 27 in 1964 and 16 in 1971. By the late 1970s, it was officially predicted, only about 7 per cent of men in this age group would remain at work.<sup>1</sup>

### **Possible Explanations of Earlier Retirement**

How is the fall in numbers remaining at work to be explained? In any comprehensive examination of this question, at least four sets of variables would have to be considered: (a) characteristics of individuals, including their age, health, education and training; (b) the different attitudes held towards work and retirement by individuals, families and other social groups; (c) internal structural factors concerned with the distribution of the workforce in relation to business enterprise and profit; and (d) external factors concerned with the social definition of the scope of paid employment, including the values held by society about work and retirement. We will illustrate these four possibilities.

The first is whether there has been any change in the characteristics of the individual elderly. Provisionally we might argue that, among the population aged 65 and over, the proportion aged 75 and over has tended to grow. This factor in itself will have contributed to the overall reduction in the percentage remaining at work. But it is only a small factor in the explanation. Thus, in the United Kingdom, those aged 75 and over formed 18 per cent of all those aged 65 and over in 1911 and 25 per cent in 1969. We might also argue that, until the introduction of pensions, men were obliged to work virtually until they dropped; now that they can retire at 65 (or some other age, such as 60 or 67), many who are no longer fully fit choose to do so. The trouble with this sort of explanation is that the fall in proportions at work is not closely correlated with the introduction of pension schemes. There are countries in which the value of the pension which is available has not changed much during a period of thirty or more years, at least in relation to earnings levels, and why the effects are taking so long to make themselves felt would have to be explained. Moreover, there is the complicating problem of disability. The time has long since passed when it was possible to argue that the introduction of pensions allowed only the disabled and those in ill-health to retire. The numbers of 'active' retired people are now quite large. This concentrates attention on whether it is structural factors within industry or the workforce, or social controls rather than individual characteristics or attitudes, which are shaping retirement practices. Pension ages, for

<sup>1</sup> DHSS, Report by the Government Actuary on the Financial Provisions of the National Superannuation and Social Insurance Bill, Cmnd 4223, HMSO, London, December 1969, p. 21. Strictly, some of those who are 'retired' are earning although receiving pensions. This explains the differences between the percentage not technically 'retired' and the percentage 'economically active' (Table 19.1) on the basis of census questions. Some are working very few hours. Between the ages of 65 and 70, a man who retires and draws a retirement pension may take paid work. Beyond certain levels of earnings, his pension has been reduced.

example, do not appear to have been chosen on the basis of knowledge of the onset of disability. The ages chosen either by societies or the managers of occupational pension schemes do not correspond even roughly with a change in the statistical distribution of capacity or health at successive ages. But these have been treated as axiomatic in much research on retirement and the elderly and the characteristics of representative samples of the population just under the pensionable ages, for example, have attracted scant attention. For such reasons, changes in retirement practices have been 'explained' in terms of individual instead of organizational or social characteristics and values. Among samples of those of pensionable age, the non-retired have been found to include more active people than the retired and explanation has ceased. But the significant facts that some disabled people remain at work and, correspondingly, that some active people under the pensionable ages are not in the workforce, suggests that this explanation is too facile.

Much the same is true of explanations built on individuals' attitudes towards retirement. There are difficulties enough in obtaining reliable information about attitudes, but for different countries there is evidence of substantial minorities of the retired who would prefer to be at work (and sometimes vice versa).<sup>1</sup> The relationship between individual attitudes and retirement is complex. Attitudes change as the day of retirement approaches and recedes. Attitudes depend also on a variety of unspoken assumptions about the availability and kind of alternative employment and the social and 'occupational' as well as financial consequences of retirement, which need to be made explicit if any consistent interpretation is to be produced. And attitudes change according to the 'level' of self-revelation. People sometimes admit different things to strangers than to their intimates and to anyone else than to themselves.

Some of the structural factors internal to industry which are involved in explanations of retirement are familiar. The replacement of unskilled jobs by smaller numbers of skilled jobs, the decline and even the disappearance of certain types of industry and the reduction in the relative importance of small firms and the self-employed during the emergence of the giant corporation, have all attracted notice in accounts of unemployment and retirement. The contracting industries are those which tend to have older workforces. Research into redundancy and redeployment shows that it is the older men who are more likely to remain unemployed.<sup>2</sup> Periods of high unemployment would seem likely to correspond with an acceleration in the numbers of people of pensionable age leaving work, and correspond also with an

<sup>1</sup> Shanias *et al.*, *Old People in Three Industrial Societies*, pp. 320-45 and 447.

<sup>2</sup> A study of the closing of a colliery in Durham showed that (a) the workforce contained a relatively high proportion of employees in late middle age; (b) the proportion of men still unemployed six months after closure was very high among the oldest age groups and was strikingly correlated with advancing age. See D EP, *Ryhope: A Pit Closes*, HMSO, London, 1970, pp. 11 and 67.

acceleration in the numbers of people retiring earlier than the usual pensionable age. Despite the need for detailed analysis of trends, this cannot be more than a fitful part of the story, however. For example, the retirement rate increased steadily in Britain during the very low rates of unemployment in the 1950s and early 1960s. There are at least two possible effects of industrial reorganization upon the older male worker. In accordance with the decline in relative numbers of unskilled and semi-skilled in the workforce, and possibly also because of the return to the workforce of larger numbers of middle-aged women, some unskilled and semi-skilled male manual workers may find themselves forced into unemployment. Older skilled manual and non-manual workers who become redundant may be able only to obtain unskilled jobs.

This brief preliminary discussion may help to suggest lines of inquiry. Cohort analysis of the distribution by occupational status needs to be related for successive points in time to the structural changes taking place in individual industries as well as the occupational system as a whole. The characteristics and attitudes of people of different age, both at work and not at work, also need to be examined and related.

### **Changes in Activity Rates**

The trends in relation to employment below as well as above the pensionable ages will first be presented. Table 19.1 shows recent changes in the proportions of people of different age in the United Kingdom who are in paid employment. The 'economically active' are defined to include the unemployed and the short-term sick as well as those in paid employment. As already stated, the proportion of men aged 65 and over remaining at work has continued to fall steadily, but there has also been some reduction of activity rates among men in late middle age, certainly since 1961. By contrast, there was a pronounced increase in the percentages of older married and widowed women who were economically active, even of women aged 60 and over.

Since 1966, unemployment has increased and the rates in Table 19.1 conceal this change. In 1971, the monthly average was 799,000 in the United Kingdom, compared with 346,500 in 1961.<sup>1</sup> Proportionately more older than younger workers are usually unemployed for long periods. There is also evidence of a proportionate increase of men in late middle age who are chronic sick and who draw national insurance sickness benefit. Table 19.2 shows the change in a short span of years. To a certain extent, the classification of older men as unemployed rather than retired, or as sick rather than unemployed, is fortuitous. Government surveys of the unemployed have shown that a high proportion are in fact sick or

<sup>1</sup> *Social Trends*, No. 6, HMSO, London, 1975, p. 85.

**Table 19.1.** *Economic activity rates, Britain, 1951-71.*

Sex	Age	Percentage of each age (or age and marital status) group economically active			
		1951	1961 <sup>a</sup>	1971 <sup>b</sup>	
Males	20-24	94.9	93.2	90.3	
	25-29	97.6	97.9	97.2	
	30-34	98.3	98.7	98.2	
	35-44	98.6	98.8	98.4	
	45-54	97.8	98.6	97.7	
	55-59	95.0	97.1	95.4	
	60-64	87.7	91.0	86.6	
	65-69	47.7	39.9	30.5	
	70 and over	20.3	15.2	10.9	
Females	20-24	single	91.1	89.5	82.1
		married	36.5	41.8	45.8
		widowed	66.8	62.7	50.5
	25-34	single	86.9	89.5	85.8
		married	24.4	29.5	38.4
		widowed	67.8	68.4	60.2
	35-44	single	81.0	85.1	85.1
		married	25.7	36.4	54.2
		widowed	63.8	71.7	70.9
	45-54	single	74.8	81.7	82.6
		married	23.7	35.3	56.8
		widowed	54.1	66.7	73.9
	55-59	single	63.9	75.1	76.4
		married	15.6	26.0	45.1
		widowed	39.1	51.8	62.2
	60-64	single	34.9	39.2	33.3
		married	7.2	12.7	24.8
		widowed	19.3	28.2	33.7
65 and over	single	11.8	10.9	8.2	
	married	2.7	3.4	6.3	
	widowed	4.9	5.6	5.7	

NOTES: <sup>a</sup>Not completely corrected for bias.<sup>b</sup>Ten per cent sample.SOURCE: *Social Trends*, No. 6, HMSO, London, 1975, p.84.



**Table 19.2.** *Number (thousands) of men, and percentage of each age group, drawing sickness (invalidity) benefit for more than six months.*

Year	20-24	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65+
<i>Numbers</i>						
1959	3	21	33	57	83	4
1965	2	20	34	63	115	6
1969	4	28	34	70	138	9
1973	2	26	44	65	146	15
<i>Percentages</i>						
1959	0.2	1.3	2.0	4.0	8.2	1.9
1965	0.1	1.4	2.1	4.0	8.6	2.7
1969	0.2	1.7	2.5	4.6	10.0	5.5
1973	0.2	1.7	2.8	4.7	10.6	5.2

SOURCES Department of Health and Social Security (private communication) and *Social Security Statistics 1974*, HMSO, London, 1975, pp. 32-3. The statistics are for dates in May or June of each year. The 1959 figures, unlike those for later years, are based on age as given six months beforehand, and are therefore slightly higher than they should be for purposes of strict comparison.

handicapped.<sup>1</sup> Men with chronic mental or physical handicaps sometimes refuse to acknowledge any suggestion that they are different from other men of their age and endeavour to maintain registration with the employment exchange. A large proportion of the men who draw sickness benefit for a lengthy period intend to re-enter employment. There are also disabled men who desire work and who look for work although they do not seek to be placed on the disabled persons' register at the employment exchange. Moreover, over 11,000 disabled persons classified as 'unlikely to obtain employment other than under special conditions' are excluded from the unemployment figures.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that the numbers drawing sickness benefit for long periods have been growing may be attributable less to a proportionate increase in the incidence of clinically verifiable chronic disease than to the classification of some redundant workers as sick instead of unemployed (or retired). To some men, the status of 'sickness' may be preferable to that of 'unemployability'. The long-term sick also have fewer difficulties than the long-term unemployed in obtaining help at all and discretionary additions from the Supplementary Benefits Commission.

<sup>1</sup> A special survey of the unemployed by the Ministry of Labour in 1964 found that 60 per cent of the men were 'poor placing prospects on various personal grounds'. This curious terminology in fact included a large number who were disabled or had a history of ill-health. See also Sinfield, R. A., *The Long-term Unemployed*, OECD, Paris, 1968, p.35.

<sup>2</sup> *Employment and Productivity Gazette*, July 1971, p. 626.

The data imply that, in the United Kingdom, the proportions of men under as well as over the pensionable ages who are economically active may continue to decrease, while the proportions of women may continue to increase. Indeed, it might be hypothesized that, because substantial reductions can no longer be made in the male labour force of pensionable age, the rate of withdrawal from the labour force of men aged 55-64 will actually rise.

What are the factors contributing to this situation? Is it that more older men are sick and disabled or that more of that proportion who have always been disabled are choosing to draw sickness benefit and avoid the stigma of unemployment? Is it that older men particularly lack the educational qualifications and occupational skills which are felt to be required in the modern labour force - in which case it would be difficult to explain the growth of women's employment, unless this is linked with the brutal fact that their labour is cheaper? Is it, more generally, that the labour force needs of the industries which are expanding can be met without recruiting older workers made redundant in the industries which are contracting? Or is it that these trends have even deeper causes, such that they make it possible, through the reduction of the relative incomes of a larger proportion of the middle aged, for class *differentials* to be preserved at a time when more young people are ascending into the upper middle class.

### The Employment Record of the Older Worker

We will examine the individual characteristics of older workers and their place in the social structure, and go on to consider their industrial situation. The survey data

**Table 19.3.** Percentages of older men and women who were economically active.

<i>Employment status</i>	<i>40-54</i>	<i>55-64</i>	<i>65-74</i>	<i>75+</i>
<i>Men</i>				
Employed	86	79	26	5
Self-employed	12	10	4	1
Not employed in year	2	11	70	94
Total	100	100	100	100
Number	506	345	217	81
<i>Women</i>				
Employed	58	32	11	1
Self-employed	4	4	2	-
Not employed in year	38	64	87	99
Total	100	100	100	100
Number	578	361	283	176

but allow the picture to be filled out in some respects. Table 19.3 shows the correspond with census and Department of Employment and Productivity data, proportions of men and women of different ages who were employed, self-employed and not working at all during the twelve months preceding the survey. As many as 11 per cent of the men aged 55-64 did no work in the year. This includes men sick or unemployed throughout the year. The corresponding figure from the 1966 census is just under 10 per cent.

Among the economically active, fewer of the older than of the younger men experienced any unemployment in the year, for example, 6.4 per cent of men aged 55-64, compared with 10.2 per cent of employed men aged 20-29 (Table 17.3, page 601, above). The difference between older and younger men was, however, mainly in experience of very short spells of unemployment. Younger men's unemployment in the year was frequently limited to a few weeks, and similar percentages of younger and older workers had spells of more than eight weeks.

On the other hand, proportionately more of the older employed men had been off work sick, and 10 per cent had been off work sick for more than five weeks. But the

**Table 19.4.** *Percentages of employed men of different age according to weeks of sickness in year.*

<i>Number of weeks</i>	<i>20-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-54</i>	<i>55-64</i>	<i>65-74</i>
None	71	70	74	67	63
1-2	19	15	12	12	14
3-5	4	8	7	12	16
6-9	3	4	4	2	4
10 or more	3	4	4	8	4
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Number	369	342	435	274	57

NOTE: Self-employed excluded.

trends with age in absence because of sickness, as shown in Table 19.4, are less marked than might be expected. Two thirds of employed men aged 55-64, and even of men aged 65-74, had not been off work during the previous twelve months.<sup>1</sup>

The volume of work, as measured by the numbers of hours worked in the week, is also sustained. Although fewer employed men aged 55-64 worked more than sixty hours a week, slightly fewer of them worked less than forty hours. The tendency for

<sup>1</sup> Between 1954-5 and 1967-8, the average number of days of certified sickness per annum of employed men and women of different age increased, for example, of men aged 50-54 from 16.2 to 18.9 and men aged 55-59 from 25.3 to 26.9. The higher average for older than for younger employees is attributable to the more lengthy absence of a very small percentage, however. See Central Statistical Office, *Social Trends*, No. 1, HMSO, London, 1970, p. 112.

women of comparable age to work fewer hours and for a substantial proportion of them to work less than thirty hours a week is, however, very marked. Among the relatively small number of elderly people remaining at work, there is a marked increase, for both sexes, in the number working under thirty hours (Table 19.5). It also seems that, in addition to the contraction during the 1960s in numbers aged 65 and over of men remaining at work, there has also been a reduction in the proportion of them working forty or more hours a week.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 19.5.** Percentages of employed men and women in certain age groups, according to hours worked in previous weeks.

Hours	Men			Women		
	40-54	55-64	65+	40-54	50-64	65+
1-9	0.4	0.3	10.9	7.9	12.4	(31.2)
10-19	0.6	0.3	20.0	11.4	11.5	(15.6)
20-29	1.3	0.6	25.4	23.5	27.4	(21.8)
30-39	15.2	13.1	10.9	24.5	21.2	(15.6)
40-49	53.2	63.2	20.0	27.4	22.1	(6.2)
50-59	17.8	14.8	5.4	1.9	1.7	0
60+	11.4	6.8	7.2	3.1	3.5	(6.2)
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number	455	277	55	314	113	32

### Incapacity and Age

The sickness and working record of men in their fifties and early sixties seems exceptionally good in relation to the evidence we collected about physical incapacity. In the national survey, an incapacity index was developed, based on experience in a number of previous surveys.<sup>2</sup> This was an elaborate method devised to enable adults and children aged 10 and over to be classified carefully and as objectively as possible according to the degree to which they had difficulty in managing personal and household needs without help. Table 19.6 presents the results for the economically active and, where possible, for the economically inactive, of different age. The freedom of young men from even slight incapacity is striking. By contrast, the proportion of men with slight incapacity rises sharply with age after the age of 40. There is also a substantial minority of men in employment

<sup>1</sup> Only about a third worked fewer than thirty hours in 1962, compared with well over half in 1968-9. Shanas *et al.*, *Old People in Three Industrial Societies*, p. 303.

<sup>2</sup> See Shanas *et al.*, *Old People in Three Industrial Societies*, Chapters 2 and 3, for an account of the history and use of an index applied to the elderly. See also Sainsbury, S., *Registered as Disabled*, Bell, London, 1970. See Table 20.2, page 692 below, for the list of activities included in the index.

**Table 19.6.** Percentages of economically active and inactive men and women of different ages, according to degree of incapacity.

Degree of incapacity (score)		Economically active					Economically inactive						
		20- 29	30- 39	40- 54	55- 64	65- 74	20- 29	30- 39	40- 54	55- 64	65- 74	75+	
<i>Male</i>													
None	0	97	94	83	65	47				(24)	24	9	
Slight	{	1	1	3	5	14	23			(3)	21	9	
		2	1	1	5	6	11			(11)	15	4	
Some	{	3	1	1	2	4	7			(3)	3	11	
		4	0	0	1	3	5			(8)	8	11	
		5	0	0	1	1	2			(11)	11	7	
Appreciable or severe	{	6	0	0	2	2	2			(3)	4	5	
		7-8	0	0	1	3	4			(8)	6	8	
	9+	0	0	1	3	0			(29)	8	37		
Total		100	100	100	100	100			100	100	100		
Number		369	342	435	274	57			37	151	76		
<i>Female</i>													
None	0	95	89	78	57	(27)	91	91	66	42	15	5	
Slight	{	1	2	5	9	12	(20)	3	5	8	16	17	5
		2	½	1	5	6	(20)	1	2	4	12	14	4
Some	{	3	1	1	2	2	(17)	1	0	4	4	5	8
		4	0	1	2	4	-	2	2	3	3	5	9
		5	1	1	2	8	(10)	1	0	4	5	7	9
Appreciable or severe	{	6	0	1	1	3	(3)	1	0	1	4	10	5
		7-8	½	0	1	6	(3)	0	0	4	6	10	15
	9+	0	1	0	2	(0)	0	0	4	8	17	40	
Total		100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	
Number		257	167	336	117	30	157	154	218	231	247	174	

NOTE: Self-employed not included among economically active.

with some or appreciable incapacity, rising from 8 per cent (age 40-54) to 16 per cent (age 55-64). The great majority of men aged 65-74 remaining in employment have little or no incapacity.

On the other hand, the evidence for the economically inactive is not quite as might be expected. For example, although a large proportion of the men aged 55-64 are severely incapacitated, over a third have little or no incapacity. The numbers in the sample are small, but if representative mean that nearly 15,000 men in the

population with little or no incapacity are inactive. Again, proportionately more of the men aged 65-74 who are not than of those who are in the labour force are incapacitated to a marked or a severe degree; none the less 60 per cent, representing over 90,000 men in the population (with another 20,000 aged 75 and over) have little or no incapacity.

### Skill, Training and Education

Incapacity is one factor which helps to explain patterns of work and retirement in late middle life and old age, but is clearly not the only one. For example, as already noted, the numbers of women aged 40-59 in employment has been rising, a considerable proportion of whom are significantly incapacitated. What part is played by other individual characteristics, such as skill, training and education?

The distribution of economically active older men and women by occupational class is shown in Table 19.7. Thirty per cent of men aged 55-64, compared with 23 per cent aged 40-54, were in occupations classified as unskilled or partly skilled.

**Table 19.7.** *Percentages of economically active men of different age according to occupational class.*

Occupational class	Men			Women	
	40-54	55-64	65+	40-54	55-64
Professional	7	5	3	3	1
Managerial	7	4	1	5	3
Supervisory - high	9	9	4	10	3
- low	16	13	10	11	13
Routine non-manual	6	7	7	11	8
Skilled manual	32	32	30	33	41
Partly skilled manual	15	18	14	18	21
Unskilled manual	8	12	30	9	9
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Number	478	305	70	336	117

Although the numbers in the survey were small, we also noted that a fifth of the unskilled among those aged 55-64 were already economically inactive and around a seventh of those in supervisory and lesser supervisory non-manual occupations. By contrast, less than a tenth of the people in skilled manual, managerial and professional occupations were economically inactive at these ages. There seems therefore to be some tendency for people in the supervisory but less well-paid non-manual jobs as well as unskilled manual jobs to retire prematurely.

The age groups differ in their educational experience. Fewer of the older than of

**Table 19.8.** *Percentages of economically active men according to years of education.*

<i>Years of education</i>	<i>20-29</i>	<i>40-54</i>	<i>55-64</i>	<i>65+</i>	<i>Men of all ages</i>
Under 5	3	4	2	3	3
6 or 7	0	1	3	4	1
8	1	4	9	31	5
9	3	54	59	46	34
10	54	15	9	11	30
11	17	10	9	1	14
12	10	4	2	1	5
13 or 14	7	4	3	0	4
15+	5	4	4	3	3
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Number	385	494	308	71	1,770

the younger workers have had ten or more years' education. Table 19.8 shows the changes in distribution for the older age groups. The table chiefly represents the changes that took place when the upper limit of compulsory schooling was raised first to 14 and then to 15.

We found that the percentage with apprenticeship training was about 10 among those still economically active over the age of 65 but varied between 15 and 20 among younger age groups. The majority of these had been apprentices for between five and seven years. Among those over 65, there was little evidence that those with longer education or any form of apprenticeship tended to remain economically active. Among people aged 55-64, those who had served apprenticeships tended not to be among the economically inactive, and this finding reflects the fact that nearly all skilled manual workers remained active at these ages, as reported above. Rather more of the economically inactive had experienced very little education, but the tendency is slight and the absolute numbers in the sample are small. In general, activity rates in late middle and old age did not offer much obvious correlation with years of education or apprenticeship training.

Among these middle-aged workers there was little evidence of retraining by employers or government. All men aged 30-64 were asked whether they had been on a trade, industrial rehabilitation or government training course of any kind in the previous five years, whether or not they had changed jobs. We found that 4.4 per cent had done so, representing rather less than 600,000 men in the country. However, over half of these had gone on a course arranged by employers, and some on courses arranged in the armed services, and by voluntary associations. Only a quarter, representing 150,000, had gone on a course arranged by the government. Most of these had gone in their thirties or early forties. The percentages by age are

**Table 19.9.** Percentages of men of different ages who had been on a training course in the previous five years.

<i>Training course in last 5 years</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60-64</i>
Yes	6.4	3.8	4.1	1.6
No	93.6	96.2	95.9	98.4
Total	100	100	100	100
Number	371	345	318	126

shown in Table 19.9. When the men who had been on training courses were asked whether that had helped them get a better job, three quarters said it had not.

In developing a rounded picture of the relationship between general educational and specific vocational skills and the place of older men in the labour force, it will be important to investigate 'skill' in wider senses, and with specific reference to work situation. Some of the findings by Welford, for example, might be checked in relation to the allocation of roles in particular industries.<sup>1</sup> Reliability and steadiness of performance as well as time-keeping, and the ability to sustain heaviness of work as well as utilize experience can often afford compensation to an employer which more than off-sets diminished speed and agility with age.

### **Trends in Social Class by Age**

Analyses of trends in social class distribution by age suggest both that each succeeding generation of young workers tend to have jobs of higher occupational status than their predecessors, but also that there is some downward mobility as well as upward mobility in later working life. It would seem that some skilled manual and non-manual workers, forced out of their present jobs, are displacing some of those who have had unskilled manual jobs, who themselves are forced into, or are accepting, premature retirement.

Table 19.10 shows the composition of the male labour force by age and social class at successive censuses between 1951 and 1971. Because there have been major changes in official classification, and our method of standardization is necessarily rough, the actual figures in the table must be treated with care. The principal trends revealed are, however, reliable enough. The proportion of partly skilled and unskilled workers declined in the 1950s and continued to decline in the 1960s, but the rate of decline was smaller. The same is broadly true for different age groups. There is a long-term trend in favour of a larger non-manual labour force, but the trend in the skilled manual labour force is more debatable. At the younger ages, there has been a remarkably swift increase in the proportion who are professional,

<sup>1</sup> Welford, J., *Skill and Age: An Experimental Approach*, Nuffield Foundation: Oxford University Press, 1961.



**Table 19.10.** Percentages of men aged 25+ in five social classes in 1951, 1961 and 1971 (England! Wales), according to 1960 (and 1970) classification of occupations.

Age	Year	Profes- sional I	Inter- mediate II	Skilled III	Partly skilled IV	Unskilled V
25-34	1951	2.1	7.9	54.5	26.8	8.6
	1961	5.3	12.9	55.9	18.4	7.5
	1971	7.5	18.1	53.2	15.2	6.1
35-44	1951	2.1	12.6	49.0	26.7	9.8
	1961	4.3	16.6	53.4	18.8	6.9
	1971	6.2	20.7	50.5	16.1	6.6
45-54	1951	1.9	13.1	43.5	28.5	12.9
	1961	3.3	18.8	48.5	21.1	8.2
	1971	4.8	21.3	48.8	17.9	7.3
55-59	1951	1.8	14.0	39.9	29.5	14.7
	1961	2.9	17.8	45.0	23.5	10.8
	1971	4.0	20.5	46.3	20.2	9.1
60-64	1951	1.7	13.6	38.3	30.0	16.3
	1961	2.6	17.5	42.7	24.5	12.7
	1971	3.7	18.7	45.3	21.4	10.9
65-69	1951	1.9	13.3	42.6	29.1	15.0
	1961	2.7	17.9	41.8	24.5	13.1
	1971	3.4	17.2	43.2	22.5	13.7
70+	1951	1.9	14.7	46.1	25.4	11.8
	1961	3.2	19.2	41.7	24.0	11.9
	1971	3.3	19.4	44.0	21.6	11.8
Total	1951	1.9	11.9	47.1	27.5	11.5
	1961	3.9	16.8	49.3	21.0	9.0
	1971	5.2	19.7	48.7	18.1	8.3

NOTE: An attempt has been made in this table to allow for changes of classification brought about after the introduction of the 1960 Classification of Occupations. (There were only a few further changes in the 1970 Classification and the figures from the 1961 and 1971 Censuses did not need to be adjusted before being compared.) However, for 1951 we have changed the figures for each age group by the proportion suggested for all age groups in an exercise reported in *The General Report*, General Register Office, Census 1961, Great Britain, HMSO, London, 1968, p. 193. The 1961 data were reclassified for a sample using the 1951 Classification and compared with the 1961 data classified according to the 1960 Classification of Occupations. We have worked back to the 1951 data for social classes and changed the figures for each class by the proportion suggested by the results of the exercise carried out by the GRO. The 1951 figures given above must be treated as approximate only. But they are more nearly comparable with the 1961 and 1971 Census results than the figures published in the 1951 Census reports.

SOURCES: General Register Office, Census 1951, England and Wales, *Occupation Tables*, HMSO, London, 1956; General Register Office, Census 1961, England and Wales, *Occupation Tables*, HMSO, London, 1966, Table 20; Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, Census 1971, Great Britain, *Economic Activity Tables*, Part IV, HMSO, London, 1975, Table 29.

managerial and senior administrative workers. Among older workers, the proportions in the highest two classes have also continued to rise beyond the levels reached by the corresponding cohorts ten years earlier. However, the percentage of men aged 55-64 who were unskilled manual workers in 1971 was higher than the corresponding percentage of men aged 45-54 who were such workers in 1961.

The changes among older workers are brought out in Table 19.11, which shows the increase or decrease between 1951 and 1971 in the percentage of each age group

**Table 19.11.** Increase or decrease in the percentage of economically active men in different social classes between 1951 and 1971 (England and Wales).<sup>a</sup>

Age	I	II	III	IV	V
25-34	+5.4	+10.2	-1.3	-11.6	-2.5
35-44	+4.1	+8.1	+1.5	-10.6	-3.2
45-54	+2.9	+8.2	+5.3	-10.6	-5.6
55-59	+2.1	+6.5	+6.4	-9.3	-5.6
60-64	+2.0	+5.1	+7.0	-8.6	-5.4
65-69	+1.5	+3.9	+0.6	-4.6	-1.3
Total	+3.3	+7.8	+1.6	-9.4	-3.2

NOTE: <sup>a</sup>Adjustments made throughout for changes in classification, on the basis of Table 55, Census 1961, Great Britain, *General Report*, HMSO, London, 1966. The changes were assumed to apply in equal proportion to each age group.

SOURCES: General Register Office, Census 1951, England and Wales, *Occupation Tables*, HMSO, London, 1954; Census 1961, England and Wales, *Occupation Tables*, HMSO, London, 1966; Census 1961, Great Britain, *General Report*, HMSO, London, 1966; Census 1971, *Economic Activity Tables (Ten Per Cent)*, Part IV, HMSO, London, 1975.

falling into the Registrar General's five categories. As in the previous table, the data should be treated with caution, because adjustments have had to be made for changes in administrative classification between the two dates. The actual proportion of men who were in unskilled and partly skilled occupations declined - and among those in occupations in social classes I, II and III increased - for all age groups except men aged 25-34 in class III. The percentage of older workers in professional occupations increased slightly during the two decades, while the percentage of younger workers in those occupations rose strikingly.

These changes mask what has happened to different cohorts of workers as they have grown older. Table 19.12 suggests that during the 1950s there was a movement at the younger ages from manual, particularly partly skilled and unskilled, occupations into intermediate occupations, particularly certain types of senior administrative and managerial, supervisory and self-employed occupations. At older ages, the flow into administrative, supervisory and self-employed occupations was smaller. During the next ten years, there continued to be upward mobility into

**Table 19.12.** Increase or decrease in the percentage of each cohort of men of a particular age belonging to each social class (England and Wales), 1951-61 and 1961-71.

Age of cohort in		I	II	III	IV	V
1951	1961					
25-34	35-44	+2.2	+8.7	-1.1	-8.0	-1.7
35-44	45-54	+1.2	+6.5	-0.5	-5.6	-1.6
45-54	55-64	+0.9	+4.5	+0.3	-4.5	-1.1
55-64	65-74	+1.1	+4.8	+2.6	-5.5	-3.0
1961	1971					
25-34	35-44	+0.9	+7.8	-5.4	-2.3	-0.9
35-44	45-54	+0.5	+4.7	-4.6	-0.9	+0.4
45-54	55-64	+0.5	+0.8	-2.7	-0.3	+1.8
55-64	65-74	+0.6	+0.6	-0.3	-1.9	+1.0

SOURCES: As for Table 19.11.

classes I and II, though the movements at older ages was small. The class losing its percentage share now became social class III rather than IV. Older men were now also moving into social class V. There were signs of a bimodal trend. However, these indicators of movement must be treated with reserve. There are the problems noted above of making adjustments for changes in administrative classification. And although each age group in 1951 is compared with an age group ten years older in 1961, and the same for 1961 and 1971, these are by no means exactly comparable populations. There will have been losses because of death, disability, illness, retirement, long-term unemployment and emigration, and gains because of immigration, recovery from long illness and re-entry into the workforce of some unemployed and disabled people.

In examining movements between 'skilled', 'partly skilled' and 'unskilled' occupations, it is important to keep in mind the changing realities of occupations to which these labels are attached. Some types of labourers (such as building and agricultural labourers) are today expected to display familiarity with, as well as knowledge of, a wide variety of machinery, including dumper trucks, bulldozers, cranes, combine harvesters, tractors and milking machines. It would be difficult to classify some of them as 'unskilled' according to practical criteria.

Some evidence of greater mobility in the early and the late stages than in the middle stages of working life emerged from a question we asked all those aged 30 and over: 'What was the best job you have ever had in your life?' More men aged 40-49 than either younger or older men named the same job that they currently held. Partly skilled and unskilled men in their thirties, and in their fifties and sixties, were more likely than those in their forties to name a different job of similar occupational

status or a skilled manual or non-manual job. For example, 20 per cent in their thirties, and 29 per cent in their fifties and sixties, compared with 16 per cent in their forties, said the best job they had held had been a skilled manual or non-manual job. There was a similar peak in middle life for women workers, though this applied not just to the forties but throughout the fifties as well. Only about a third of both men and women in their sixties declared that their present job was their best job.

### Changes in the Type of Industry and Employment

The skills that individuals can offer are not the only or even very important factors determining the employment of older workers. Industry itself has experienced profound changes in size, technology and organization, and is governed by changing values. In the ten years up to 1961, the number of women in employment rose by 12 per cent, but of men by only 4 per cent. These increases were more pronounced in many of the expanding occupations, such as the professions, technical occupations, administration and management, and clerical, typing, commercial and financial work (Table 19.13a). On the other hand, there were big decreases in the declining industries, like mining, agriculture and textiles. There does, however, seem to be some evidence that in many of the declining industries the contraction of the women's labour force has been greater than of the men's labour force. Conversely,

*Table 19.13a. Changes in occupation, men and women, 1951-61 (England and Wales), and percentage aged 55 and over (1961).*

Occupation	Numbers of men		Numbers of women		Percentage aged 55 and over (1961)	
	1961	% of 1951	1961	% of 1951	Men	Women
Total occupied population 15 and over	14,649,000	104	7,045,400	112	19.9	14.7
1. Fishermen	10,800	70	-	-	18.7	0.0
2. Agriculture, horticulture and forestry	741,400	77	70,800	73	27.3	18.7
3. Mining and quarrying	469,600	79	200	15	21.3	-
4. Workers in treatment of non-ferrous mining products	76,600	94	40,200	87	<sup>a</sup>	<sup>a</sup>
5. Coal, gas and coke, chemical and allied trades	108,800	117	10,000	90	17.4	11.6

*Table 19.13a. - contd.*

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Numbers of men</i>		<i>Numbers of women</i>		<i>Percentage aged 55 and over (1961)</i>	
	<i>1961</i>	<i>% of 1951</i>	<i>1961</i>	<i>% of 1951</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
6. Engineering (manufacturing) and allied trades	2,460,600	109	199,600	101	14.9	10.8
7. Textile workers	144,600	73	245,400	68	26.4	17.6
8. Tanners, etc.	83,600	71	65,200	100	26.4	14.7
9. Makers of textile goods	96,800	80	364,400	83	23.8	14.0
10. Food, drink and tobacco	134,800	90	65,600	78	18.8	12.5
11. Woodworkers	428,400	99	12,000	90	15.6	10.0
12. Paper-workers	200,800	124	84,400	104	15.9	10.4
13. Makers of other products	94,200	111	43,400	107	14.6	9.9
14. Building workers	838,200	100	1,000	72	18.9	36.0
15. Painters and decorators	283,000	95	9,200	88	18.6	14.3
16. Administrators and managers	525,600	129	67,600	147	22.2	23.7
17. Transport and communications	1,400,000	100	147,600	113	18.7	6.5
18. Commercial and financial	1,462,400	119	910,600	120	17.7	14.8
19. Professional and technical	1,108,000	155	674,600	129	14.0	13.3
20. Defence services	486,200	71	13,600	69	0.3	0.6
21. Entertainers and sport	77,000	94	21,800	100	<sup>a</sup>	<sup>a</sup>
22. Personal service	492,400	106	1,555,800	106	29.5	26.1
23. Clerks and typists	956,200	111	1,725,400	136	21.2	7.6
24. Warehousemen, packers, etc.	398,800	114	213,600	118	28.2	12.4
25. Crane and tractor drivers	226,000	100	1,800	91	25.0	10.8
26. Workers in unskilled occupations	1,193,600	107	437,000	115	27.4	14.8

NOTE: <sup>a</sup>Directly comparable figures not available. Some other percentages are not precisely comparable and are approximations.

SOURCE: General Register Office, 1961 Census, England and Wales, *General Report*, HMSO, London, 1968, Table 54; and *Occupation Tables*, HMSO, London, 1966, Table 8, p. 261.

**Table 19.13b.** *Changes in occupation, men and women, 1966-71 (Britain), and percentage aged 55 and over.*

	Number of men	1971 as % of 1966	Number of women	1971 as % of 1966	Numbers aged 55 and over		Percentage aged 55 and over	
					Men	Women	Men	Women
Total occupied population 15 and over	15,883,900	99.3	9,137,530	103.1	3,288,210	1,696,940	20.7	18.5
1. Farmers, etc.	643,040	84.7	96,770	92.2	195,320	21,530	30.4	22.2
2. Miners, etc. Gas, coke workers	256,230	68.7	520	179.3	69,460	150	27.1	28.8
3. Glass, ceramics	126,200	98.6	13,230	75.2	22,760	1,730	18.0	13.0
4. Furnace, forge	63,810	92.3	28,860	81.8	11,950	5,160	18.7	17.9
5. Electrical, etc.	159,620	80.2	8,920	73.0	32,550	1,550	20.4	17.4
6. Engineering and allied	529,140	100.2	88,220	101.7	55,540	7,770	10.5	8.8
7. Woodworkers	2,501,040	101.6	295,740	96.5	377,590	41,460	15.1	14.0
8. Leatherworkers	415,330	91.2	12,290	95.3	77,610	1,880	18.7	15.3
9. Textile	57,190	78.7	57,160	90.0	15,430	9,940	27.0	17.4
10. Clothing	143,130	88.8	166,790	68.5	30,590	43,520	21.4	26.1
11. Food, drink, etc.	78,440	92.5	329,840	86.2	20,770	56,560	26.5	17.1
12. Paper and printing	266,730	93.6	113,810	92.8	58,740	19,350	22.5	17.0
13. Other products	219,100	98.5	95,870	84.6	39,160	13,510	17.9	14.1
14. Construction	206,090	99.5	108,700	84.4	31,470	15,630	15.2	14.4
15. Painters and decorators	551,860	93.3	1,610	83.4	121,140	380	22.0	23.6
16. Drivers, etc.	279,200	89.5	8,600	80.9	62,930	1,680	22.5	19.5
17. Labourers	307,320	97.4	3,750	108.1	71,440	570	23.2	15.2
18. Transport and communica- tions	1,103,630	92.3	137,180	143.9	306,540	34,240	27.8	25.0
19. Warehouse- men, etc.	1,267,430	95.0	155,750	94.8	248,470	14,120	19.6	9.1
20. Clerical	502,900	94.2	295,410	89.9	154,650	52,280	30.8	17.7
21. Sales	1,073,360	96.5	2,485,340	108.6	257,930	108,250	24.0	4.3
22. Service workers	1,182,780	96.0	1,064,470	92.5	272,340	220,940	23.0	20.7
24. Administrators and managers	910,770	104.9	2,037,000	95.9	281,690	594,180	31.0	29.2
25. Professional, technical	846,310	119.4	78,110	136.6	178,240	15,000	21.0	19.2
26. Armed forces	1,683,340	115.0	1,066,520	117.1	251,940	366,580	15.0	12.8
	239,790	100.4	12,010	98.6	1,750	110	0.7	0.9

SOURCES: Census 1971, *Economic Activity Tables*, Part II; HMSO, London, 1975, Table 5; Part IV, HMSO, London, 1975, Table 35.

in several of the expanding industries (with the very notable exception of professional and technical occupations), the increase in the women's labour force has been greater than of the men's labour force.

Although there has been an overall decline in the number of partly skilled and unskilled workers, slowing down in the 1960s, the number has fallen dramatically in some industries, such as railways. Thus, an analysis of changes between 1961 and 1966 showed a marked reduction in numbers of porters, ticket collectors and lengthmen, for example, whereas there were during the same period increases in numbers of office cleaners, caretakers, domestic helps and ward orderlies in hospital.<sup>1</sup> A contraction within manufacturing industries has been accompanied by expansion in service occupations - especially within city areas.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, because of changes in definition of occupations and the introduction of new occupations, it is difficult to trace changes continuously for all or even most occupations from 1951 to 1971, and the Registrar General has not been able to standardize and publish numerical estimates of the changes which have occurred throughout that period. Table 19.13 has therefore been divided into two parts which show trends for the first ten and last five years of the period of twenty years. Several of the totals in each part are not directly comparable with the corresponding entry in the other part. However, some trends, like the decline in textile, mining and agricultural occupations, have plainly continued throughout the 1960s. These declining occupations account for a disproportionately large number of workers, both male and female, over 55. On the other hand, some of the expanding occupations, such as services, administration and clerical work, include a substantial and fast-growing proportion of women. The proportion of female clerical workers and typists over 55 is tiny, but there are more than average proportions of women of that age in services, sales and administration (Table 19.13b). These jobs have been created with pay and conditions which have persuaded women, including older women in their fifties, to apply for them. Many, of course, are not in places where there are older men seeking work, but some are, and yet they are presented in a form which excludes such men from applying for them or where men, at least, are not expected to apply. Those who return to paid employment after many or several years' absence, nearly all of whom will be women, are unlikely to be union conscious and do not expect to receive high rates of pay. Even if indirectly more than directly, women are under-cutting older men. There is a relationship therefore between the weakening employment position of many older male workers and both

<sup>1</sup> DEP, 'Employment Changes in Certain Less Skilled Occupations, 1961-66', *Employment and Productivity Gazette*, April 1969, pp. 308-11. See also Knight, R., 'Changes in the Occupational Structure of the Working Population', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, vol. 130, Part 3, pp. 408-22.

<sup>2</sup> Pahl, R. E., 'Poverty and the Urban System', in Chisholm, M., and Manners, G. (ed.), *Spatial Problems of the British Economy*, Cambridge University Press, 1971.

the changing occupational structure and the increasing availability of relatively cheap female labour.

During the 1970s, a much higher rate of unemployment, combined with a rate of employment of men aged 65 and over which had reached a very low level, provoked new demands for a lowering of the pensionable age. For example, backbenchers in Parliament introduced a Bill in 1976 to reduce the pensionable age of men to 60.<sup>1</sup> In some respects these demands can be regarded as rationalizations of what had already occurred - increasing numbers of older men had been made redundant and had found it difficult to get back into work. Earlier retirement also continued to be thought of by leading union officials and Members of Parliament as a desirable as well as an expedient objective. A lower retirement age, they believed, would reduce the numbers listed as unemployed and allow attention to be concentrated, in discussion about economic and manpower policies, on the needs of younger men. The assumptions being made by these influential figures - that the economy could not be organized with higher numbers of men and women employed; that earlier retirement is preferable to a shorter working week; that older men want to retire earlier, even when still physically active; and that it is better to dispense with older workers than, for psychological and social as well as economic reasons, to retain a balance of such workers and younger workers - could all be challenged. The problems for individuals and society of creating a considerable section of the population who are still physically active but under-employed (and perhaps under-occupied) have not been faced.

### Earnings and Age

Rates of earnings help to reveal the labour market position of older workers. Median earnings tend to be highest for men in their thirties, but are almost as high for men in their forties, as Table 19.14, which is drawn from the results of three national surveys by the Department of Employment, shows. Median earnings fall for men in their fifties and fall again for men in their early and their late sixties. This applies to both manual and non-manual workers, and to skilled, partly skilled and unskilled among the manual workers.<sup>2</sup> But while there seems to be a marked downward drift in earnings of the majority of men at successive ages after the thirties, there is evidence of continued high earnings among the top 10 per cent or so (though some

<sup>1</sup> On 14 July 1976, Mr Gwilym Roberts, MP for Cannock, moved 'That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide that the pensionable age of men be reduced to 60 by not later than 1 January 1985.' See *Hansard*, 14 July 1976, cols. 663-5.

<sup>2</sup> In 1968 median earnings were highest for manual workers among those aged 30-39, and were £24.1 compared with £21.6 for men in their fifties and £19.6 for men in their early sixties. The peak of median earnings was reached among non-manual workers aged 40-49, and comparable weekly amounts were £31.1, £29.5 and £26.4 respectively - DEP, *New Earnings Survey, 1968*, HMSO, London, 1970, p. 103.



**Table 19.14.** *Earnings (in pounds) of all men employed full time, 1968, 1970, 1975.*

Age	Lowest decile			Median			Highest decile		
	1968	1970	1975	1968	1970	1975	1968	1970	1975
15-17	5.0	6.1	16.3	7.2	8.8	23.1	10.9	13.3	34.6
18-20	9.0	10.4	23.4	13.2	15.4	35.6	21.1	24.7	54.4
21-24	13.9	16.0	33.3	19.7	22.9	47.1	28.8	33.0	67.8
25-29	16.1	18.6	38.6	23.4	27.0	55.2	34.5	29.0	79.7
30-39	17.5	19.7	40.6	25.9	29.7	60.4	40.2	45.9	91.8
40-49	16.7	19.1	40.0	25.5	29.4	59.8	41.4	47.6	96.3
50-59	15.3	17.5	37.5	23.0	26.8	55.5	38.4	45.2	90.3
60-64	14.0	16.0	33.9	20.6	23.8	49.8	33.9	38.9	77.4
65+	10.0	12.9	26.8	17.5	20.2	44.2	30.6	34.8	73.4
All	15.5	15.8	34.1	23.6	26.3	54.3	38.1	42.8	86.5

SOURCE: Department of Employment and Productivity, *New Earnings Survey, 1968*, HMSO, London, 1970, p. 31; *Department of Employment Gazette*, January 1971, p. 48; *New Earnings Survey 1975*, HMSO, London, 1976, p. E35.

of this may be non-manual workers receiving promotion and increments and replacing high-paid manual workers, whose capacity or opportunity to get high rates of overtime pay has faded). Indeed, the earnings at the highest decile were higher in each of the three years we examine in Table 19.14 for men in their forties than in their thirties, and were only a little lower among men in their fifties. With advancing age, therefore, there is a loss of status and of earning power among a large number if not a majority of men, but a consolidation or maintenance of status and earnings among the best paid, especially non-manual workers. It is likely that, because part-time workers are excluded from these calculations, and because of the tendency of the New Earnings Survey to under-represent the low paid (see Chapter 18, pages 621-4), the disadvantages of older workers are not fully brought out here.

Our national survey allows the changes with age to be traced clearly. Among men in their forties, 42 per cent earned more than the mean, compared with 40 per cent in their thirties, 26 per cent in their twenties and only 20 per cent in their early sixties. As many as 17 per cent of men in their fifties earned less than 10 per cent of the mean, and in their early sixties 31 per cent (Table 19.15). The distribution of the actual amounts for different age groups is shown in Table A.70 (Appendix Eight, page 1047). The numbers of men in the sample aged 65 and over who were employed and for whom information about earnings was available was small, but nearly all had earnings below the mean and nearly half below 60 per cent of the mean. However, a number of these were working considerably fewer than forty hours. One further exercise was to compare the mean earnings of different age groups, standardized by occupational class and number of hours employed.

**Table 19.15.** Percentages of men of different age employed full time, according to the percentage of mean earnings that their earnings represented (gross weekly earnings).

Percentage of mean gross earnings	Age					
	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-64	65+
less than 50	5	4	5	5	9	(35)
50-59	11	6	7	12	22	(10)
60-79	30	24	25	32	29	(40)
80-99	27	27	22	21	20	(5)
100-19	12	17	19	13	9	(5)
120-59	11	13	11	10	6	(5)
160-99	2	4	6	3	2	(0)
200+	1	6	6	4	3	(0)
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number	319	338	322	285	107	20

In the survey we also endeavoured to find whether people who were in, or who had been in, employment, had ever experienced a big fall in earnings. The individual was left to decide what he would regard as a 'big' fall. The results are given in Table 19.16. The great majority aged 65 and over were retired. Because some of them had been retired for several years, their information may not be so reliable as that for younger workers. About a fifth of men in all age groups below the pensionable ages

**Table 19.16.** Percentages of men saying they had experienced a big fall in earnings.

Experience of big fall in earnings	Age				
	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-64	65-69
No	80	80	83	77	81
Yes	20	20	17	23	19
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Number	376	349	329	134	123

said they had experienced a big fall in earnings. According to this broad criterion, it does not seem that more men experienced a fall in earnings in their fifties than earlier.

### **Fringe Benefits and Work Conditions**

The mean value of fringe benefits increases with age for both manual and non-manual employees (Table 19.17). For men in their fifties and sixties, this helps to offset the decline, relative to younger men, in their earnings. However, the fact that information was not always complete for fringe benefits, and that the value of certain benefits, such as the use of an employer's car or the provision of accommodation, were received by only a small minority of workers, should be remembered. While fringe benefits slightly redress inequalities in average earnings between younger and older workers, they reinforce the tendency among older workers for remuneration to be exceptionally unequal. Older male non-manual employees derive substantially greater benefit than do manual employees from fringe benefits, as Table 19.17 shows.

**Table 19.17.** *Mean value of fringe benefits of non-manual and manual employees of different age, expressed as a percentage of their gross earnings.*

Age	Men		Women	
	Non-manual	Manual	Non-manual	Manual
15-29	9.3	4.1	6.1	2.5
30-49	14.0	4.9	7.8	5.4
50-64	29.4	9.9	17.4	25.5
All ages	17.2	6.5	8.8	10.0
Number	355	600	197	144

NOTE: Calculations made only for employees for whom information on fringe benefits in every particular was gained.

There is little official information on cover according to age. The inquiry by the Ministry of Pensions in 1961-2 found that cover increased slightly among older male workers. Altogether 57 per cent of men were said to be covered by some kind of sick-pay arrangement. For men aged 55-63, however, the figure was 62 per cent, whereas for men aged 25-34 it was 55 per cent.<sup>1</sup>

Table 19.18 shows the cover for selected fringe benefits of both manual and non-

<sup>1</sup> See Ministry of Pensions, Report of an Enquiry into the Incidence of Incapacity for Work, HMSO, London, 1964, p. xiii.

**Table 19.18.** Percentages of non-manual and manual male employees of different age with selected fringe benefits.

Age	Sick pay		Occupational pension		Paid holiday		Numbers <sup>a</sup>	
	Non-manual	Manual	Non-manual	Manual	Non-manual	Manual	Non-manual	Manual
<i>Men</i>								
15-29	82	41	77	34	49	14	160	337
30-39	89	49	82	41	58	23	176	200
40-49	89	46	86	49	57	25	152	192
50-59	91	62	77	61	55	30	129	173
60+	(87)	63	(79)	42	59	21	53	130
<i>Women</i>								
15-29	79	26	54	12	33	10	246	113
30-39	77	(38)	47	(27)	38	17	103	77
40-49	76	53	50	20	44	20	139	112
50-59	(84)	(42)	(49)	(16)	42	19	79	97
60+	(92)	(36)	(69)	(0)	(37)	12	35	51

NOTE: <sup>a</sup>Numbers giving information on paid holiday.

manual workers according to age. There is a marked difference in the proportions of manual and non-manual employees receiving sick pay and occupational pensions, and the expected growth in cover among middle-aged and older groups. The rise up to the fifties in the percentage with fringe benefits among manual workers is offset to some extent by downward occupational mobility, especially among skilled manual workers, a matter which was discussed earlier.

Conditions of work are known to vary widely, but quantifiable indices of these conditions have not been developed. In the UK survey, an experimental index of

**Table 19.19.** Percentages of employed men of different age according to work conditions.

Index of conditions at work	20-29	30-39	40-54	55-64	65-74
Very poor	0-4	4	2	3	(10)
Poor	5-6	10	9	10	(10)
Adequate	7-8	33	30	24	(45)
Good	9-10	53	59	63	(35)
Total		100	100	100	100
Number		227	238	280	20

both work conditions and work deprivation was compiled. This is discussed fully in Chapter 12 (pages 438 and 461). Table 19.19 illustrates one of these measures. There is no consistent trend with advancing age. In the context of our previous discussion, it is likely that some skilled manual workers who have high rates of pay in their thirties or forties but poor work conditions, move into partly skilled or unskilled work at lower rates of pay but more adequate work conditions in their fifties and sixties. This may offset the general tendency for lower rates of earnings to be associated with poorer conditions of work.

### **The Woman Worker**

We have suggested that the entry or re-entry of large numbers of middle-aged women into the labour force may be making it more difficult for some men in their fifties and early sixties to retain existing status and jobs and pay, relative either to younger men or to women of comparable age with whom they are directly or indirectly competing. It is important to realize that 'competition' between the sexes is more indirect than direct. In a number of industrial contexts, there is plainly no clash of interests because of the very different nature of employment which men and women are expected to fill. But the reorganization of industry and the growth of new industries are bound to reflect the opportunities which now abound for firms to utilize relatively cheap womanpower instead of relatively expensive manpower.

The reasons for the expansion of employment of women, of course, lie in part in changing patterns of social structure, particularly earlier marriage and childbirth, smaller families, earlier completion of child-rearing and changing social norms about the roles of women. They also lie in the nature of the 'lighter' jobs made possible by scientific innovation and the service occupations increasingly made necessary by social, particularly urban, organization. Many of these jobs have long been regarded as the preserve of women, and more women are attracted into them as they expand in number.

We have seen (Table 19.1, page 659) the increase since the war in the proportions of women of different age, particularly aged 45-54, who are economically active. There have been increases among married and widowed (though not unmarried) women even at the older ages. A large proportion work part time, and few of them, unlike men, work more than fifty hours a week. A surprisingly large minority, about a fifth, of middle-aged female workers, have at least some trace of incapacity, and some of them have marked incapacity. The distribution of educational experience among the economically active is very similar to that of men. However, practically none of them (0.6 per cent among those aged 40-54, and none over this age) claimed to have had any apprenticeship training.

About the same proportions of employed women as of men, 3 per cent aged 40-54 and 4 per cent aged 55-64, said they had been unemployed in the year, most of the

latter for more than ten weeks and most of the former for under five weeks. Again, about the same proportions of women as for men, 28 per cent aged 40-54 and 29 per cent aged 55-64, had been off work sick during the year, and the spells off work were roughly comparable in duration. Fewer older than younger women had been off work sick, but they tended to be off work longer.

Married women in more than 5 million families are now in paid employment and their earnings enhance family living standards. Fewer women than men tend to be in professional, managerial and supervisory occupations in middle age, and more in skilled and partly skilled manual occupations. But even allowing for this and the smaller number of hours worked, their gross earnings are much smaller. For 1968, the Department of Employment found that the median earnings of all women working full time was £12.5, compared with £23.6 for men. In 1975, the corresponding figures were £33.4 and £54.3. In relation to the earnings of men of the same age, women's earnings among both manual and non-manual groups are higher in the twenties than they are in the thirties and forties. They begin to rise again in the fifties, and by the sixties reach, or approach (for non-manual employees) the levels reached in the early twenties (Table 19.20). In the poverty survey, the proportion of women earning more than £12 a week reached a peak in the thirties and then fell off markedly, partly because substantially more women over this age worked part-time (Table 19.5, page 663) and more of them took up, or returned to, manual employment (Table 19.7, page 665). For full-time employees, the New Earnings Survey showed relatively little variation by age among women between 20 and 64, if manual and non-manual groups are considered separately. The majority of women workers have jobs of low non-manual status or of partly skilled manual status, with few opportunities of promotion.

Even when, as in the case of many non-manual employees, they are on incremental scales, the departure of young women to raise families before they have reached the top of their wage or salary scales and the entry of middle-aged women into employment at the foot of these scales results in little observed variation by age in earnings. When more and more women have held employment for the bulk of adult life, it is likely that the lowest earners among women will be, like men, those in their fifties and sixties.

The evidence of a connection between the growth of employment for women and the pressure upon older men to retire early is at this stage tenuous. The fall in employment of older men began in the inter-war years, when the female labour force was roughly static, although, of course, there was heavy male unemployment during many of these years. But after the war, when the unemployment rate was very small, the proportion of men retiring by 65-9 increased as steadily as the proportion of women entering the labour force also increased. On the face of it, this is a paradox which requires better explanation. A much more detailed analysis of trends in the labour force, industry by industry, needs to be made, particularly of patterns of

**Table 19.20.** *Median earnings of women of different age, expressed as a percentage of men's median earnings at that age (New Earnings Survey, 1968 and 1975).*

Age	Percentage			
	Manual		Non-manual	
	1968	1975	1968	1975
21-24	55.2	64.4	72.2	78.9
25-29	51.6	59.9	62.8	69.5
30-39	45.2	56.4	52.5	57.5
40-49	46.4	57.4	52.1	53.7
50-59	49.5	59.2	58.6	59.0
60-64	51.0	63.4	65.2	68.8
65+	59.6	62.2	70.3	66.7

NOTE: Full-time employees paid for a full week.

SOURCES: Department of Employment and Productivity, *New Earnings Survey, 1968*, HMSO, London, 1970, p. 32, and *New Earnings Survey, 1975*, HMSO, London, 1976, p. E35.

employment for each sex and patterns of retirement and redundancy. All we can do is call attention to the suggestiveness of the trends and ask whether a larger number of physically active middle-aged males will be pensioned off to facilitate occupational opportunity for women?

### Conclusion and Summary

This chapter has called attention to the vulnerability of the older worker, especially the man, during industrial and social change. We have traced the decline in the proportion of men over 65 remaining in paid employment and have predicted that now that the numbers have reached such low proportions, there is likely to be an acceleration in the withdrawal from the labour force of men aged 55-64. This withdrawal has so far been small, though we have brought forward data to show that it may take the form of increases in the number classified as chronic sick and unemployed as well as retired.

We have suggested that this process of withdrawal may be accelerated first by the rigidity of class and income differentials in a society in which the annual rate of recruitment to higher education and to the professional and managerial classes has increased in recent years. Thus, the national salary bill increased by 198 per cent, but the wages bill by only 106 per cent between 1955 and 1969.<sup>1</sup> As a percentage of all income from employment, salaries increased from 34 to 42. Yet there is no

<sup>1</sup> *National Income and Expenditure, 1970*, HMSO, London, 1971.

corresponding evidence in general of depreciation of salary levels relative to wages. Secondly, the withdrawal of middle-aged men from the labour force may be accelerated by the pressures from married women, particularly of middle age, to enter or re-enter employment or, rather, of employers eager to accommodate them at lower wages. We have hypothesized that the differentials in earnings between the occupational classes is being preserved by the employment of more women at rates of remuneration much below those of men, by the reduction of the proportion of men in late middle age who are employed and by the acceleration of downward mobility in middle age, through redundancies, reduction of recruitment opportunities for older men and failure to expand and create *effective* retraining facilities for men of this age.

The evidence is, however, inconclusive. Older men (i.e. aged 55-64) are vulnerable in the sense that their earnings are lower, and more of them have low earnings than men, say, in their thirties; more of them experience two or more weeks of sickness in the year, and substantially more of them have some degree of incapacity. However, despite some reduction of overtime earnings, the survey data did not show that more of them worked fewer than forty hours a week or had markedly inferior educational or apprenticeship skills. Trends in social class by age show both that each succeeding generation of younger workers tend to have jobs of higher occupational status than their predecessors, but also that there is some downward mobility as well as upward mobility in later working life. Some skilled manual and non-manual workers who are obliged to leave their jobs are displacing some unskilled workers who are forced into or are accepting premature retirement. But the proportion aged 55-64 is still small. In some of the declining industries, the contraction of the women's labour force has been greater than of the men's labour force. In several of the expanding industries, on the other hand, the increase in the female labour force has been correspondingly greater. Moreover, the increase in service occupations, particularly in city areas, has tended to expand the employment of older women with relatively low earnings, at the expense, if indirectly, of older men, who are squeezed into insecure jobs or into premature retirement. Some pensioners have been willing to accept, and employers to offer, poor rates of pay for a small number of hours, to keep within the earnings rule and not suffer any loss of benefit.

Research on a larger cross-section of the population may help to clarify the trends, for there are a number of cross-currents. On the one hand, the development of seniority rights in large organizations and the disproportionate increase of such organizations seems to be strengthening the situation and earnings of some employed men in the older age groups - even if they are becoming more dependent than previously on the firm. Thus, the mean value of fringe benefits to men in their fifties and sixties, for both manual and non-manual employees, particularly non-



manual employees, is much greater than for younger men. On the other hand, redundancies from certain types of skilled job and the lagging of pay and conditions in the older industries, together with the demand for employment of women, is tending to increase the proportion of older male workers occupying low-paid and insecure jobs. These trends can amount to a major new source of inequality and of poverty in society.