



11

Work and the Economy

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 11 ties in very well with the previous chapter. After one's education, we begin to look for work. The author provides us with three key points to begin with: work is central to our existence, work is a social product, and people seek meaning in their work.

Given that the Canadian economy works under the system of capitalism, the author devotes much of the chapter to explaining work and the economy in terms of capitalism. She starts by giving the reader a brief definition and history behind the rise of capitalism in western societies. Next, two different forms of capitalism are discussed: family capitalism and corporate capitalism. Finally, the attention shifts to our modern and global economy, and the rise of the multinational corporations.

In the next section, the author explains the three sectors of the economy—primary, secondary, and tertiary—and the jobs and attributes associated with each of them. This is followed up by an examination of social reproduction in the economy, highlighting the formal and informal economy and what each entails.

The author then discusses work and the economy in today's rapidly-changing society. New forms of technology have created much faster production of goods and services but at the same time have made many human-controlled jobs obsolete. Due to this loss of jobs, precarious (or non-standard) work is also on the rise, as this type of work arrangement now encompasses most spheres of employment today. The job market has also seen a change in the labour force, with a diverse set of workers—male and female, young and old, and those of different ethnicities.

Lastly, with capitalism and this diverse set of workers, inequalities are bound to present themselves. The author examines how we try to find meaning in our work today, along with trying to

maintain professional control over our labour. Much of this is now being done through unions, which negotiate these facets of work on behalf of their members.

KEY TERMS

Capitalism	Informal economy	Service economy
Culture	Means of production	Social institutions
Globalization	Non-standard (precarious) work	Social relationships
Identity	Numerical flexibility	Social reproduction
Ideology	Power	Unemployment rate

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How is work a social product? (p. 250)
2. What is the union advantage? (p. 266)
3. What is time discipline? (p. 252)
4. What is the knowledge society? (p. 258)
5. What is social reproduction? (p. 257)
6. Why are occupations defined as “professional” while others are not? (p. 265)
7. What are some of the benefits the wider Canadian society has received due to union struggles and the labour movement? (p. 266)
8. Why would powerful corporations try to curb workers’ rights to organize unions? (p. 266)
9. How did corporate capitalism differ from family capitalism? (p. 252)
10. Why do people seek meaning in their work? (p. 250)

READINGS AND WEBSITES

Dobbin, Frank (ed). (2004). *The sociology of the economy*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

This book provides several readings about the study of the economy from a sociological perspective. The book contains four major themes. Part 1 looks at how political institutions shape the markets. Part 2 examines how the economic models throughout society shape the markets. Part 3 contains readings based on how networks can shape the markets. Part 4 addresses how different economic ideas themselves, both new and old ones, have an effect on the markets.

Volti, Rudi. (2008). *An introduction to the sociology of work and occupations*. Los Angeles, CA: Pine Forge Press.

This book encompasses a vast amount of introductory information to the sociology of work. In the first section, the author examines work prior to industrialization which mainly consisted of agricultural, hunting, and gathering societies. The next section focuses on capitalism and the rise of industrialization. This is followed by an examination of work in contemporary times and the onset of globalization and new technologies. Lastly, the text covers several aspects of work in society. The author discusses topics such as unions, wage and inequalities, social interactions at work, socialization of identity, and the balance between work and family.

Canadian Labour Congress. (2015) “History of Labour in Canada.” Retrieved from <http://canadianlabour.ca/why-unions/history-labour-canada>

This website provides a detailed history of the labour movement in Canada, highlighting the struggles and victories for workers’ rights within the country.

Child Labor Public Education Project. (2011, Jul.) “What is Child Labour?” Retrieved from https://www.continuetolearn.uiowa.edu/laborctr/child_labor/about/what_is_child_labor.html

The Child Labor Public Education Project of the University of Iowa Labor Center and Center for Human Rights provides educational workshops and materials on a range of issues regarding child labor in the US and other countries:

- Causes and consequences of child labor
- History of child labor in the US
- Effects of child labor on children’s health and workers’ rights
- International issues such as workers’ rights, trade, and economic policies

Waller, Nikki, and Joann S. Lublin. (2015, Sep. 30). “What’s Holding Women Back in the Workplace?” *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/whats-holding-women-back-in-the-workplace-1443600242>

A new LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Co. study on Women in the Workplace finds that corporate diversity initiatives aren't helping women break the glass ceiling. WSJ’s Shelby Holliday takes a closer look at the reasons why and other key takeaways from the data.