

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:

I. The Reorganization of Work: Fordism After Fordism

A. Fordism in Motion

1. Main thesis: Evolution of Fordist principles through adaptability and systemic flexibility.

a. Transition from rigid mass production to flexible specialization in response to economic crises.

b. Integration of new technologies and management strategies to sustain productivity.

c. Retention of core Fordist elements (e.g., standardization) amid structural transformations.

B. Subcontracting, Offshoring, and Global Production Chains

1. Main thesis: Fragmentation of production processes into transnational networks to optimize efficiency.

a. Subcontracting: Outsourcing specialized tasks to external firms to reduce costs and risks.

b. Offshoring: Relocation of manufacturing to low-wage regions to exploit global labor arbitrage.

c. Global chains: Coordination of interconnected production stages across national borders via multinational corporations.

C. Fordism 2.0

1. Main thesis: Digital-era resurgence of Fordist logic through technological and organizational innovation.

a. Technology integration: Automation, data analytics, and lean production systems enhancing control.

b. Mass customization: Balancing standardized processes with consumer-specific product variations.

c. Labor restructuring: Reconfigured workplace hierarchies and skill demands under algorithmic management.

D. Fordism in Services

1. Main thesis: Extension of Fordist principles to service sectors, replicating industrial-era logic.

a. Standardization: Rule-based, repetitive service processes (e.g., fast food, retail, call centers).

b. Hierarchical control: Centralized management systems enforcing uniform service delivery.

c. Deskilling: Reduction of worker autonomy and devaluation of service labor through routinization.

Question 2

To develop: The Coming of Post-Industrial Society

STUDENT RESPONSE:

The Coming of Post-Industrial Society

The concept of the post-industrial society, popularized by Daniel Bell in his 1973 work *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, marks a paradigmatic shift from industrial capitalism, where manufacturing and material production dominated, to a new social order centered on services, knowledge, and information. This transition, rooted in late 20th-century socio-economic transformations, redefined labor structures, class dynamics, and the very nature of work. Bell argued that the post-industrial era emerged as a result of technological advancements, particularly in computing and telecommunications, which diminished the primacy of industrial labor while elevating the role of theoretical knowledge as the core organizing principle of society.

Central to this paradigm is the dominance of the service sector, which surpassed manufacturing in employment and economic output in advanced capitalist economies. Unlike industrial societies, where blue-collar labor in factories defined social stratification, post-industrial societies are characterized by a growing "professional and technical class" whose expertise in knowledge production and management becomes the new basis of social hierarchy. This class, composed of scientists, engineers, educators, and administrators, operates within a network of institutions prioritizing innovation and information over physical production. Concurrently, the rise of service-oriented occupations—ranging from healthcare to finance—reconfigured labor markets, displacing traditional industrial jobs while generating new forms of employment.

Proponents of the post-industrial thesis initially framed this shift optimistically, positing that the service sector would foster higher-skilled, better-paid jobs, reduce manual labor, and elevate societal well-being through technological progress. The expansion of higher education was seen as a key mechanism for equipping workers with the competencies required in a knowledge-driven economy, thereby promoting social mobility and economic growth. However, this optimistic narrative has faced significant critique. Critics, including scholars like André Gorz and proponents of the "degradation of work" thesis, argue that the service sector is highly heterogeneous, encompassing both high-status professions and low-wage, precarious roles in retail, hospitality, and care work. Far from universalizing skilled employment, post-industrialism has exacerbated labor market segmentation, with many service jobs characterized by deskilling, instability, and diminished bargaining power.

The quality of employment in post-industrial societies remains contested. While certain segments of the workforce benefit from intellectual labor and autonomy, others face intensified precarity, stagnant wages, and the erosion of labor protections. The "degradation of work" in services mirrors industrial-era patterns, as tasks become routinized and fragmented under managerial control, particularly in the context of globalization and digitalization. Furthermore, the promise of education as a vehicle for upward mobility has been undermined by overqualification and credential inflation, as discussed in Tema 6, where

expanding access to higher education has not translated into proportionate improvements in job quality.

The post-industrial transition also reveals deepening inequalities. The valorization of theoretical knowledge has marginalized workers without access to advanced education, reinforcing class divides along educational and racial lines. Immigrant and female laborers, as highlighted in Temas 7 and 8, are disproportionately concentrated in low-status service roles, perpetuating gender and ethnic wage gaps. Meanwhile, the rise of "affective labor" and unpaid care work—often performed by women—underscores the incomplete integration of social reproduction into economic frameworks.

In conclusion, the advent of the post-industrial society represents a profound reconfiguration of work and social organization, yet its implications are neither uniformly progressive nor regressive. While it has enabled unprecedented innovation and expanded opportunities for some, it has also entrenched new forms of exploitation and inequality. The debate over whether employment has "improved or worsened" hinges on recognizing the duality of post-industrialism: a society where knowledge is both a source of empowerment and a mechanism of exclusion, where the service sector commands economic primacy but fails to deliver universal prosperity. Understanding this duality is essential for addressing the challenges of labor in the 21st century.