NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

Sociología del trabajo

Idioma: EN

EXAM STATEMENT:

No materials may be used. The exam consists of two topics. The first must be summarised in an outline. The use of bullet points or numbering (with at least three levels of detail) is recommended to express the structure of the content. Your presentation should not exceed one side of a sheet of paper. The outline must contain the main theses of each section. The second topic should be as extensive and detailed as possible, taking into account the time available (90 minutes for the entire examination). Pay special attention to your handwriting and spelling. Repeated spelling mistakes may result in failure.

Question 1: To summarise in an outline: The reorganisation of work or Fordism after Fordism (I): Fordism in motion; subcontracting, offshoring and global production chains; Fordism 2.0; Fordism in services.

Question 2: To develop: The Coming of Post-Industrial Society

Question 1

To summarise in an outline: The reorganisation of work or Fordism after Fordism (I): Fordism in motion; subcontracting, offshoring and global production chains; Fordism 2.0; Fordism in services.

STUDENT RESPONSE:

1. The reorganisation of work, or Fordism after Fordism (I)
1.1. Basic premise: “Fordism after Fordism”
1.1.1. Classical Fordism (reference point)
1.1.1.1. Mass production based on standardised products, assembly-line organisation and strong managerial control
1.1.1.2. Productivity-wage nexus and mass consumption; stable internal labour markets; collective bargaining and welfare-state supports
1.1.2. Post-Fordist context (trigger of reorganisation)
1.1.2.1. Intensified competition, market volatility, shorter product cycles and pressure on costs/time
1.1.2.2. Reorganisation does not imply the disappearance of Fordism but its reconfiguration and displacement in space and sectors
1.1.3. Central thesis
1.1.3.1. The core principles of Fordism (standardisation, measurement, fragmentation of tasks, tight control) persist, but become more flexible, externalised and globalised

1.2. Fordism in motion
1.2.1. Meaning
1.2.1.1. Fordist organisation becomes less anchored in one large, vertically integrated factory and more distributed across firms, places and contractual forms
1.2.2. Main features
1.2.2.1. Flexibilisation of production and labour
1.2.2.1.1. Variable volumes, just-in-time logics, rapid adjustment to demand
1.2.2.1.2. Workforce adjustments via temporality, outsourcing and multi-tier employment statuses
1.2.2.2. Intensification and rationalisation
1.2.2.2.1. Continuous improvement, performance targets and tighter time discipline
1.2.2.2.2. Expansion of monitoring beyond the assembly line (digital metrics, traceability, KPIs)
1.2.2.3. Organisational decentralisation with central control
1.2.2.3.1. Formal decentralisation of tasks/units, but strategic control by lead firms through standards, auditing and purchasing power
1.2.3. Consequences for work
1.2.3.1. Greater insecurity and dualisation: stable core vs peripheral workforce
1.2.3.2. Transfer of risks from firms to workers and suppliers (employment instability, income volatility)

1.3. Subcontracting, offshoring and global production chains
1.3.1. Subcontracting (outsourcing)
1.3.1.1. Definition and rationale
1.3.1.1.1. Transfer of activities to external firms to reduce fixed costs, increase flexibility and specialise
1.3.1.1.2. “Fragmentation” of the production process into modules and services

purchased on the market
1.3.1.2. Architecture of the subcontracting system
1.3.1.2.1. Multi-tier networks: lead firm → first-tier suppliers → second/third tiers
1.3.1.2.2. Contractual governance: standards, delivery times, penalties, quality certifications
1.3.1.3. Effects on labour relations
1.3.1.3.1. Wage dispersion and uneven working conditions for similar tasks across firms
1.3.1.3.2. Weakened collective bargaining due to workplace fragmentation and employer dispersion
1.3.2. Offshoring (relocation abroad)
1.3.2.1. Definition and motives
1.3.2.1.1. Geographic relocation of production stages to lower-cost or strategically located countries
1.3.2.1.2. Search for cheaper labour, tax/regulatory advantages, proximity to markets and logistics hubs
1.3.2.2. New international division of labour
1.3.2.2.1. High-value functions (design, R&D, branding, finance) concentrated in core economies
1.3.2.2.2. Labour-intensive assembly/manufacturing concentrated where labour is cheaper and regulation weaker
1.3.2.3. Social and labour outcomes
1.3.2.3.1. Deindustrialisation pressures in origin countries (employment loss/recomposition)
1.3.2.3.2. In destination countries: job creation often accompanied by intense labour discipline and limited protections
1.3.3. Global production chains (global value chains)
1.3.3.1. Concept
1.3.3.1.1. Production organised as a transnational chain of specialised tasks coordinated by lead firms
1.3.3.1.2. Value captured unevenly: lead firms appropriate higher margins through control of design, standards and markets
1.3.3.2. Mechanisms of control
1.3.3.2.1. Standardisation of components/processes enabling spatial dispersion while maintaining uniform output
1.3.3.2.2. Audits, certifications and logistics/IT systems enabling real-time coordination
1.3.3.3. Vulnerabilities and dependencies
1.3.3.3.1. Supplier dependence and “race to the bottom” in costs and labour conditions
1.3.3.3.2. Systemic fragility: disruptions propagate along the chain (delays, shortages)

1.4. Fordism 2.0
1.4.1. Core idea
1.4.1.1. A renewed form of Fordism combining classical standardisation with flexibility, digital control and globalised organisation
1.4.2. Key components
1.4.2.1. Standardisation plus customisation
1.4.2.1.1. Modular products/services allowing variety without abandoning mass-production principles

1.4.2.1.2. Shorter cycles with continuous redesign while keeping routinised tasks
1.4.2.2. Data-driven management and surveillance
1.4.2.2.1. Measurement of performance and time as a central axis of labour control
1.4.2.2.2. Algorithmic scheduling and optimisation of workflows
1.4.2.3. Lean/just-in-time discipline as a contemporary Taylorism
1.4.2.3.1. Reduction of inventories and buffers increases pressure on workers and suppliers
1.4.2.3.2. Intensification: fewer “dead times,” constant benchmarking and target setting
1.4.2.4. Externalisation of costs and risks
1.4.2.4.1. Outsourcing, temporary work and subcontracting reduce employer obligations
1.4.2.4.2. Responsibility diluted across contractors while lead firms keep strategic control
1.4.3. Central thesis
1.4.3.1. Fordism does not end; it upgrades: it becomes networked, digitalised and more flexible while deepening control and standardisation

1.5. Fordism in services
1.5.1. General thesis
1.5.1.1. Fordist principles extend from industry to services through standardisation of tasks, scripting and the industrialisation of service delivery
1.5.2. Mechanisms of “service industrialisation”
1.5.2.1. Standardised procedures and scripts
1.5.2.1.1. Call centres, fast-food chains, retail: prescribed interactions and routinised sequences
1.5.2.1.2. Quality control through checklists, mystery shoppers, and customer ratings
1.5.2.2. Spatial and temporal rationalisation
1.5.2.2.1. Workflow design akin to assembly lines (queues, stations, timed tasks)
1.5.2.2.2. Scheduling to match demand peaks; variable hours and “just-in-time” staffing
1.5.2.3. Metrics and surveillance
1.5.2.3.1. Quantification of performance (calls per hour, sales targets, handling time)
1.5.2.3.2. Digital monitoring and platform-mediated supervision
1.5.3. Labour outcomes in services
1.5.3.1. Deskilling and routinisation in many service jobs, despite growth of highly skilled service niches
1.5.3.2. Intensification of emotional labour under standardised rules and customer evaluation
1.5.3.3. Polarisation: a managerial/technical layer vs a large base of low-paid, tightly controlled, often precarious service work
1.5.4. Link to “Fordism after Fordism”
1.5.4.1. The expansion to services broadens the social reach of Fordist control mechanisms, while flexibility and subcontracting reshape employment stability and bargaining power

Question 2

To develop: The Coming of Post-Industrial Society

STUDENT RESPONSE:

The coming of post-industrial society refers to a long-term transformation of advanced capitalist economies in which the central axis of employment, production and social organization shifts from industrial manufacturing to services, knowledge and information. It is not simply “more services” in a statistical sense, but a reconfiguration of what is produced, how value is created, what kinds of work predominate, and which social groups and institutions gain prominence.

1) From industrial society to post-industrial society: the core thesis
Industrial society was structured around the mass production of standardized goods, the concentration of workers in factories, and a relatively clear class compromise in which stable employment (often full-time, male breadwinner) was exchanged for productivity and social peace, supported by unions and welfare-state expansion. Post-industrial society emerges when:
- The dominant sector becomes services (employment and, increasingly, value added).
- Knowledge, information and symbolic processing become strategic resources.
- Occupational structure polarizes and fragments: alongside high-skilled professional and technical jobs, many low-paid personal services expand.
- Firms reorganize production through flexibility, externalization and new technologies, weakening the institutional centrality of the factory and the traditional working class.

This “coming” is therefore both economic (sectoral change), technological (ICT and automation), organizational (new forms of coordination and control), and social (new inequalities and life-course risks).

2) The expansion of services and the reallocation of employment
A key empirical feature is the tertiarization of employment. The post-industrial claim is that, as productivity rises in agriculture and industry, fewer workers are needed to produce goods, while demand grows for services. Several mechanisms reinforce this:
- Differential productivity: manufacturing productivity grows faster than many service activities (especially labor-intensive care, hospitality, cleaning, retail). Even if industrial output remains high, industrial employment can fall.
- Income effects and changing consumption: higher incomes increase consumption of services (leisure, tourism, education, health).
- Demographic and social change: aging societies increase demand for care; dual-earner households increase demand for marketized domestic and personal services.
- Business services and the “service revolution” within production: modern production requires logistics, design, marketing, finance, legal services, IT, HR, customer support, and consultancy.

Thus, the “rise of services” includes both high-productivity, knowledge-intensive business services and low-productivity personal services, which has consequences for inequality and job quality.

3) Knowledge, information and the new centrality of education
Post-industrial society is often characterized by the primacy of theoretical knowledge and codified expertise. This is visible in:
- Growth of professional, technical and managerial occupations.
- Increased importance of credentials and formal education as sorting mechanisms in the labor market.
- Expansion of knowledge-intensive sectors (ICT, R&D, higher education, health, professional services).

However, education does not translate automatically into broad-based upward mobility. As educational expansion accelerates, competition for desirable jobs intensifies and the risk of mismatch increases. Post-industrial dynamics therefore link directly to phenomena such as overqualification and credential inflation: more people have higher education, but the occupational structure does not always generate a proportional number of high-quality professional jobs.

4) Technological change, automation and the transformation of work
The coming of post-industrial society is inseparable from technological change, especially ICT. Technology reshapes work in at least four ways:
- Automation of routine tasks: many routine manual and routine clerical tasks can be mechanized or digitized, reducing mid-level jobs in both factories and offices.
- Digitalization of coordination: platforms, enterprise software and data analytics make it easier to monitor performance, standardize procedures and reorganize workflows.
- New forms of service delivery: e-commerce, call centers, online banking, telemedicine, online education, etc.
- Growth of “symbolic-analytic” and relational work: tasks based on problem-solving, creativity, and interaction become more important, though unevenly distributed.

A major implication is job polarization: growth at the top (high-skill) and bottom (low-skill personal services) with pressures on middle jobs. This complicates any simple optimistic narrative that post-industrialism necessarily means “better work”.

5) Organizational change and the restructuring of employment relations
Post-industrial society also involves a shift in how employment is organized:
- Firms pursue flexibility (numerical, functional and wage flexibility) to adapt to demand volatility and global competition.
- Outsourcing and subcontracting expand, creating multi-tier labor markets where core workers have better conditions than peripheral workers.
- Service work often occurs in smaller workplaces and dispersed settings (shops, offices, homes, digital environments), making collective organization harder than in concentrated industrial plants.
- Performance management and customer-driven control become central in many service jobs (targets, ratings, scripts, standardized interactions).

The employment relation becomes less standardized. While some segments enjoy autonomy and high wages, many workers face temporary contracts, part-time

work, unpredictable schedules, and weak bargaining power.

6) Social structure, inequality and the new “class” landscape
A classic post-industrial argument is the decline of the industrial working class and the rise of a “new middle class” of professionals and technicians. Yet the overall picture is more complex:
- Occupational upgrading exists in some areas (more professionals), but there is also expansion of low-wage service employment.
- Inequality may increase due to skill-biased technological change, weakened collective bargaining, and the stratification of service sectors.
- Labor market segmentation becomes more salient: stable, protected jobs coexist with precarious, low-paid jobs.
- New cleavages intersect with class: gender and migration become central axes of labor-market inequality because many expanding service jobs are feminized and/or filled by immigrants (care, cleaning, hospitality, agriculture-linked services, delivery).

Therefore, post-industrial society does not imply the disappearance of classes, but rather their reconfiguration and the emergence of new forms of stratification.

7) The role of the state and welfare in post-industrial society
The coming of post-industrial society challenges welfare states built around the industrial male breadwinner model:
- New social risks: unstable careers, long transitions between education and employment, single-parenthood, reconciliation of work and care, long-term unemployment in deindustrialized regions, and in-work poverty.
- Fiscal and political pressures: slower growth, aging populations, and increased demand for health and care services raise expenditure needs.
- Policy dilemmas: whether to prioritize activation and employability, expand care services and social investment (education, childcare), or rely on market solutions.

In post-industrial economies, the state is not simply reduced; it is reoriented. Public employment in health, education and administration becomes a major component of the service sector, and regulation increasingly shapes service work (minimum wages, working-time rules, care standards, platform regulation).

8) Critiques and limits of the post-industrial thesis
Although the “post-industrial” label captures major trends, it has important limitations:
- Industry does not disappear; it is transformed and often relocated. Manufacturing output can remain high while employment falls due to productivity and offshoring. Advanced economies also retain high-tech manufacturing and “industrial services” around production.
- The boundary between goods and services is blurred: many goods are bundled with services (maintenance, software, subscriptions), and many services depend on industrial infrastructures (data centers, logistics).
- Post-industrialism is uneven geographically: deindustrialization hits some regions hard, while others thrive in high-tech manufacturing or global-city services.
- The optimistic view that services inherently provide better jobs is not supported in many cases: a large share of service employment is low-paid, insecure and

tightly controlled.

Thus, the coming of post-industrial society should be understood as a reorganization of capitalism rather than an automatic transition to a more egalitarian or “lighter” economy.

9) Overall assessment
Post-industrial society denotes the centrality of services, knowledge and information, and the displacement of the factory as the emblematic workplace. Its arrival is marked by tertiarization, technological change, new occupational structures, and new forms of inequality and insecurity. The key sociological point is that the transformation is multidimensional: it affects not only what people produce, but also how they work, how careers unfold, how collective actors (unions) operate, and how welfare states manage new risks. The “coming” of post-industrial society is therefore best seen as an ongoing, contested, and unequal process of economic and social restructuring.