Before the advent of industrial capitalism approximately 200 years ago in England, work referred in a generalized way to activities directed at satisfying the human need for survival, for the vast majority, at a subsistence level. In terms of the 40,000 years plus history of human societies, it is only in the recent past that work has become synonymous with regular paid employment, a separate sphere of specialized economic activity for which one receives payment. Thus, the current conception of work is a modern social construction, the product of specific historical conditions that are typically denoted by the term ‘industrial capitalism’. The first part of this term indicates that work is a productive activity involving machines powered by inanimate energy sources that is undertaken outside the home in a dedicated building that one has to travel to each work day. The second part indicates that work involves monetary payment, typically agreed in advance in relation to time and/or output, and is part of a market system in which productive property is privately owned with a view to making a profit and that everything has a price, including labour. The term ‘modern society’ refers to industrial society and although the process of modernization may start with industrialization, it is one that covers all aspects of social change, not just economic change. At the beginning
of the twenty-first century, there is some controversy about the extent to which the most advanced industrial capitalist societies have changed and how best to conceptualize it.

Work in pre-industrial societies

In order to appreciate the revolutionary character of the modern conception of work, it is useful to consider briefly the main features of work in pre-modern societies before comparing them with work in modern societies. However, such an exercise is not without its difficulties, notably that it implies, wrongly, that change is unilinear, and it understates the heterogeneity of work activities and beliefs in pre-modern societies, particularly with reference to the meaning of work and the division of labour. Since the objective here is to contextualize historically in a succinct way the contrast between work in pre-modern and modern societies, Table 1.1 summarizes the great variety of pre-modern societies by excluding hybrid societies and by collapsing the Nolan and Lenski (1999) classification based on the predominant method of subsistence into four types of society: (a) hunting and gathering; (b) horticultural; (c) agrarian; and (d) industrial.

Table 1.1 Types of society and main types of work in different historical periods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of society</th>
<th>Approximate dates</th>
<th>Main kinds of work</th>
<th>Historical period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hunting and gathering (i.e., 'Stone Age')</td>
<td>40,000 BP + to 10,000 BP (or 8,000 BP)</td>
<td>Hunting and gathering</td>
<td>Pre-modern period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horticultural</td>
<td>10,000 BP to 5,000 BP (or 3,000 BP)</td>
<td>Gardening</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agrarian</td>
<td>5,000 BP to late 18th century</td>
<td>Farming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial capitalist</td>
<td>19th and 20th centuries</td>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>Early modern period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-industrial/Informational/Global capitalism</td>
<td>Late 20th century and early 21st century</td>
<td>Services (and information processing)</td>
<td>Late modern period</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: BP: Before the present.

Unless otherwise indicated, in the following discussion of pre-industrial societies I have drawn heavily upon the vast amount of comparative material collated by Nolan and Lenski (1999). In the case of the most recent type of society, the industrial, two caveats are in order. First, the label ‘industrial capitalism’ is preferred since an essential element of the earliest and subsequently the most economically successful industrial societies which dominate the world economy is that they are capitalist as well as industrial. Second, the development of human societies is ongoing, hence the debate about whether, and in what ways, advanced industrial capitalist societies have become post-industrial...
THE HISTORICAL TRANSFORMATION OF WORK

is indicated by the use of a broken line after the industrial type in Table 1.1, which summarizes the main types of human society.

Hunting and gathering societies

The earliest known human societies were based on hunting and gathering and lasted longer than any other type of society, namely from the beginnings of human society, estimated to be at least 40,000 years ago, to around 10,000 years ago. Somewhat surprisingly given the globalization of industrial capitalism, a small number of these ‘Stone Age’ cultures have survived into the modern era, for example, Aborigines in Australia and Pygmies in Africa. In these essentially nomadic and small-scale societies, their exceedingly limited technology, involving the widespread use of stone for tools and weapons, typically did not produce a regular economic surplus or lead to marked inequalities. Consequently, everyone in such societies participated, to a greater or lesser extent, in productive work; the young and old, men and women, even political and religious leaders undertook their roles on a part-time basis. Biological differences between the sexes and age groups led to adult males specializing in hunting and fishing and adult females in gathering and food preparation, with everyone often contributing to the building of shelters. Preparation for the sex-based adult work roles in such a limited division of labour was informal, although formal ceremonies (initiation rites) typically marked the transition to manhood and womanhood. Sharing work and the products of work typified this era since the survival of the group put a premium on co-operative rather than competitive behaviour. In Veblen’s (1964 [1914]) terminology, they were more peaceable than predatory societies.

Horticultural societies

The emergence of semi-nomadic and later settled horticultural societies based on the cultivation of plants and the domestication of animals about 10,000 years ago, combined with the use of metals instead of stone for tools and weapons, led to the creation of a more reliable economic surplus, an increase in the size of the population, and the differentiation of economic activities. Essentially, such societies are dominated by gardening work using a digging stick and hoe, and are characterized by an increase in socio-economic specialization, for example, workers and warriors, and a corresponding growth of inequality associated with the beginnings of a stratification system dominated by male warriors. The increase in trade and the conquest of people were not only made possible with technological innovations such as metal working, but were found to be a viable economic alternative to the ‘conquest of nature’ (Nolan and Lenski, 1999: 138). The production of a ‘margin worth fighting for, above the subsistence of those engaged in getting a living’, led Veblen to call this stage the first predatory era (1970 [1899]: 32). Thus, in addition to the by
now established pattern of women doing most of the productive work, in the more advanced horticultural societies, the creation of a stable economic surplus by the majority allowed a minority to form an hereditary aristocracy of males who specialized in politics, religion and warfare.

Agrarian societies

The next major stimulus to production occurred sometime around 5,000 years ago, it involved the widespread use of the plough and the harnessing of animal power for agriculture and transport, and heralded the development of agrarian societies. The farming of fields using animals to pull a plough rather than gardening based on human energy to operate the hoe became the predominant method of cultivation. Following these technological innovations, production expanded markedly, the population grew, and social differentiation increased, especially along class lines, with dominant groups specializing in the ownership of land and people, and subordinate groups specializing in a range of economic activities, including the production, transportation and distribution of everything from food and spices, to tools and weapons. Economic growth led to a greater diversity of occupations and the emergence of urban centres in which the use of money became the preferred medium of exchange, which in turn further stimulated trade and therefore production and community specialization. For the vast majority, home and work were still not separated, with the household being the unit of production as well as consumption for its members, not all of whom would have been related, for example, apprentices and servants. The expansion of those engaged in the increasing variety of occupations encouraged the establishment of craft guilds to promote their interests – the pre-modern equivalent of trade unions. Contrary to Sennett (2008), guild membership was open to both men and women via apprenticeship (Applebaum, 1992; Oakley, 1976), although from the fifteenth century onwards, there was a trend in Europe to restrict women to lower status guilds or even exclude them altogether (Farr, 2000).

It was at this historical juncture that the important distinction between a productive class of people who worked for a living and a non-productive, parasitical leisure class reached its fullest development. In Europe, this class prevailed during the feudal era when its members were ‘not only exempt, but by prescriptive custom’ they were ‘debarred, from all industrial occupations’ (Veblen, 1970 [1899]: 22). This degree of social differentiation involved the emergence of work and leisure as separate spheres of activity for the dominant class, whereas formerly such activities were embedded in a range of other institutions, notably kinship and religion. In Veblen’s terms, there are upper-class and male-dominated leisure class occupations, such as government, warfare and religious observances, that are concerned with predatory, non-industrial activities and are accorded the highest status, and there are lower-class and
female-dominated productive activities, such as farming and craft work, which are considered ignoble according to the standards of the leisure class. In order to further enhance their status, the leisure class demonstrated their superior wealth and power by engaging in a variety of other non-work activities, the defining features of which were that, in addition to the conspicuous abstention from useful work, they involved conspicuous expense and the conspicuous waste of materials. In short, the conspicuous consumption of time, money and resources, namely the consumption of the most elaborate food, drink, clothes, and sports.

**Discussion: pre-industrial societies**

Thus, prior to the growth of industrial capitalism, the main kinds of work were all non-industrial and varied from everyone working co-operatively on a minimally differentiated basis, to a degree of gender and class specialization culminating in some social groups being exempt from productive work. Above all, in pre-industrial societies: ‘Work was not a special subject, it was part of the general social and spiritual framework’ (Anthony, 1977; 37). However, variation in terms of gender was marked, ranging from women taken as trophies and enslaved following conflict between horticultural societies (Veblen, 1970 [1899]), to women owning land and managing the production of linen and beer in agrarian England (Applebaum, 1992). Notwithstanding such variations, the development of industrial society tends to enhance the liberation of women (Boserup, 1970), although this generalization is not without its complexities and critics (Walby, 1990), as will become apparent below.

Occupational specialization was minimal in the earliest known societies whereas in horticultural and agrarian societies ‘occupational specialties numbered in the hundreds, and there was a complex division of labour that often involved specialization by communities and even regions’ (Nolan and Lenski, 1999: 206). Yet, compared with today, rural pre-modern societies were characterized by a rudimentary and essentially ascriptive division of labour, such is the unparalleled degree of economic specialization intrinsic to industrial capitalism. The increase in the division of labour was accompanied by a move from learning work roles informally via watching adults work and practical experience, to acquiring specialist knowledge and skills formally in dedicated organizations such as schools and universities. Even in the most advanced agrarian societies, education was not universally available but restricted to the dominant classes in order to prepare its members for political, religious and military roles, rather than for economically productive ones.

Variations between the different types of pre-modern society also relate to beliefs about the meaning of work, although, as in the case of the division of labour, the multiplicity of meanings attached to work in such societies are revealed to be of minor social significance by the radically new and
elevated meaning of work occasioned by the onset of industrial capitalism. In pre-industrial societies labour was typically unfree to a greater or lesser extent in the form of slavery, serfdom and bonded service, and persisted with the growth of industrial capitalism in Britain, America and elsewhere (Corrigan, 1977). For example, female bonded farm labour in south-east Scotland declined but did not end completely until the 1930s (Robertson, 1990). It is unsurprising therefore that useful work tended not to be highly valued as an economic activity, despite its indispensability for the survival of everyone. Hence, it has been shown that in pre-modern societies as different as ancient Greece and medieval Europe, work was regarded negatively, as a necessary evil or as an expiation of sins committed by others in the past (Applebaum, 1992; Tilgher, 1977 [1930]). Moreover, even such vital activities as farming and craft work received only limited approval from dominant political and religious leaders because, although they were conducive to an independent livelihood and produced goods and services for the parasitic ruling class, they detracted from the ability to engage in politics or spiritual contemplation. Consequently, physical labour, however essential or skilled, did not enjoy the wealth, power and therefore status of non-manual work, such as owning (land and people), governing or praying. It was also considered ceremonially unclean and therefore to be avoided at all costs (Veblen, 1970 [1899]).

The shame associated with certain kinds of work for particular social groups is not of course unique to pre-modern societies. The disrepute that attaches to the performance of certain kinds of work in industrial capitalist societies, particularly when it is conventionally undertaken by marginal groups, is due to a range of factors. Arguably, among the most important are the historical persistence of the moral indignity of manual work, namely cultural lag (Veblen, 1970 [1899]), a labour market in which the supply of unskilled manual workers exceeds the demand (Fevre, 1992), the gendering of jobs which discourages women from entering male work cultures and vice versa (Hakim, 1996), and the operation of a widely accepted social hierarchy, characteristic of modern occupational structures and most work organizations, that assigns zero prestige at best to jobs at the bottom of the pyramid (Rothman, 1998).

In the transition to industrial capitalism in Britain and elsewhere, before wage labour became the norm for the vast majority, wage work in agriculture was common but it was typically irregular, and was merely one of a number of economic activities upon which people depended for their survival. For example, in addition to seasonal wage labour, workers could obtain a supply of food via the cultivation of a small parcel of land, make and sell clothes, plus hunting and gathering (Malcomson, 1988). Whatever the combination of different forms of work, the family remained the basic productive unit in the sense that all members contributed to its economic survival. This was a pattern which persisted during the rise of industrial capitalism (Anderson, 1971). Thus, it was not until the full development of industrial capitalism that a marked contrast
between work in this new type of society and work in all pre-modern societies became apparent.

**Work in industrial capitalist societies**

Consideration of the many models of evolutionary change shows that there is near universal consensus regarding the social significance of the rise of industrial capitalism, namely that it transformed the life and work of everyone. Hence the tendency to focus on the contrast between this new type of society and all types of traditional rural societies and the plethora of dichotomies to summarize the differences, for example, community and association (Tönnies). In the heyday of evolutionary theory around 100 years ago, an exception was Veblen, whose model emphasized the handicraft era by virtue of its importance in the establishment of a competitive market. Yet Veblen also acknowledged that capitalist industrialization involved a radical departure from the past, the productiveness of which impressed him but the social costs did not, and in this respect he has more in common with Marx than Weber (Edgell, 1975, 2001).

The term ‘Industrial Revolution’ is invariably used to convey the significance of this transformation, one that centres on the nature of work above all else. Such was the scale and intensity of this social change that it is widely thought to have prompted the rise of sociology as a distinct discipline (e.g., Giddens, 1971). Notwithstanding the ongoing and possibly never-to-be-resolved debate about whether it was economic factors which changed ideas about work (Marx’s view) or ideas about work which changed economic life (Weber’s view), or a mixture of both (Veblen’s view), what is certain is that work was transformed by the rise of industrial capitalism. What is also agreed is that the process of capitalist industrialization started in England towards the end of the eighteenth century, developed soon after in America, France and Germany, and subsequently the rest of the world to the point where it is now a global phenomenon in the sense that goods and services are made from materials sourced from many parts of the world, and sold around the world.

The first part of the term ‘industrial capitalism’ refers to the use of inanimate energy sources such as electricity, gas or nuclear power, and the consequent reorganization of production involving machine technology, which results in the establishment of large-scale specialized workplaces such as factories and the increased time synchronization of labour and technology in an economy based primarily on manufacturing rather than agriculture. ‘Capitalism’ refers to a profit-oriented system based on the private ownership of production, on an individual/family or corporate basis, that operates in a competitive market system in which the owners of capital employ free wage labour on a monetary basis. The apparent clarity of these definitions does not imply, in the case of the word ‘industrial’, any suggestion of technological determinism and, in the case of the word ‘capitalist’, any suggestion of admiration or antagonism. However,
the use of the two words in combination does imply that industrialism and capitalism are inextricably linked without giving theoretical priority to either.

An illustration of the interconnectedness of the industrial and capitalist dimensions of modern societies is afforded by consideration of the experience of workers. The spatial separation of home from work, initiated by the creation of specialist work sites following the introduction of inanimate energy sources to power machine technology, represents the first major change from what had been the norm in all pre-industrial societies, the unity of home and work. In a capitalist system in which making a profit is the priority, workers are recruited on the basis of potential productiveness rather than parentage. Hence the move from working and living at home in a rural community to working away from home in an urban area meant being treated as a cost of production in a large-scale organization and interacting with people to whom one was not related or even knew personally prior to working in the same workplace. In other words, the industrial (factory work) and capitalist (labour treated as a commodity) aspects of work reinforce each other, thereby accentuating the impersonality of the new work situation and the contrast between this and family relationships.

The characterization of work in industrial capitalism presented below applies to a greater or lesser extent to both the early organizational structure in which individuals, often members of the same family, owned and managed one or a relatively small number of local productive units, and the more recent bureaucratic form in which numerous shareholders, individually or institutionally, own but tend to employ others to manage a large number of productive units in many countries. Table 1.2 presents in summary form the ten main contrasts between work in pre-industrial and industrial societies. It is not intended to be exhaustive or to imply that some features are more significant.

### Table 1.2 Work in pre-industrial society compared with work in industrial capitalist societies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key features</th>
<th>Work in pre-industrial society</th>
<th>Work in industrial capitalist society</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Production system</td>
<td>Hand tools/water/human/animal energy</td>
<td>Machine tools/inanimate energy (coal, gas, oil, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Unit of production</td>
<td>Family/household</td>
<td>Individual adults/large-scale organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Division of labour</td>
<td>Rudimentary/low degree of differentiation</td>
<td>Complex/high degree of differentiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Time</td>
<td>Irregular/seasonal</td>
<td>Regular/permanent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Education and recruitment</td>
<td>Minimal/generalized/Particularistic/family</td>
<td>Extensive/specialized/Universalistic/individual adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Economic system</td>
<td>Traditional/non-market</td>
<td>Rational/market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Meaning of work</td>
<td>Necessary evil</td>
<td>Work as a virtue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Purpose of work</td>
<td>Livelihood/subsistence/short-term profit</td>
<td>Maximum reward/income/long-term profit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Payment</td>
<td>In kind/cash</td>
<td>Wages/salaries/profits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Embeddedness of work</td>
<td>Embedded in non-economic institutions</td>
<td>Separate from other institutions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
than others. It is, however, intended to clarify the issues, albeit at the risk of exaggerating the discontinuities which are often less marked in practice than in theory. For example, it is problematic how ‘free’ labour is under industrial capitalism, hence the use of the term ‘wages-slavery’ by Marx and Engels (1962 [1845]: 467, 513), and the persistence of physical and economic coercion in global capitalism today (Bales, 2000).

Main features of work in industrial capitalist societies

(1) Production system

The re-organization of work started with the introduction of new sources of inanimate energy to drive machinery, replacing water or wind power and human or animal muscle power. The key innovation was arguably the invention of the condensing steam engine to power cotton machinery in 1785 (Smelser, 1972 [1959]). The steam engine not only revolutionized industry, but also transportation and mining, and led to a huge increase in production. For example, output increased by over 300 per cent when power looms replaced handlooms in the British textile industry during the early nineteenth century (Berg, 1994). The increased scale of the power sources and the complexity of the machines meant that a large amount of capital was required to finance production and work was moved out of the home and into factories, which in turn had profound implications for workers. In contrast to pre-industrial production, in which ‘the workman makes use of a tool’, in the new factory-based system of production under the control of the capitalist, ‘the machine makes use of him … we have a lifeless mechanism independent of the workman, who becomes its mere living appendage’ (Marx, 1970 [1887]: 422). Also, the unrelenting uniformity of machinery that requires limited skills ‘deprives the work of all interest’ (ibid.: 423). Marx used the term ‘alienation’ to describe the increasing estrangement and powerlessness of wage labour when confronted by the power of capital (Marx, 1970 [1959]: 108), an issue that will be considered in the next chapter.

The deleterious impact of the introduction of the factory system on workers led them to contest the introduction of machinery, which threatened their livelihood and relatively independent way of life. Opposition often took the form of attacking in vain the machines (Luddism), which from the standpoint of displaced workers ‘symbolized the encroachment of the factory system’ (Thompson, 1970: 599). The Luddites were depicted as being irrational, whereas the new technology was considered the epitome of rationality (Grint and Woolgar, 1997). Wherever industrial capitalism developed, workers organized themselves into trade unions and political parties in an attempt to temper the most harmful effects of the new system of production or even to overthrow it.
(2) Unit of production

The change from the household as the productive unit in which family and non-family members lived and worked together, pooling resources, and producing food and goods for their own consumption, to the factory and other large-scale specialist units of production, such as offices, in which individuals worked for wages, was gradual. Initially whole families were recruited to work in the factories, with parents effectively subcontracting work to their children. This system had many advantages; it maintained parental authority, facilitated occupational training, and enhanced the family income. Also, in the absence of state welfare, the family was the only resource available to individuals when faced with a crisis, such as sickness or lack of work (Anderson, 1971). So long as these circumstances pertained, families ‘continued to work and live as a unit’ (Kumar, 1988b: 157). Most importantly from the standpoint of capital, the move from household to factory production removed control over the work process and the product from the worker and enabled capitalists and their managers to supervise and discipline workers more easily, thereby reducing the costs of production (Marglin, 1980).

The increased control of workers by employers, facilitated by the introduction of the factory, was reinforced as alternative sources of income disappeared and non-family sources of labour and non-family relationships became more significant. Consequently, individuals became more independent of their family of origin and more dependent on the labour market and hence an employer. Thus over time, ‘[f]amily members, male and female, increasingly come to think of their wages as their own, to be disposed of as they individually see fit’ (Kumar, 1988a: 190). By this stage, the process of individualization was virtually complete in the sense that a person’s identity was no longer tied to family and place, as it was in the pre-industrial situation, but to ‘one’s occupation in the formal economy’ of the industrial capitalist society (ibid.: 190). In effect, the loss of its productive function reduced the role of the family to that of consumption and reproduction; meanwhile, work, in the form of employment in the market economy, increased in importance as it became the sole or major source of income.

(3) Division of labour

The advent of capitalist industrialization caused a decline in a range of pre-modern types of work, especially those connected to agriculture, such as blacksmiths and basket-makers, a large proportion of whom were self-employed, and created a vast number of new types of industrial work. Machines were designed, built, installed, supplied with energy and raw material, operated, maintained, and supervised by different types of worker who, following the separation of conception and execution, were divided by education (e.g., professional and elementary) and skill categories (e.g., skilled, semi-skilled, and
unskilled). New professional specializations were created, notably those based on the application of scientific and technical knowledge such as mechanical engineering, and a mass of factory workers, consisting of ‘individuals of both sexes and of all ages’, were organized with ‘barrack discipline’ and divided hierarchically ‘into operatives and overlookers, into private soldiers and sergeants of an industrial army’ (Marx, 1970 [1887]: 423–4). Weber concurred with Marx that ‘military discipline is the ideal model for the modern capitalist factory’, but unlike Marx, he seemed to admire its rationality and approved of ‘the American system of “scientific management”’, or Taylorism as it is also known (Weber, 1964 [1947]: 261). This aspect of work in industrial capitalism will be considered more fully in Chapter 3.

The expansion of the factory system and the related increase in production led to an improvement in the means of transportation and communication, and an increase in the number of people employed in new industries such as canals, railways, gas, post and telegraphy. The consequent change in the occupational structure can be illustrated with reference to the shift in employment from primary sector work which dominated pre-industrial societies (e.g., farming and fishing) to secondary sector work (e.g., mills and factories) and tertiary sector work (e.g., education and communication) which together dominate industrial capitalist societies. For example, in 1840, nearly 70 per cent of the American labour force worked in the primary sector and just over 30 per cent in the secondary and tertiary sectors; by 1900, employment in the primary sector had declined to 40 per cent and employment in the other two sectors had risen to 60 per cent (Nolan and Lenski, 1999).

(4) Time

Prior to the rise of industrial capitalism, the working year was interspersed with a generous number of religious and secular holidays, the working day varied from long days in the summer to short ones in the winter, and the pace of work ranged from periods of intensity during harvest time to a more relaxed tempo once a specific activity had been completed (Kumar, 1988b; Schor, 1993; Thompson, 1967). This was because work tended to be task-oriented and influenced by the seasons. At the risk of romanticizing the past, before industrial capitalism, work was intermittent and irregular, and involved a semblance of time freedom in that a person could decide when to start and stop work, and how hard to work. Work discipline, such as it was, tended to be minimal other than that imposed by the workers’ definition of their needs and the weather (Thompson, 1970).

The rise of the factory with its ubiquitous clock was a revolutionary event that came to dominate the lives of wage workers. Industrial work involved fewer holidays, much longer hours, and timed labour, with the factory bell demarcating the relatively unstructured non-work time from the highly structured and supervised work time in which a higher tempo than previously
experienced was set by the technology owned by the employers on whom employees were dependent for work. Schor (1993) has estimated that hours worked nearly doubled between 1600 and 1850 in Britain, from under 40 hours a week to over 70; it took around 100 years of trade union and political pressure to reduce the working week back to 40 hours.

Thus, work and life ceased to be task-oriented and characterized by irregularity and independence, and became the epitome of regularity and dependence, measured with increasing precision in hours, minutes and eventually even seconds. The stricter division between life and work and the increased synchronization of labour within the factory raised time-consciousness, provoked resistance, including the attempt to retain the tradition of the non-working ‘Saint Monday’ that was widespread in many pre-industrial work cultures in Europe and America (Reid, 1976; Thompson, 1967).

The centrality of time to work in industrial capitalism has led some to argue that the time piece rather than the steam engine symbolizes this era. For example, Mumford (1934) has argued that the increased scale of industrial production put a premium on the synchronization of people and technical processes and that this was achieved via the clock. Similarly, Thompson (1967) has claimed that what was different about work in industrial capitalism was its focus on time rather than tasks and a clearer distinction between work and non-work. Conversely, it has been argued that the distinction between pre-industrial task time and industrial clock time has been exaggerated (Ingold 1995) and that Thompson underestimated the contested and variegated nature of time and work during the transition (Whipp 1987). The advantage of time is that it provides management with a standardized unit with which to co-ordinate the human and non-human elements of production and to measure the contribution of labour, with or without reference to output. Hence the tendency for pay to be based on the amount of time spent at work and the requirement to ‘clock on and off’ accompanied by a schedule of fines or dismissal for repeated lateness. Thus, in industrial capitalism time took on a new and exacting meaning; it was money.

(5) Education and recruitment

The increase in the division of labour with its new work–time discipline occasioned by the development of industrial capitalism, necessitated a marked expansion of compulsory education, which prioritized punctuality and regularity, and specialized training in vocational subjects. The tendency for educational institutions to parallel the expected workplace experiences of their pupils has been called correspondence theory (Bowles and Gintis, 1976). The introduction and expansion of formal education in all industrial societies also led to the growth of examinations and the award of credentials to certify competence for impersonal recruitment to different types of work (Collins, 1979). Weber referred to this as the “rationalization” of education and training and
noted that the process of bureaucratization ‘enhances the importance of the specialist examination’ (1961 [1948]: 240, 241).

During the transition to industrialization, whole families, including young children, were recruited to work in the new urban factories, but over time the introduction of legal restrictions on the employment of children (and women) in factories, combined with state provision of education for all, undermined the kinship basis of factory labour. In Britain, the first Act of Parliament to limit the employment of young children to a 12-hour working day was in 1802 but was restricted to cotton and woollen mills. Later Acts covered other workplaces and raised the age at which children could work, thereby reducing the number of child workers. Public funding of education was provided for the first time in 1833, but a national system of free elementary education up to the age of 10 was not established in England until 1891, and 1902 in the case of secondary education, well after similar reforms in other industrializing countries, such as Germany and France (Hill, 1971). Thus, gradually the recruitment of workers as individuals on the basis of their formal education and qualifications, replaced informal family recruitment and training.

(6) Economic system

The rise of industrial capitalism involved the development of a market economy in which capital, labour, goods and services are exchanged for money free of traditional social obligations and constraints such as restrictions on who could engage in certain economic activities. In other words, the idea and practice of free trade or *laissez-faire*. Most importantly, in industrial capitalism economic relations become separated, formally at least, from non-economic relations, and distinguished by the primacy accorded to the freedom to maximize economic gains by employing free wage labour. In contrast to pre-modern paternalism, employers had no obligations beyond paying the lowest wages possible in the new competitive market system, since to do otherwise risked economic failure, although industrial paternalism limited the more extreme operation of the free (labour) market culture (Joyce, 1982).

From Marx’s perspective, the fundamental capitalist feature is production for sale, and therefore profit, not use, involving the buying and selling of labour power in a market in which money wages are paid on the basis of the time worked and/or the output achieved. Hence, for Marx, industrial capitalism is distinguished by its class dynamic which is rooted in the inevitable conflict of economic interests between the owners of capital and those they employ, namely exploited and oppressed propertyless free wage labourers. Separated from direct access to the means of subsistence, wage labour is compelled in a competitive market system to sell their labour power in exchange for wages, which in turn are exchanged for the goods and services essential to maintain life. Thus, social relations under capitalism are reduced to market values expressed in monetary terms and, as a consequence of this commodity status,
workers are ‘exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all fluctuations of the market’ (Marx and Engels, n.d. [1848]: 60).

Weber agreed with Marx that industrial capitalism involved the development of a class system in which both capital and labour are freed from all restrictions, but emphasized the rationality of modern capitalism: ‘capitalism is identical with the pursuit of profit, and forever renewed profit, by means of continuous, rational, capitalistic enterprise’ (Weber, 1976 [1930]: 17). In practical terms, this meant making a calculation about the most efficient means to achieve certain goals, rather than selecting means with reference to historical tradition, namely on the basis of how things were undertaken in the past. This wholly new approach to work was exemplified by the rational principles of bureaucratic organization and book-keeping adopted by capitalist enterprises.

Although Marx focused on exploitation and Weber on rationality, both agreed that in industrial capitalism, waged work (i.e., employment) is both separate and different from non-work, especially family life. Where previously the two spheres had been united in the form of the household economy, under industrial capitalism, the commodified and rational character of work is the opposite of the non-commodified and non-rational character of relationships beyond employment.

(7) Meaning of work

According to Weber, the rationality of economic action in industrial capitalist society required dispensing with the traditional attitude that work was at best something to be avoided and at worst a necessary evil, and replacing it with a positive evaluation as an activity that was considered virtuous. One of the main sources of this new rational attitude to work, which revolutionized economic and social life, was to be found in Protestantism, or more precisely in the symmetry between certain Calvinist beliefs, notably the calling of working hard to make money and the economic spirit of modern capitalism. Suitably imbued with the ethics of Protestantism, individuals work to please God and to demonstrate their worth to themselves and members of their group. Meanwhile, the asceticism of their religious beliefs discouraged people from spending their earnings wastefully. The unintended consequence of these religious prescriptions was accumulation rather than dissipation: ‘When the limitation of consumption is combined with this release of acquisitive activity, the inevitable practical result is obvious: accumulation of capital through ascetic compulsion to save’ (Weber, 1976 [1930]: 172).

Work as a religious duty was exported to America by the Puritan settlers and a range of homilies emerged to sum up the modern spirit of capitalism and to inspire entrepreneurs and workers alike, for instance, ‘time is money’, and others that praised ‘frugality’ and ‘punctuality’, and deplored ‘idleness’ (ibid.; 48, 49). Ascetic Protestantism involved a major change in the meaning of work; it meant a reversal of the traditional attitude of doing no more than is
necessary, to one in which the creation of wealth via unrelenting hard work became the main object in life. What had started as a peculiarly Protestant attitude to work became secularized over time largely because this new conception of work was so ‘well suited’ to the emergent capitalist system in terms of encouraging workers to be diligent and employers to be profit-oriented, and over time ‘it no longer needs the support of any religious forces’ (ibid.: 72). Thus the Protestant work ethic became simply the work ethic, promulgated by non-religious institutions such as governments, business corporations and schools, although in the process the ascetic dimension has arguably declined as consumption has increased (Beder, 2000).

An alternative perspective on the change in the meaning of work in industrial capitalism is provided by Marx, who argued that when workers are separated from the means of production and constrained to enter into a subordinate relationship to capital, they forfeit the ability to act creatively through work and instead become alienated since the competitive necessity to maximize profit requires that ‘the labourer exists for the process of production, and not the process of production for the labourer’ (1970 [1887]: 490). Thus, the meaning of work for Marx cannot be understood without reference to the antagonistic and unequal class relationship that lies at the centre of the labour process of industrial capitalism.

(8) Purpose of work

In pre-modern societies, the main purpose of economic activities that we call work was to provide the essential goods and services necessary for the survival of the group or household. For the vast majority, therefore, work was a matter of making a living. This changed dramatically with the rise of the capitalistic organization of work, the main purpose of which became ‘the pursuit of profit and forever renewed profit, by means of continuous, rational, capitalistic enterprise’, for to do otherwise was to risk economic failure (Weber 1976 [1930]: 17). In other words, making things became subordinated to making a profit. If there was no profit to be obtained, things would not be made, however much people needed them.

On an individual level, the new idea of the relentless pursuit of profit by all work organizations, although sanctified by religion in the early years, was not embraced by everyone caught up in the rise of industrial capitalism. The privileged few who owned and controlled the business enterprises clearly had an interest in the accumulation of profit and therefore supported and promulgated the idea that hard work was not only a necessity that resulted in economic success, but morally worthwhile. However, for those recruited to work in the more routine and boring jobs for far smaller economic rewards, work remained more of a necessary evil than a virtuous activity in its own right. This kind of instrumental orientation to work, one that puts a premium on pay and security rather than on intrinsic interest and satisfaction, can still be found
among manual workers (Goldthorpe et al., 1969). Finally, there is the case of professional workers who are considered to be motivated primarily by a commitment to provide a public service on the basis of their specialist knowledge, such as vocationally inspired health or education professionals. However, it has also been argued that the relatively high prestige and autonomy of certain professions, for example law, enable their members to act as much for their own benefit as they do for others. In other words, professional work can involve both a selfish orientation as well as a selfless one (MacDonald, 1995).

(9) Payment

In pre-modern societies, economic activities such as farming and handicraft work were organized on a small scale and were concerned primarily with ‘earning a livelihood rather than with a view to profits on investment’ (Veblen, 1975 [1904]: 24). For the vast majority, this meant subsistence, involving a mixture of payments in kind and in cash. However, once workers had been separated from the means of production, their only option was to seek work for wages as an employee.

In the early phase of industrialization in England, the payment of wages in kind rather than cash, known as the truck system, persisted until an efficient monetary system had been established. It was outlawed effectively following a series of Truck Acts in the nineteenth century (Hilton, 1960). It had been virtually universal in pre-modern England and took many forms; sometimes the workers were paid in the goods they had produced, in coupons that were exchangeable only in shops owned by the employer, or a mixture of the two. Whatever form it took, the truck system was highly exploitative since it tended to lower wages via either the falsification of weights and measures, and/or high charges for materials and goods. Consequently, it was resented by workers, and even some employers, who regarded it as inflexible since it tied some workers to their employers through debt (ibid.). The truck system was a kind of transitional payment system between a predominantly payment in kind subsistence system, characteristic of pre-industrial capitalism, and a money payment system in which wages are the sole or main source of income and therefore sustenance.

As the diversity of life-maintaining forms of work shrank, viable alternatives to wage labour declined markedly, although they did not disappear totally (Pahl, 1984). By the late nineteenth century, the transformation from a complex mixture of different forms of task work, common rights and self-provisioning, typical of pre-modern England (Malcomson, 1988), to a system characterized by regular, full-time employment in one job was well advanced (Kumar, 1988b). However, this change was a protracted one in that pre-modern forms of work persisted throughout the nineteenth century in Britain, especially in London where the seasonality of production, for example in high-value consumption goods, dock work and the building trade, favoured irregular casual employment (Stedman Jones, 1984).
The historical transformation of work

The gradual erosion of a culture characterized by multiple sources of income and sustenance to one way of making a living meant that to be without employment meant to be out of work, and by the 1880s in Britain the now familiar terms ‘unemployed’ and ‘unemployment’ had entered public discourse (Burnett, 1994). The equation work equals employment is therefore only meaningful in a society, namely an industrial capitalist one, in which a wage via formal paid employment is effectively the only way of securing the means to obtain the goods and services necessary to sustain life.

Embeddedness of work

The cumulative effect of all these radical changes to the nature and organization of work associated with capitalist industrialization was that work ceased to be embedded in non-economic social institutions, such as the family and became a separate, distinct institution in terms of space, time and culture. Thus it has been noted that the spatial separation of work from family also involved the differentiation of work time from non-work time, and a set of impersonal work relations which contrasted with the affective bonds of family life, although the extent to which work was embedded in social relations in pre-modern society and the extent to which this pattern has been reversed since is a matter of some debate (Granovetter, 1985).

To use more technical language, behaviour within the two realms of home and work in industrial capitalist societies are guided by particularism and universalism respectively. In other words, participation in the modern world of work is no longer linked directly to family life in the sense that workers are typically trained, recruited, employed and dismissed by rational organizations in which they are not given preferential treatment. Hence neither gaining qualifications, nor obtaining, retaining or progressing at work on the basis of a family connection or close friendship are regarded as fair or appropriate since it would compromise the rationality of the work system and risk the charge of cronyism. In theory, the equal treatment of all is the rule in a modern economy and is backed up by the force of law. However, universalistic norms are so well established (i.e., institutionalized) and accepted (i.e., internalized) that individuals do not expect to be treated in a preferential way in any non-family structure, for instance, promoted on the basis of kinship or friendship ties.

This model of the contrast between the particularism of family life and the universalism of work organizations associated with the rise of industrial capitalism is often referred to as structural differentiation and in many respects it is an idealized version of the two spheres (Smelser, 1972 [1959]). In practice, the autonomy of work and family is relative rather than absolute. This is mainly because although the direct influence of family membership on the attainment of an occupational position has been disconnected, except where the inheritance of capital is concerned as in family businesses, family background continues to have an indirect influence via the purchasing of educational
privilege, the acquisition of cultural capital, and the operation of social networks (Scott, 1991). Even today therefore, getting a job and getting on at work may depend as much on personal ties at the club or pub than impersonal factors such as formal qualifications. Moreover, research on the multiplicity of ways in which home and work intersect in modern societies, particularly for those who work at and/or from home, suggests that work has not been separated totally from home (e.g., Allen and Wolkowitz, 1987; Edgell, 1980).

Thus although it is difficult to deny the dislocation caused by capitalist industrialization to family and work life, the thesis that it occasioned the separation of home from work tends to exaggerate the degree to which social life became segmented. This is especially the case for the early stages of the separation of the two spheres when recruitment to the new urban factories persisted on a kinship basis, either directly as in the case of the recruitment of family members, or indirectly as in the case of recommending relatives to prospective employers (Anderson, 1971). In due course, however, the increasing reliance on the wages from work as an employee contributed to the enhanced economic and social significance of paid work outside the home and the marginalization of all other kinds of work, especially unpaid work inside the home.

**Capitalist industrialization and the primacy of work**

The primacy of work over all other social activities in industrial capitalist societies is not difficult to fathom. Under industrial capitalism, paid work is effectively the only way to acquire sufficient income to be able to satisfy needs (e.g., food, shelter, warmth) and wants (e.g., consumer durables such as a car, television, etc). Work is the major influence on where you live, how you live, and how long you live. Consideration of the extent to which paid work shapes life led Beck to claim that: ‘The importance that work has acquired in industrial society has no parallels in history’ (1992: 139). Yet, the primacy of work goes beyond mere survival and how well one lives. For the vast majority of people in industrial capitalist societies, their whole lives are organized with reference to work; they spend their early years in education in order to be able to obtain work, the next 40 or so years in work, and their last years recovering from work: ‘Even “old age” is defined by non-occupation. Old age begins where the world of work discharges people’ (ibid.: 139). While in work, most waking hours are spent getting to and from work, doing work, and thinking about work. It is unsurprising therefore that paid work has such a fundamental impact on people’s lives, that it plays a vital role in the formation of an identity (Jahoda, 1982). This is readily apparent from studies of people in work (Bain, 2005) and of those without work, especially the unemployed who typically report that they experience economic deprivation, disorientation, shame, and a ‘loss of identity’ (Marsden, 1982: 155). It is also clear from those who have won a large sum of money, yet continue to undertake paid work (Grandon,
2008). This suggests that paid work is not just about paying the bills (i.e., extrinsic rewards), it is also about a sense of satisfaction (i.e., intrinsic rewards). Thus the significance of paid work in industrial capitalism transcends the basic need for economic survival, it gives meaning to life and is therefore a crucial element in identity formation.

This view has not gone unchallenged. It has been argued that social changes such as deindustrialization and globalization have undermined the stability of work patterns associated with the development of capitalist industrialization, and that, as a consequence, paid work is no longer a key source of meaning and identity for most people (Offe, 1985). The idea of a fixed identity achieved through a life-long involvement in work is considered redundant, replaced by a fragmented and more flexible range of identities, rooted in rapidly changing patterns of consumption (Bauman, 1998). Research is beginning to address the decline in the significance of work thesis and this suggests that for both standard (permanent full-time) and non-standard (temporary part-time) workers, work has retained its life-shaping and identity-forming significance (Doherty, 2009). Thus, despite the alleged increase in job insecurity, work has arguably not become any less important as the primary means of satisfying economic and social needs for most people.

Crises and industrial capitalism

Although the terminology varies from ‘contradictions’ to ‘irrationalities’ and ‘derangements’, the analyses of industrial capitalism by classical social theorists such as Marx, Weber and Veblen, all identified sources of instability; respectively overproduction, overspeculation and overcapitalization, that led invariably to recurrent economic crises. However, their accounts of the development of industrial capitalism diverged when it came to assessing the consequences of frequent crises.

According to Marx, industrial capitalism is inherently unstable due to endemic fluctuations in the business cycle that cause overproduction from time to time, leading to lower prices, less profits and eventually reduced output and hence economic failure of some companies; ‘The life of modern industry becomes a series of periods of moderate activity, prosperity, over-production, crisis and stagnation’ (Marx, 1970 [1887]: 453). Crises for Marx were ‘the most evident manifestation of the internal “contradictions” of the capitalist system’ (Giddens, 1971: 54) in that they reflected the exploitation of workers and their consequent lack of purchasing power. The silver lining for Marx was the possibility that capitalist crises could foster revolutionary class consciousness and lead, hopefully, to its overthrow. For Weber, capitalist crises were also inevitable due to the tendency for ‘overspeculation’ (Weber, 2003 [1927]: 290), and reflected the increasing rationalization of the economic system. However, they would not necessarily result in total collapse, rather a series of
adjustments before expansion could restart and he surmised that ‘capitalism could endure indefinitely as an economic system’ (Collins, 1992: 104). Veblen also argued that capitalist crises were unavoidable on the grounds that the incessant quest for profit in an expansionary phase encouraged ‘overcapitalization’ based on the extensive use of credit by businesses (1964 [1923]: 221; see also Veblen, 1975 [1904]). In Veblen’s view, the intermittent crises of capitalist industrialization were symptomatic of the conflict between business oriented to maximizing profit and industry concerned with maximizing production, but Veblen, in marked contrast to Marx, hesitated to predict the end of capitalism (Edgell, 2001).

In all three cases, the root of the problem of the recurrent economic crises of capitalist industrialization seems to be the competitive imperative for ever increasing profit (institutionalized greed), which leads to overconfidence and eventually to a mild (recession) or severe (depression) decline in production, resulting in bankruptcy for businesses, and a wage freeze, wage cuts, and/or unemployment for workers. The first major industrial capitalist depression was in Britain in 1793, it extended to all branches of industry and trade, and its impact was felt in other societies that were either trading partners and/or also industrializing (Mitchell, 1970 [1913]), unlike later economic crises which tended to develop an increasingly global character as industrial capitalism spread around the world. The tendency for industrial capitalism to generate periodic economic crises of varying depth and length, often provokes contemporary governments to intervene along Keynesian lines to limit their severity and therefore impact, such as by expanding public expenditure to stimulate demand, and to restore confidence in the system, thereby forestalling the possibility of what Habermas (1973) has called ‘a legitimation crisis’.

In addition to the main features of work in industrial capitalist societies discussed thus far, at the forefront of the transformation of work associated with capitalist industrialization were technological and organizational change, trade unions, and the role of women; these topics therefore warrant further elucidation.

**Technological and organizational change**

The dominant image of work in industrial capitalist society is of a large number of people working together using machinery driven by inanimate sources of power; in short, organizations and technology. There is some controversy regarding which came first: the new organizational forms or the new technologies (Marglin, 1980), but this debate is of less importance than the tendency for these two features of modern work environments to be associated inextricably with the transformation of work during capitalist industrialization. The interconnectedness of technology and organization is indicated by consideration of what these terms refer to. At first sight, the concept of technology
conjures up a picture of machines, but this is a very narrow understanding of the term since all technology has a social dimension. First, new technologies do not just appear, they are shaped by social forces, such as interests (MacKenzie and Wajcman, 1999), and, second, the technology has to be operated and deployed to fulfil its productive capacity, otherwise it is useless (Grint and Woolgar, 1997). It is difficult therefore to separate out the non-human from the human, the artefact from the social conditions out of which it emerged and was implemented.

Definitions of technology range from the narrow, as tools or machines, to the broad, as production systems including the organizational context of machinery (Clark et al., 1990). There are advantages and disadvantages of each definition. A narrow definition allows a researcher to explore the possible independent influence of technology on work but runs the risk of neglecting the social processes that gave rise to its introduction and implementation. Conversely, a broad definition acknowledges that technology involves more than just machinery, but makes it difficult to appraise the impact of technology on work separate from other possible independent variables such as organizational factors. In order to be able to consider the causal significance and interconnectedness of technology, a narrow rather than a broad definition is preferred.

From a historical perspective, it has been suggested by Coombs (1985) that, since the advent of the Industrial Revolution, three overlapping phases of technological change have occurred; primary, secondary and tertiary mechanization. Primary mechanization refers to the introduction of steam-powered machinery during the nineteenth century to transform raw materials into products. Secondary mechanization emerged at the end of the nineteenth century and involved the use of electricity to drive machinery, which enabled the transfer of materials between machines that was crucial for the development of continuous flow and assembly-line production. Tertiary mechanization in the form of electronics-based computing and information technologies dates from the second half of the twentieth century and facilitates the co-ordination and control of production. Coombs emphasizes that his discussion of these three technological phases in the evolution of production processes are ‘at a very high level of abstraction and generality’ (1985: 156), but he provides some empirical data from the UK and the USA to support his historical typology, particularly the second and third phases.

From a similar historical perspective, namely, since the advent of capitalist industrialization, organizational changes may be reduced to a comparable three-stage typology. Following Weber’s famous distinction between pre-bureaucratic (traditional and charismatic authority) and rational bureaucratic authority (1964 [1947]), and by adding the category post-bureaucratic authority (Heckscher, 1994), a three-phase historical typology of organizational change may be constructed. Pre-bureaucratic organizations are characterized by the personal authority of the owner-manager by virtue of their
traditional and/or charismatic sources of legitimation; in a bureaucracy, authority is impersonal and based on rational criteria with actions governed by rules, and positions in the hierarchy are achieved on merit via qualifications and experience; and in a post-bureaucratic organization, authority is decentralized and democratized in a flattened hierarchy characterized by a culture of empowerment and consensual dialogue.

Table 1.3 shows that, considered together, these two historical typologies of technical and organizational change correspond in that primary mechanization tended to coincide with the pre-bureaucratic organizational form, secondary mechanization with bureaucratic, and tertiary mechanization with post-bureaucratic. This is a highly oversimplified model of overlapping phases but the parallels are indicative of the interconnectedness of technological and organizational change.

The rise of trade unions

Resistance by workers to exploitation and oppression was not unknown in pre-modern societies, but tended to be sporadic, such as the Peasant Revolt of 1381 in feudal England and the San Domingo slave revolution of 1797. It is only in industrial capitalist societies that workers have established permanent organizations to resist exploitation and improve their pay and conditions of work. Although there are parallels between pre-modern associations of workers, namely guilds, and their modern equivalent, trade unions, in terms of their concern for the wages and welfare of their members, and their sense of collectivism, there are also some contrasts in that guilds were composed of employers and employees, and limited to skilled crafts (Farr, 2000).

At the onset of capitalist industrialization, employers were all-powerful, economically, legally and politically, whereas individual workers were powerless. In order to redress this marked imbalance of power, workers combined together to form their own organizations to represent their interests and limit the power of employers to hire and fire, cut wages, lengthen working hours,
and generally improve the dangerous physical conditions of work. Typically, employers responded to the emerging challenge to their power by refusing to recognize, and hence negotiate with, trade unions, and enlisted the support of the state in the form of the police, the courts, and sometimes the army, to repress workers and their attempts to organize opposition to the unlimited power of ‘tyrannical’ employers (Kirk, 1994: 63). During the first half of the nineteenth century in Britain and America, union activity was subject to the law of conspiracy, which along with a lack of financial support, hindered the effectiveness of unions. In the absence of legitimate means to express their grievances, conflict between employees and employers during the rise of capitalist industrialization tended to become violent, often resulting in the destruction of machinery, and even the death of workers, famously the machine-breaking Luddites in the new urban industrial centres in England between 1811 and 1812 and the Peterloo Massacre of 1819 in Manchester (Reid, 2005). Trade union activists in this formative period of unionization risked being blacklisted, imprisoned, deported, or executed.

It was not until the mid to late nineteenth century, following considerable collective agitation, that trade unions gained legality and national trade union confederations were founded in Britain in 1868 and in America in 1886 (van der Linden, 2003). Repression gave way gradually to recognition; the key turning points in Britain were a series of Acts in the 1870s which excluded unions from the threat of the conspiracy laws and strengthened their legal position, but much later in America where workers and their unions did not achieve full legal recognition until two Acts in the 1930s which, among other things, protected workers’ rights to organize and bargain with employers (Booth, 1995). On the basis of their more secure legal position and in the context of full employment during the economic expansion of the 1950s, union membership increased and relatively peaceful collective bargaining ensued, in contrast to the more confrontational worker and employer relationship characteristic of the previous century. In short, conflict had been institutionalized in that the rules of the contest between capital and labour had been agreed.

However, union rights are never totally secure in a capitalist society. As unions grew in strength numerically and politically during the last century, employers and political parties representing their interests sought to limit their power. Anti-union legislation was enacted in America (e.g., The Taft-Hartley Act 1947) and Britain (e.g., The Employment Act 1980), which outlawed the sympathy strike and weakened the ability of trade unions to organize successfully during a dispute with employers (MacInnes, 1987; Sweet and Meiksins, 2008). During the second half of the twentieth century union membership declined in America, Britain, and many other societies, until stabilizing towards the end of the century (Fairbrother and Yates, 2003). Currently unions face the problem of global corporations who relocate production to countries where they can employ non-union workers at lower wages (Beynon, 2003). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, trade
unions are following the example of corporations by seeking to act more globally to defend their members' interests.

**Women and work in the development of industrial capitalism**

The impact of capitalist industrialization on women, particularly the transfer of paid work out of the home, has been the subject of considerable debate. The majority view, or pessimistic perspective (e.g., Thomas, 1988), is that the rise of industrial capitalism had a negative impact on the work prospects of women (e.g., Oakley, 1976; Walby, 1986). The minority view, or optimistic perspective, argues the reverse (e.g., Goode, 1970; Shorter, 1976). The important study by Pinchbeck (1969 [1930]) has been credited with being the precursor of the optimistic viewpoint by virtue of her judgement that over the long term the Industrial Revolution benefited women because it increased their employment opportunities, which in turn contributed to their economic independence (Richards, 1974). However, it has also been noted that Pinchbeck's account was not wholly unambiguous (Bradley, 1989), and in this sense it is a forerunner of the suggestion that the impact of industrialization was mixed rather than simply beneficial or detrimental to women (Hudson and Lee, 1990). This debate affords many opportunities for disagreement, such as the issue of the time frame under consideration, hence the focus will be on Britain with reference to both the initial and longer-term impact of industrial capitalism on women. Although these phases overlap, this distinction offers a way out of the debate between the 'pessimists' and the 'optimists'.

**Initial phase circa 1800–1840s**

Historical research on the factors associated with female employment suggests that there are several grounds for arguing that work opportunities for women expanded during the rise of industrial capitalism:

- the continuity of female labour in the transition to factory work (Scott and Tilly, 1975);
- the female input in trade unions and the co-operative movement (Lewenhak, 1980);
- demographic forces which created a supply of female labour (Richards, 1974);
- economic expansion and the demand for women workers (Hobsbawm, 1969);
- physical strength ceased to be crucial to operate machinery (Hudson and Lee, 1990);
- the relative cheapness of female labour compared to male (Rendall, 1990);
- male reluctance to enter factories due to loss of independence (Thompson, 1970);
- the perception that female workers were compliant (Pinchbeck, 1969 [1930]);
- machines were designed with female workers in mind, namely their alleged greater manual dexterity (Berg, 1994).
Many of the factors that encouraged the employment of women during the initial phase of capitalist industrialization were mutually reinforcing, such as the tendency to employ female labour on the basis of their presumed docility, dexterity and, above all perhaps, cheapness. Similarly, the forces of supply and demand were complementary in that the greater availability of female labour coincided with increased opportunities for work in the expanding textile factories.

Studies of specific industries such as textiles and metals, confirm that the impact of this combination of factors was conducive to an increase in the employment of women during the early years of capitalist industrialization (Berg, 1988). In the silk industry, which was slower to mechanize than cotton and wool, this gender pattern was repeated and by the middle of the nineteenth century there were at least two women workers for every man, and in areas such as Essex they outnumbered men in the workforce by over four to one (Lown, 1990).

In addition to being in the vanguard of those occupations affected by the initial impact of capitalist industrialization, women continued to work on an irregular, pre-modern basis, at and from home, and such work, especially by married women, was recorded inconsistently in the early censuses (Davies, 1980), or not recorded even in 1851 (Anderson, 1971). There is therefore a strong case for the view that, during the initial phase of industrial capitalism, women not only worked as they had done before when work was organized in the household, but became a prominent part of the waged workforce recruited by the first factory owners. Thus, whatever the actual timing of the capitalist industrialization of production, the absence of any constraints on the employment of women encouraged the employment of the cheapest labour available, which in the short run meant women (and children) rather than men, albeit in the less skilled and lower status work.

Mature phase circa 1850s–1890s

The separation of work from home and the initial increase in the employment opportunities for women created a problem for men in the short term and employers in the long term. It threatened male authority in the home, the supply of healthy male labour, future supplies of labour, and raised the issue of who should care for vulnerable family members such as children. The solution was to exclude women from paid work outside the home and assign them primary responsibility for all things domestic. As a consequence, by the late nineteenth century the economic activity rate for women had declined to 32 per cent and the decline was even more marked for wives; in 1851, one in four married women was employed and by 1901 the proportion had shrunk to one in ten (Hakim, 1980), although the under-reporting of women workers was still an issue during this period. The exclusion of women
from work outside the home was achieved by a combination of factors, including:

- male trade union restrictions on women workers (Hartmann, 1979; Walby, 1986);
- the campaign for a family wage by male workers (Creighton, 1996; Land, 1980);
- legislative restrictions by male parliamentarians (Bradley, 1989; Walby, 1986);
- the introduction of a marriage bar by male employers (Lewenhak, 1980);
- limits on child labour and the introduction of compulsory education (Rendall, 1990);
- the twin ideals of male breadwinner and female domesticity (Hudson and Lee, 1990);
- the large size of the Victorian family (Richards, 1974);
- the decline of the family production unit (Scott and Tilly, 1975);
- lower pay rates for women which discouraged them from working outside the home (Hudson and Lee, 1990);
- changes in business structure which limited the possibility of women inheriting businesses (Hudson and Lee, 1990).

The patriarchal dimension of these factors is unmistakable, less obvious is the class one. Out of economic necessity, working-class women were far more likely to work outside the home than their middle-class counterparts, and as a result were criticized heavily for neglecting their domestic responsibilities (Roberts, 1995). In contrast, there was no economic urgency for middle-class wives to go out to work. In fact they could afford to employ staff to undertake their domestic work, thereby creating employment for a large number of unmarried working-class women (Oakley, 1976). This left the middle-class wife free to engage in voluntary work, which, being unpaid yet time-consuming, demonstrated the economic status of the male head of the household (Veblen, 1970 [1899]). For working-class men this model was not merely a status aspiration, but one of practical necessity to ensure their ability to perform the family breadwinning role (MacRaild and Martin, 2000). Hence, the Victorian ideals of full-time female domesticity and full-time male breadwinner were more likely to be met by the middle class, whereas the majority of women who worked outside the home during the mature phase of capitalist industrialization were working class (Scott and Tilly, 1975) and unmarried (Hudson and Lee, 1990). Thus, the ‘exclusion of women should be seen as a result of the intersection of patriarchal relations and capitalist relations’ although the ‘articulation of these factors varied between industries’ (Walby, 1986: 97).

Considered together, the two phases of capitalist industrialization suggest that in the case of paid work of women, ‘the pattern was one of increase followed by decline’ (Scott and Tilly, 1975: 37). The decline in the proportion of women, especially married women, who worked outside the home during the late nineteenth century, paralleled the rise of women’s work
inside the home, as unpaid housewives or managers of domestic servants. Hence, the attempt to exclude women from paid work does not mean that women ceased to work, rather, it indicates a major change in the meaning of work and the tendency for married women to become dependent economically on their husbands.

The dominant conception of work in industrial capitalism

The term ‘dominant concept of work’ has been used to refer to a distinctive model of work that emerged during the process of capitalist industrialization (Callender, 1985: 50; see also Hakim, 1980; Ransome, 1996). A systematic articulation of this model suggests that once industrial capitalism has become established, the defining features of the dominant conception of work are that it is work that is undertaken outside the home (i.e., industrial), for pay (i.e., capitalist), by adult males on a full-time and uninterrupted basis (i.e., patriarchal), and is allocated individually with reference to impersonal universalistic criteria (i.e., modern). This model is summarized in Table 1.4 along with the possible threats to its dominance.

With the maturation of industrial capitalism, this conception of work became dominant, although the historical process was uneven and as far as the male breadwinner–female homemaker dimension is concerned, it was arguably more dominant culturally than empirically (Janssens, 1997; Pfau-Effinger, 2004). Notwithstanding these caveats, the demise of the family-economy

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Table 1.4 Dominant conception of work in industrial capitalism and threats to its hegemony

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<th>Dominant conception of work</th>
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<td>Monetized market system</td>
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<td>Labour power exchanged for pay</td>
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<td><strong>Industrial</strong></td>
<td><strong>Global post-industrialism</strong></td>
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<td>Outside the home: bureaucratic organizations</td>
<td>Working at/from home: post-bureaucratic organizations</td>
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<td>Contractual regulation</td>
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<td>Fixed hours</td>
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<td><strong>Modern</strong></td>
<td><strong>Traditionalism</strong></td>
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<td>Universalism</td>
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<td>Achievement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specialization</td>
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<td><strong>Patriarchal</strong></td>
<td><strong>Feminism</strong></td>
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<td>Adult male worker</td>
<td>Adult female worker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
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<td>Permanent</td>
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system in which men and women worked together in the household, elevated paid work outside the home as the only kind of work that was considered ‘real’ work, and this was reflected in the official data collected on work (Hakim, 1980). Consequently, any work that did not conform to this dominant conception, such as unpaid housework, was not only excluded from the official statistics of work, but tended to be regarded differently, namely that it was a less important type of work. Since women were the largest social category who deviated from the dominant conception of work yet were over-represented in unpaid domestic work, their economic role was correspondingly under-reported and under-valued (Hakim, 1996). In effect, work became synonymous with employment which with the rise of Fordism became standardized in terms of contract, location and working time.

For those who worked as an employee, the majority of whom were men, a regulatory framework developed covering eventually all aspects of work, namely pay and conditions. If a member of the permanent labour force was out of work, from the late nineteenth century onwards, they were considered to be unemployed and deserving of support, initially by charitable organizations and later the state (Burnett, 1994). However, for those who worked unpaid in the home, the majority of whom were women, there was a complete lack of regulations covering their work; it was, and still is to a large extent, considered a private matter (Oakley, 1976). Moreover, since eligibility for state benefits for the unemployed was related to one’s degree of involvement in work as a form of employment, women typically have found it more difficult than men to claim benefits when unemployed (Dex, 1985). Thus, capitalist industrialization created a gender division of labour; a predominantly male group of adults who worked outside the home for pay on a regular basis, and a predominantly female group of adults who worked inside the home for no pay on a regular basis. The social category the unemployed and the role of full-time housewife are therefore both recent social constructions that emerged in the late nineteenth century in Britain and elsewhere.

The dominance of this conception of work is not a static phenomenon, but is subject to change. Over the past two decades or so, each of the dimensions of the dominant conception of work has come under threat from a variety of trends. First, as far as the capitalist dimension is concerned, co-operatives and other not-for-profit organizations, socialist trade unions, radical social movements all indicate that capitalism remains a contested system. Moreover, not all ‘work’ has been commodified and non-monetized exchange remains significant (Williams, 2002). Second, it has been argued that towards the end of the twentieth century, the industrial dimension was being undermined by globalization associated with the increasing emphasis on all forms of organizational and work flexibility and the destandardization of work (Beck, 1992). Third, the patriarchal dimension has been challenged by feminism in the recent past (Castells, 1997). Fourth, the modern dimension of the dominant
conception of work is threatened by the revival of family-based enterprises and the persistent influence of family background on class destination (Edgell, 1993). However, it remains to be seen to what extent these threats to the dominant conception of work have been effective, an issue that will be discussed at the end of the book.

Summary and conclusions

At the risk of over-simplifying the complex and varied history of human societies, it has been argued that in pre-industrial capitalist societies – Stone Age, horticultural and agrarian – work was viewed negatively and was embedded in wider social relations, notably those of kinship. The emergence of industrial capitalism, initially over a long period in Britain, and later over a shorter time span in the rest of the world, involved a clear break with all previous types of society and culminated in work being accorded an unprecedented primacy. The main features of this new type of society include the use of machinery powered by inanimate sources of energy, the separation of home and work, specialist work roles and places, a profit-oriented market system, free wage labour, a positive value associated with work, endemic economic instability, and a distinctive patterning of technology and organization. It is important to remember that these characteristics are neither uncontested, as the term ‘wage slavery’ indicates, nor universal, as the persistence of homeworking testifies.

During the early development of industrial capitalism in Britain, work opportunities for women increased, but thereafter declined, especially for married women, who were excluded from some kinds of work and restricted to certain other types of work, such as low-paid, unskilled paid work and unpaid housework. The distinct gender division of labour that emerged has been designated the male breadwinner and female homemaker model and found in most countries (Warren, 2007). When this patriarchal dimension of work was combined with other key features of the new type of society – industrial, capitalist and modern – it created a dominant conception of work in which real work was equated with full-time employment for pay outside the home by adult males recruited on the basis of impersonal norms, and led to the devaluation of other kinds of work. This conception of work became standardized and dominated the twentieth century but is now under threat.

Three main conclusions may be drawn from the historical overview of the changing nature of work. First, that the rise of industrial capitalism occasioned a major transformation of work which dislocated work to a greater or lesser extent from all other social institutions. Second, during the establishment of this revolutionary type of society, a dominant conception of work emerged that prioritized work that was capitalist, industrial, patriarchal and modern.
over other types of work, such as unpaid housework, which did not conform to this model. Third, uncertainty prevails over the extent to which contemporary social processes, notably deindustrialization, computerization, and globalization, are changing the character and patterning of paid and unpaid work in the direction of a more flexible and individualized experience. A key part of the rationale of this book is to consider whether or not this is the case, and by implication, the degree to which work is being transformed, thereby creating a distinctively new type of post-industrial society.

The aim of this book is to cover paid and unpaid work, not just those in paid work, since a truly sociological account of work in advanced industrial capitalism should not take its cue from the dominant conception of work, especially at a time when this model is arguably in decline.

Further reading

BOOKS The history of work from a socio-cultural evolutionary perspective is provided by Nolan and Lenski (1999) Human Societies: An Introduction to Macrosociology, and for information on the key contrast between work in pre-modern and modern societies, see Applebaum (1992) The Concept of Work: Ancient, Medieval and Modern. For an account of Veblen’s relatively neglected contribution to our understanding of changes in the nature of work in different eras, see Edgell (2001) Veblen in Perspective: His Life and Thought. Two books by Beck – Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity (1992) and The Brave New World of Work (2000) – provide a summary of both past and current trends in the patterning and significance of work. As a corrective to the inevitable compression of the arguments and evidence concerning the gender dimension of work during the development of industrial capitalism, consult Walby (1986) Patriarchy at Work. A succinct account of the emergence of the specialist role of housewife as a consequence of industrialization can be found in Oakley (1976) Housewife.


WEBSITES For a timeline of the development of industrial capitalism from the standpoint of labour, consult the Working Class Movement Library, www.wcml.org.uk. The UK Economic and Social Research Council programme on the ‘Future of Work’ covered a range of issues relevant to this and later chapters, for example, the centrality of work and changing forms of work, www.leeds.ac.uk/esrfutureofwork/
Questions for discussion and assessment

1. What are the major differences between work in pre-industrial and industrial capitalist societies?
2. Consider the impact of capitalist industrialization on the meaning of time.
3. Assess the claim that new technology was a crucial factor in the rise of industrial capitalism.
4. Discuss the pattern of technological and organizational change during the development of capitalist industrialization.
5. Evaluate the view that the initial development of industrial capitalism improved the work opportunities for women.
6. Account for the decline in the labour force participation of women in Britain during the late nineteenth century.
7. Which dimension(s) of the dominant conception of work do you consider to be under most threat and why?