

# 13

## The Economy and Work

### **Comparing the Sociology of Economic Life with Economics**

#### **Economic Systems in Global Perspective**

Preindustrial Economies  
Industrial Economies  
Postindustrial Economies

#### **Contemporary World Economic Systems**

Capitalism  
Socialism  
Mixed Economies

#### **Perspectives on Economy and Work in the United States**

Functionalist Perspective  
Conflict Perspective  
Symbolic Interactionist Perspective

#### **The Social Organization of Work**

Occupations  
Professions  
Managers and the Managed  
The Lower Tier of the Service Sector and Marginal Jobs  
Contingent Work

#### **Unemployment**

#### **Worker Resistance and Activism**

Labor Unions  
Absenteeism, Sabotage, and Resistance

#### **Employment Opportunities for Persons with a Disability**

#### **The Global Economy in the Future**

The U.S. Economy  
Global Economic Interdependence and Competition





In the wake of the Industrial Revolution, many thoughtful observers were dismayed by the mechanization of work and its effects on the dignity of workers. Filmmaker Charlie Chaplin bitinglly satirized the new relationship between workers and machines in the classic *Modern Times*.

**As a lithography manufacturing technician, I am responsible for quality-checking the wafers during the fabrication process. Microprocessors are built on wafers which are thin disks made of silicon. . . . My job requires me to wear a bunny suit because the room I work in must be kept [a thousand times cleaner than a hospital operating room]. No skin can be exposed. My day starts out by putting on the bunny suit. First we put on a hair net. Then we have to use a shoe cleaner to clean the bottom and sides of our shoes. We also walk over a tacky floor which collects excess dust before we put on shoe covers. Next we walk through an air shower which blasts us with air to remove additional dust particles. Then we put on our booties over our covered shoes. We put on the gowns and gloves and tuck them in so that dust particles do not flow out. The last thing we put on is our belt and bubble helmet. Our belt has an air pack utility which purifies the air we breathe out. . . . My dad works here and my mom and sister used to. I also grew up in Silicon Valley where you are surrounded by technology. The combination of living in Silicon Valley and hav-**

**ing my family members work [here] definitely influenced me to come work [here].**

—Joe Aguinaldo (1999), a technician at a Silicon Valley chip manufacturer, describing how his workday begins

**Henry Jackson [a supervisor] spoke. “You men are now property of the Rivet Line. You will find that like any other department, the Rivet Line has its share of good jobs and difficult jobs. I will confess, mostly the latter.” . . . The Rivet Line was the starting point for all that went on during the three-day snake trail needed to assemble a truck. The complex birth procedure began right here. It started with a couple of long black rails. As the rails were hoisted onto crawling pedestals, the workers began riveting them together and affixing them with various attachments. There weren’t any screws or bolts to be seen. Just rivets. Thousands upon thousands of dull gray rivets. They resembled mushrooms.**

—Ben Hamper (1992: 87–91), a former worker at the General Motors Truck and Bus division in Flint, Michigan, describing his first day as a riveter

**a**lthough many people believe the nature of work is changing dramatically in the new postindustrial, global economy of the twenty-first century, many commonalities exist between workplace settings in the industrial sector such as Ben Hamper’s automobile plant and some “high-

tech” workplaces such as Joe Aguinaldo’s microprocessing plant. In both industrial and postindustrial workplaces, the labor force is a crucial factor in generating large profits for the transnational corporations that thrive in advanced capitalist economies such as the United States. However, sociologists have pointed

out that figuring out what the workplace is, and exactly who belongs to it, is becoming increasingly difficult given the dramatic changes that are occurring in work settings, the workday, the employee, the manager, and the firm (Nippert-Eng and Fine, 1999).

What are the connections between the paid work we do and the larger economic structure of our society and the global economy? Why are some people satisfied with their jobs but others experience alienation? In this chapter, we will discuss the economy as a social institution and how it is linked to the world of work—how people feel about their work, how the nature of work is changing, and what impact these changes may have on your future. Before reading on, test your knowledge about the economy and work by taking the quiz in Box 13.1.

## Questions and Issues

**Chapter Focus Question: How are our beliefs about work influenced by changes in the economy and in the world in which we live?**

What are the key assumptions of capitalism and socialism?

What contributes to job satisfaction and to worker alienation?

What is the individual's role in the work force?

Why does unemployment occur?

How do workers attempt to gain control over their work situation?

## Comparing the Sociology of Economic Life with Economics

Perhaps you are wondering how a sociological perspective on the economy differs from the study of economics. Although aspects of the two disciplines

overlap, each provides a unique perspective on economic institutions. Economists attempt to explain how the limited resources and efforts of a society are allocated among competing ends. To economists, an imbalance exists between people's wants and society's ability to meet those wants. To illustrate, think about college registration. Would you like to have the "perfect" schedule—with the



### Box 13.1 Sociology in Everyday Life

#### *How Much Do You Know About the Economy and the World of Work?*

##### TRUE FALSE

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| T | F | 1. Most factory workers are aware of the part their work plays in the overall production process.               |
| T | F | 2. Professions are largely indistinguishable from other occupations.  |
| T | F | 3. Workers' skills are usually upgraded when new technology is introduced in the workplace.                     |
| T | F | 4. Many of the new jobs being created in the service sector pay poorly and offer little job security.           |
| T | F | 5. Most assembly-line workers are white men in the United States and other developed countries.                 |
| T | F | 6. Labor unions will probably cease to exist during the twenty-first century.                                   |
| T | F | 7. Few workers resist work conditions that they consider to be oppressive.                                      |
| T | F | 8. New office technology has made it possible for clerical workers to function with little or no supervision.   |
| T | F | 9. In the United States, positions with the most job security are located in large, transnational corporations. |
| T | F | 10. Assembly lines are rapidly disappearing from all sectors of the U.S. economy.                               |

*Answers on page 396.*



### Box 13.1

#### *Answers to the Sociology Quiz on the Economy and the World of Work*

1. **False.** According to Karl Marx, most factory workers view their work as fragmented and specialized, and they do not understand what part their work plays in the overall production process.
2. **False.** Professions have four characteristics that distinguish them from other occupations: (1) abstract, specialized knowledge; (2) autonomy; (3) authority over clients and subordinate occupational groups; and (4) a degree of altruism.
3. **False.** Jobs are often deskilled when new technology (such as bar code scanners or computerized cash registers) is installed in the workplace. Some of the workers' skills are no longer needed because a "smart machine" now provides the answers (such as how much something costs or how much change a customer should receive).
4. **True.** Many of the new jobs being created in the service sector, such as nurse's aide, child-care worker, hotel maid, and fast-food server, offer little job security and low pay.
5. **False.** Today, most assembly-line workers are young girls and women in developing nations.
6. **False.** Sociologists who have examined organized labor generally predict that unions will continue to exist; however, their strength may wane in the global economy.
7. **False.** Many workers resist work conditions that they believe are unjust or oppressive. Some engage in sabotage; others join unions or participate in other types of pro-worker organizations.
8. **False.** Clerical workers still work under supervision; however, they may not even know when they are being observed because of new technology. For example, a supervisor may examine a clerk's work on a computer network without the employee knowing about it, and an airline reservationist's supervisor may listen in on selected conversations with customers.
9. **False.** Although it is difficult to determine which types of jobs are the most secure, many positions in transnational corporations have been lost through downsizing and plant relocations and closures.
10. **False.** According to some scholars, assembly lines will remain a fact of life for businesses ranging from fast-food restaurants to high-tech semiconductor plants.

Sources: Based on Feagin and Feagin, 1997; Garson, 1989; Hodson and Sullivan, 1995; Intel, 1999; and Zuboff, 1988.

classes you want, at the times you want, and with "preferred" professors? How many students at your school actually manage to arrange such a schedule? What organizational constraints make it impossible for all people to have what they need or want? Some economists believe that the most important fact of economics is the law of scarcity, which means that there will never be enough resources to meet everyone's wants (Ruffin and Gregory, 1996). Colleges do not have the financial or human resources to provide everything that students (or faculty) want.

Economists focus on the complex workings of economic systems (such as monetary policy, inflation, and the national debt), whereas sociologists focus on interconnections among the economy, other social institutions, and the social organization of work. At the macrolevel, sociologists may study the impact of transnational corporations on industrialized and low-income nations. At the microlevel, sociologists might study people's satisfaction with their jobs. To better understand these issues, we will examine how economic systems came into existence and how they have changed over time.

## Economic Systems in Global Perspective

The *economy* is the social institution that ensures the maintenance of society through the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services. *Goods* are tangible objects that are necessary (such as food, clothing, and shelter) or desired (such as VCRs and electric toothbrushes). *Services* are intangible activities for which people are willing to pay (such as dry cleaning, a movie, or medical care). In high-income nations today, many of the goods and services we consume are information goods (Hyman, 1999). Examples include databases and surveys (“intermediate products”) and the mass media, computer software, and the Internet (“information goods”) (Hyman, 1999).

Some goods and services are produced by human labor (the plumber who unstops your sink, for example); others are primarily produced by capital (such as Internet access available through an Internet service provider). *Labor* refers to the group of people who contribute their physical and intellectual services to the production process in return for wages that they are paid by firms (Boyes and Melvin, 1994; Hyman, 1999). Capital is wealth (money or property) owned or used in business by a person or corporation. Obviously, money, or financial capital, is needed to invest in the physical capital (such as machinery, equipment, buildings, warehouses, and factories) used in production. For example, a person who owns a thousand shares of Dell Computer Corporation stock owns financial capital, but these shares also represent an ownership interest in Dell’s physical capital.

### Preindustrial Economies

Hunting and gathering, horticultural and pastoral, and agrarian societies are all preindustrial economic structures. Most workers in these societies engage in *primary sector production*—the extraction of raw materials and natural resources from the environment. These materials and resources are typically consumed or used without much processing. For example, portions of contemporary sub-Saharan Africa have a relatively high rate of exports in primary commodities, and foreign direct investment is concentrated in mineral extraction. Consequently, most of sub-Saharan Africa is highly dependent on primary sector production, which, in turn, is highly vulnerable to the whims of the primary commodity markets (United Nations Development Programme, 1999). In recent years, many people have lost economic ground in

sub-Saharan Africa, where per capita incomes are lower than they were in 1970 (United Nations Development Programme, 1999).

Throughout history, the production units in hunting and gathering societies have been small; most goods are produced by family members. The division of labor is by age and gender (Hodson and Sullivan, 1995). The potential for producing surplus goods increases as people learn to domesticate animals and grow their own food. In horticultural and pastoral societies, the economy becomes distinct from family life. The distribution process becomes more complex, with the accumulation of a *surplus* such that some people can engage in activities other than food production. In agrarian societies, production is primarily related to producing food. However, workers have a greater variety of specialized tasks, such as warlord or priest; for example, warriors are necessary to protect the surplus goods from plunder by outsiders (Hodson and Sullivan, 1995). Once a surplus is accumulated, more people can also engage in trade. Initially, the surplus goods are distributed through a system of *barter*—the direct exchange of goods or services considered of equal value by the traders. However, bartering is limited as a method of distribution; equivalencies are difficult to determine (how many fish equal one rabbit?) because there is no way to assign a set value to the items being traded. As a result, *money*, a medium of exchange with a relatively fixed value, came into use in order to aid the distribution of goods and services in society.

What was the U.S. economy like in the preindustrial era? As previous chapters have stated, the agricultural revolution brought about dramatic changes in the nature of work, including the growing division between work and home. In the preindustrial economy of the colonial period (from the 1600s to the early 1700s), white men earned a livelihood through agricultural work or as small business owners who ran establishments such as inns, taverns, and shops. During this period, white women worked primarily in their homes, doing such tasks as cooking, cleaning, and child care. Some also developed *cottage industries*—producing goods in their homes that could be sold to nonfamily members. However, a number of white women also worked outside their households as midwives, physicians, nurses, teachers, innkeepers, and shopkeepers (Hess-Biber and Carter, 2000). By contrast, the experiences of people of color were quite different in preindustrial America. As the sociologists Sharlene Hess-Biber and Gregg Lee Carter (2000) explain, the institution of slavery, which came about largely as a result of the demand for cheap agricultural labor, was a major force in the exploitation of many people of color, but



The nature of work is markedly different in the three main types of economies. In preindustrial economies, most workers are involved in farming or in extracting raw materials and natural resources from the environment. The development of a surplus leads to bartering and the use of money as a medium of exchange. In industrial economies, production and distribution of goods, such as Hershey chocolate kisses, are much more complex and work tends to become specialized and repetitive. In postindustrial economies (see photo on facing page), workers increasingly are involved in providing services such as health care rather than in manufacturing goods.

it was particularly the women of color who suffered a double burden of oppression in the form of both sexism and racism. For example, African American women were exploited as workers, as breeders of slaves, and sometimes as sex objects for white men (Hess-Biber and Carter, 2000). By contrast, Native American women in some agricultural communities held greater power because they were able to maintain control over land, tools, and surplus food (Hess-Biber and Carter, 2000).

Do preindustrial forms of work still exist in contemporary high-income nations? In short, yes. Even in high-income nations such as the United States, entire families work in the agricultural sector of the economy, performing tasks such as picking ripened cherries. Here is one journalist's description of "home life" among some seasonal cherry pickers in the state of Washington:

At the height of cherry-picking season, 12 men were making a patch of woods . . . into a home. Plastic grocery bags hung from nails in the Ponderosa pine bark: the pantry. A shard of mirror was wedged into the trunk of another pine: the bathroom. The kitchen was a Sunbeam propane grill, the bushes served as toilets, and six cheap tents formed the bedroom. . . . Cherry picking requires special timing and skills; the fruit must be picked just as soon as it is ripe, and workers must be careful not to separate the stems from the fruit or damage the branches where next year's buds will form. . . . Working from 4 A.M. until noon, when heat can damage the fruit, pickers can make \$4 for filling a 40-pound box, or up to \$80

a day. Many travel for weeks at a time following the ripening from California to Oregon, then from Washington to Montana. (Kelley, 1999: A11)

As this example shows, some parts of the agricultural sector of the U.S. economy have not been changed by industrialization or postindustrialization. The cherry pickers described above are employed in the same region as many high-tech information employees who work for Microsoft or other computer manufacturers or software designers.

### *Industrial Economies*

Industrialization brings sweeping changes to the system of production and distribution of goods and services. Drawing on new forms of energy (such as steam, gasoline, and electricity) and machine technology, factories proliferate as the primary means of producing goods. Most workers engage in *secondary sector production*—the processing of raw materials (from the primary sector) into finished goods. For example, steelworkers process metal ore; autoworkers then convert the ore into automobiles, trucks, and buses. In industrial economies, work becomes specialized and repetitive, activities become bureaucratically organized, and workers primarily work with machines instead of with one another.

Mass production results in larger surpluses that benefit some people and organizations but not others. Goods and services become more unequally distributed because some people can afford any-

thing they want and others can afford very little. Nations engaging primarily in secondary sector production also have some primary sector production, but they rely on less-industrialized nations for the raw materials from which to make many products. In sum, the typical characteristics of industrial economies include the following:

1. *New forms of energy, mechanization, and the growth of the factory system.* With the introduction of the steam engine and steam-powered machines, work becomes centered in factories, which are viewed as separate and distinct spheres from the home and the earlier cottage industries that had been located in the home.
2. *Increased division of labor and specialization among workers.* With industrialization, people carry out a wider diversity of jobs which have different but integrated activities that contribute to the production of specific goods.
3. *Universal application of scientific methods to problem solving and profit making.* Scientific knowledge makes the assembly line and mass production (discussed later) possible. New technologies allow the transformation of raw materials into goods that can be sold as commodities at a far greater cost than the value of the raw materials.
4. *Introduction of wage labor, time discipline, and workers' deferred gratification.* In industrial economies, workers are employees. Managers, supervisors, or owners determine what days people will work and how many hours per day they will be required to be at the work site. Workers typically do not have control over what time they are supposed to be at work or what time they leave at the end of the workday. As a result, workers are expected to engage in deferred gratification, meaning that they are to toil diligently at work and wait until they are on "their own time" before pursuing personal pleasures or recreational activities.
5. *Strengthening of bureaucratic organizational structure.* To develop the most efficient workplace, it is necessary to implement and enforce rules, policies, and procedures, thus requiring the creation of a well-defined, bureaucratic organizational structure (see Chapter 6, "Groups and Organizations"). Ultimately, the goal is to make the workplace more efficient and more profitable for owners and upper-level managers.

All of these characteristics contributed to the development of industrial economies, greater productivity in the workplace, and a dramatic increase in consumption. Although the standard of living improved



The nature of work has changed dramatically over the past century. Not all social scientists agree on whether robots will eventually replace many humans in the work force. What do you think work will be like in the future?

for many people, the sociologist Thorstein Veblen (1857–1929) was a leading critic of U.S. industrialism. According to Veblen (1967/1899), those who got wealthy from industrialization often engaged in *conspicuous consumption* and *conspicuous leisure*. In *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1967/1899), Veblen stated that the idle rich, who made their vast sums of money through ownership of the factories and from the toil and sweat of workers, represented a conspicuously consuming, parasitic leisure class. For Veblen, conspicuous consumption is the ostentatious display of symbols of wealth, such as owning numerous mansions and expensive works of art, wearing extravagant jewelry and clothing, or otherwise flaunting the trappings of great wealth. Veblen believed that conspicuous consumption also occurs when rich people participate in wasteful and highly visible leisure activities such as casino gambling or sporting events that require costly gear or excessive travel expenses (such as going on a safari in Africa). If Veblen were alive today, do you think he might modify his theoretical perspective on conspicuous consumption to incorporate the spending habits of some high-tech entrepreneurs whose wealth is linked to the postindustrial economy?

### **Postindustrial Economies**

A postindustrial economy is based on *tertiary sector production* — the provision of services rather than goods — as a primary source of livelihood for

workers and profit for owners and corporate shareholders. Tertiary sector production includes a wide range of activities, such as fast-food service, transportation, communication, education, real estate, advertising, sports, and entertainment.

About thirty years ago, the sociologist Daniel Bell (1973) predicted that the manufacturing sector of the U.S. economy would be replaced by a postindustrial economy in which professionals, scientists, and technicians would proliferate while many blue-collar and lower-paying, second-tier service sector positions would gradually disappear. Several characteristics are central to the postindustrial economy:

1. *Information displaces property as the central preoccupation in the economy.* Postindustrial economies are characterized by ideas, and computer software may eventually become the infrastructure of the future. Software programmers are in high demand, for they create programs that can do some of the work previously performed by travel agents, insurance salespeople, lawyers, and individuals in dozens of other jobs (Mead, 1998).
2. *Workplace culture shifts away from factories and toward increased diversification of work settings, the workday, the employee, and the manager.* Although many people continue to be employed in traditional workplaces with set workdays, increasing numbers are being affected by workplace changes such as downsizing and outsourcing. When other employees are removed, those workers who remain are often expected to do a variety of tasks in addition to the work they were previously assigned. Among these “add-ons” are activities such as creating desktop documents, developing web pages, writing correspondence on the computer, or doing routine chores such as photocopying, straightening up one’s desk and office, and answering the telephone (Nippert-Eng and Fine, 1999).
3. *The conventional boundaries between work and home (public life and private life) are breached.* Cell phones, pagers, fax machines, laptop computers, and similar products make it possible for people to work around the clock from locations around the globe. Increasing amounts of remote work activity continue to blur the distinction between one’s public life and one’s private life. Although some postindustrial cottage industry workers, such as freelance writers and copy editors, may work full time from their homes, other workers may spend some days at the office and several days a week working at home or in other locations. Ironically, even as global communications have become so rapid,

some high-tech workers have found themselves caught in a world of traffic, pollution, and urban problems that are characteristic of the worst of the industrial age (see Box 13.2).

How far has the United States moved into postindustrialization? Although this question is difficult to answer, projections by the Census Bureau indicate that the fastest-growing occupations of the twenty-first century are in the service sector, as shown in Figure 13.1. Moreover, in his study of the “McDonaldization” of society, the sociologist George Ritzer (1996, 1998) suggests that the number of lower-paying, second-tier service sector positions will continue to increase not only in the United States but worldwide as well. Many jobs in the service sector emphasize productivity, often at the expense of workers. Fast-food restaurants are a case in point, as the manager of a McDonald’s explains:

As a manager I am judged by the statistical reports which come off the computer. Which basically means my crew labor productivity. What else can I really distinguish myself by? . . . O.K., it’s true, you can over spend your [maintenance and repair] budget, you can have a low fry yield; you can run a dirty store; you can be fired for bothering high school girls. But basically, every Coke spigot is monitored. Every ketchup squirt is measured. My costs for every item are set. So my crew labor productivity is my main flexibility. . . . Look, you can’t squeeze a McDonald’s hamburger any flatter. If you want to improve your productivity there is nothing for a manager to squeeze but the crew. (qtd. in Garson, 1989: 33–35)

“McDonaldization” is built on many of the ideas and systems of industrial society, including bureaucracy and the assembly line (Ritzer, 1996).

Also contrary to Bell’s prediction, class conflict and poverty may increase rather than decrease in postindustrial societies. Recently, researchers have found that employment in the service sector remains gender segregated and, in some types of work, racially segregated. For example, about half of all U.S. service occupations (50.2 percent) and sales positions (43.4 percent) are held by women. But even in these occupations, women occupy the lower-status and lower-paying jobs, where there is little chance for advancement to better-paid positions (Hesse-Biber and Carter, 2000; Reskin and Padavic, 1994). Domestic service workers are another example. They have always been predominantly female and often minority members. Today, many hotel maids and household domestic service workers are first-generation Latinas (Romero, 1992). As the sociologist Mary Romero (1992: 29) explains, “The cheap domestic labor of women of color is one means by which white middle-class women escape oppressive aspects of their domes-



## Box 13.2 Changing Times: Media and Technology

### *On Top of the World, Stuck in Traffic*

There will be an impact when a person only has time to work, drive and sleep. [People] don't have time to get involved in their communities. They can't get home in time for Little League games.

—Steve Tedesco, president of the San Jose Silicon Valley Chamber of Commerce (qtd. in Holson, 1999: A16)

I hate the traffic here, and I'm going back to where I came from.

—anonymous author of an Internet chat about the growing traffic problems in Austin, Texas (Austin360.com, 1999)

Across the United States, many people are complaining about traffic gridlock and how it is changing their lives and the face of their communities. Many cities have on-line “traffic updates” for commuters. People complain about the traffic and in some instances post the “head-snapping” experiences they had with poor drivers in that day's traffic.

Why is it that we are able to communicate in mere seconds with people who may be six time zones away from us, but we spend extensive amounts of time, even hours, on traffic-clogged freeways as we seek to get back and forth from home to work or from place to place? For many years, people known as the “prophets of doom” have warned of impending traffic gridlock in areas of the country that had not previously experienced the problem. However, these individuals were frequently ignored because gasoline was cheap and plentiful. Moreover, people were feeling free-spirited and wanted to keep the privacy, speed, and efficiency that they believed their cars afforded them (Griffith, 1998). For the most part, people were undeterred by the thought of traffic congestion, environmental pollution, or the many other problems now associated with clogged roadways and the harried lifestyle of the commuter. Meanwhile, urban planners and community activists suggested a variety of ways to reduce traffic gridlock. Among these were alternatives such as commuter buses and light rail in metropolitan areas, rapid rail between cities, bicycle paths and bridges for bike riders only, and expressways that could move higher volumes of traffic quickly and safely.

Why have we been unable to reduce traffic gridlock? First, in many areas of the country none of the ideas

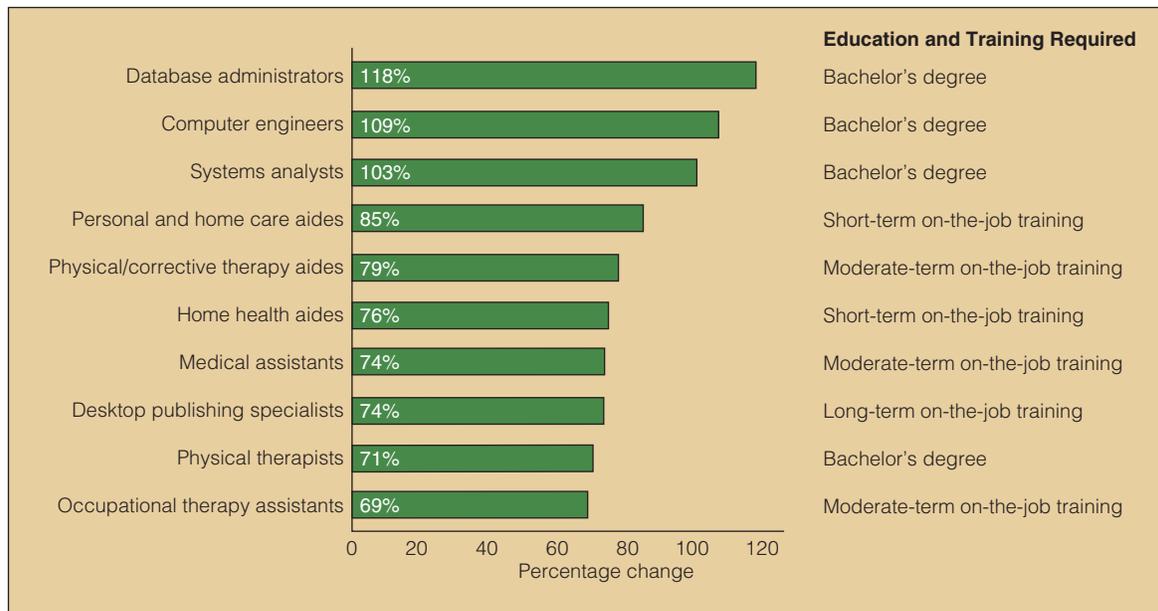
were effectively implemented. Second, some cities waited so long to build more roads or to do small improvements that they fell far behind the urban population growth and the proliferation of motor vehicles that was taking place on the streets and freeways. Third, efforts to build light rail in cities such as Atlanta, Dallas, and the San Francisco Bay area have been of limited success, according to some urban analysts (see Cox, 1999). For example, rail systems such as Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) are considered by many potential passengers to be too slow and too limited in geographic coverage. DART operates at an average of 14 miles per hour, which is less than half the average peak-hour commuting speed of cars in some areas of Dallas (Cox, 1999). Light rail routes typically focus on downtown areas and may not provide adequate access to areas throughout the city or to outlying suburban areas. However, most cities have not given up: Plans such as “Mobility 2020” continue to be developed to expand rail service throughout the Dallas–Fort Worth area. In the San Jose–San Francisco corridor, CALTRANS (the state's highway construction division) and BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) continue to embark on large construction projects and to encourage more people to try out alternative means of transportation. Ironically, “progress” such as building new roadways often has its price. When construction projects are established to add to or rebuild highways or rapid transit systems, hundreds of thousands of people are inconvenienced by the months and years that such massive endeavors frequently take. For example, on the elevated freeway that feeds into the San Francisco–Oakland Bay Bridge, where traffic already creeps for many hours a day, the project to demolish and rebuild sections of the freeway will take at least four-and-one-half years. During this time, a major downtown exit for morning commute traffic will be closed to vehicles (Holson, 1999). Where will all the cars, trucks, and SUVs go? That's a good question. And, thus far, we have not used creative thinking and adequate economic resources to alleviate the problem.

Can we solve this problem with technology? How might sci-fi writers deal with these concerns? How about sociologists? What do you suggest?

tic roles.” As more middle- and upper-income women have gained full-time employment in better-paid occupations and professional careers, it has often been women of color, particularly recent immigrants, who have taken up the slack in domestic work in their households (Hess-Biber and Carter, 2000; Romero, 1992).

Although many people in the U.S. work force will continue to be employed in low-paying service jobs in the twenty-first century, others will benefit

by continuing changes in technology and global economic conditions. Some analysts believe that the falling prices for manufactured goods and stiff international competition will continue to take a toll on the U.S. manufacturing sector and that “nontraded” services will boom. Nontraded service providers—such as hospitals, schools, nursing homes, and overnight courier services—must remain at the point where the service is consumed. Neither clients nor providers in settings such as

**Figure 13.1 Fastest Growing Occupations, 1996–2006**

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998b.

these can easily be relocated. For example, a person who wants a package delivered or needs emergency surgery or care in a nursing home is highly unlikely to relocate to a low-income nation where the workers might be paid lower wages for providing such services.

## Contemporary World Economic Systems

Throughout the twentieth century, capitalism and socialism were the principal economic models in industrialized countries. Sociologists often use two criteria—property ownership and market control—to distinguish between types of economies. However, keep in mind that no society has a purely capitalist or socialist economy.

### Capitalism

**Capitalism** is an economic system characterized by private ownership of the means of production, from which personal profits can be derived through market competition and without government intervention. Most of us think of ourselves as “owners” of private property because we own a car, a television, or other possessions. However, most of

us are not capitalists; we *spend money* on the things we own rather than *make money* from them. Only a relatively few people own income-producing property from which a profit can be realized by producing and distributing goods and services. Everyone else is a consumer. “Ideal” capitalism has four distinctive features: (1) private ownership of the means of production, (2) pursuit of personal profit, (3) competition, and (4) lack of government intervention.

**PRIVATE OWNERSHIP OF THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION** Capitalist economies are based on the right of individuals to own income-producing property, such as land, water, mines, and factories, and the right to “buy” people’s labor.

In the early stages of industrial capitalism (1850–1890), virtually all the capital for investment in the United States was individually owned—prior to the Civil War, an estimated two hundred families controlled all major trade and financial organizations. By the 1890s, individual capitalists, including Andrew Carnegie, Cornelius Vanderbilt, and John D. Rockefeller, controlled most of the capital in commerce, agriculture, and industry (Feagin and Feagin, 1997).

As workers grew tired of toiling for the benefit of capitalists instead of for themselves, some of them banded together to form the first national

labor union, the Knights of Labor, in 1869. A **labor union is a group of employees who join together to bargain with an employer or a group of employers over wages, benefits, and working conditions.** The Knights of Labor included both skilled and unskilled laborers, but the American Federation of Labor (AFL), founded in 1886, targeted groups of skilled workers such as plumbers and carpenters; each of these craft unions maintained autonomy under the “umbrella” of the AFL.

Under early monopoly capitalism (1890–1940), most ownership rapidly shifted from individuals to huge **corporations—large-scale organizations that have legal powers, such as the ability to enter into contracts and buy and sell property, separate from their individual owners.** During this period, major industries, including oil, sugar, and grain, came under the control of a few corporations owned by shareholders. As a general rule, individual shareholders—persons who hold or own shares of stock in a corporation—cannot be blamed for the actions of the corporation. Thus, shareholders are able to protect their personal assets while limiting their liability for the corporation’s actions or debts.

As automobile and steel plants shifted to mass production, workers once again perceived that their needs were not being met. In 1935 the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) was established to represent both skilled and unskilled workers in entire industries such as automobile manufacturing. According to John Sargent, a steelworker,

I got in the mills in 1936, and I [was] fortunate to be caught up in a great movement of the people in this country. . . . [A] movement of the kind that we had . . . in the CIO was a movement that moved millions of people, literally, and changed not only the course of the working man in this country, but also the nature of the relationship between the working man and the government and between the working man and the boss. . . . (qtd. in Watkins, 1993: 274)

In 1937, GM workers held their first *sit-down strike*: The workers occupied the plants but refused to work, thus paralyzing production (McEachern, 1994). The sit-down strike represented a new approach that came to dominate U.S. labor activism (Watkins, 1993).

In advanced monopoly capitalism (1940–present), ownership and control of major industrial and business sectors have become increasingly concentrated. Economic concentration is the degree to which a relatively small number of corporations control a disproportionately large share of a nation’s economic resources. Today, many corporations are global in scope. **Transnational corporations are large corporations that are headquartered in one**

**country but sell and produce goods and services in many countries.** These corporations play a major role in the economies and governments of many nations. Twenty of the largest U.S. transnational corporations are listed in Table 13.1.

Transnational corporations are not dependent on the labor, capital, or technology of any one country and may move their operations to countries where wages and taxes are lower and the potential profits are higher. Corporate considerations of this kind help explain why many jobs formerly located in the United States have shifted to lower-income nations where few employment opportunities exist and workers can be paid significantly less than their U.S. counterparts. This appears to be a fact of life, whether workers are producing parts for automobiles and computers or hamburgers in a fast-food restaurant owned by a transnational corporation such as McDonald’s, which prides itself on placing “Golden Arches” throughout the world (see Box 13.3).

**PURSUIT OF PERSONAL PROFIT** A tenet of capitalism is the belief that people are free to maximize their individual gain through personal profit; in the process, the entire society will benefit from their activities (Smith, 1976/1776). Economic development is assumed to benefit both capitalists and workers, and the general public also benefits from public expenditures (such as for roads, schools, and parks) made possible through an increase in business tax revenues.

During the period of industrial capitalism, however, specific individuals and families (not the general public) were the primary recipients of profits. For many generations, descendants of some of the early industrial capitalists have benefited from the economic deeds (and misdeeds) of their ancestors. In early monopoly capitalism, some stockholders derived massive profits from companies that held near-monopolies on specific goods and services. Examples included American Tobacco Company, Westinghouse Electric Corporation, and the former F. W. Woolworth Corporation (Hodson and Sullivan, 1995).

In advanced (late) monopoly capitalism, profits have become even more concentrated. Although many people own *some* stock, they do not own *control*; in other words, they are unable to participate in establishing the policies that determine the size of the profit or the rate of return on investments (which affects the profits they derive). In booming economic times, however, shareholders of lucrative stocks are less concerned about the fact that they do not own control of corporations such as Nike or Dell Computer.

**Table 13.1 The 20 Largest U.S. Transnational Corporations**

CORPORATION	PRODUCT	SALES (\$ BILLIONS)	ASSETS (\$ BILLIONS)
General Motors	Motor vehicles	178.1	228.8
Ford Motor	Motor vehicles	145.3	221.8
Exxon*	Oil refining	120.2	96.0
General Electric	Electronics	90.8	304.0
International Business Machines (IBM)	Office equipment	78.5	81.4
Chrysler	Motor vehicles	61.1	60.4
Mobil*	Oil refining	59.9	43.5
Texaco	Oil refining	59.8	34.0
Philip Morris	Tobacco products	56.1	55.9
Chevron	Oil refining	48.8	39.4
Hewlett-Packard	Office equipment	42.8	31.7
E. I. du Pont	Chemicals	39.7	42.9
Procter & Gamble	Cleaning products	35.7	27.5
Citicorp	Banking	34.6	295.0
American International Group	Insurance	30.6	163.9
Motorola	Office equipment	29.7	27.2
Intel	Computer peripherals	25.0	28.8
Compaq Computer	Computer equipment	24.5	14.6
Dow Chemical	Chemicals	20.0	24.0
Coca-Cola	Beverages	18.8	16.9

\*Recently merged to form Exxon Mobil.  
Source: *Forbes*, 1998a.

**COMPETITION** In theory, competition acts as a balance to excessive profits. When producers vie with one another for customers, they must be able to offer innovative goods and services at competitive prices. However, from the time of early industrial capitalism, the trend has been toward less, rather than more, competition among companies. In early monopoly capitalism, competition was diminished by increasing concentration *within* a particular industry, a classic case being the virtual monopoly on oil held by John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company (Tarbell, 1925/1904; Lundberg, 1988). Today, Microsoft Corporation so dominates certain areas of the computer software industry that it has virtually no competitors in those areas.

What appears to be competition among producers *within* an industry may actually be "competition" among products, all of which are produced and distributed by relatively few corporations. An

*oligopoly* exists when several companies overwhelmingly control an entire industry. An example is the music industry, in which a few giant companies are behind many of the labels and artists known to consumers (see Table 13.2 on page 406). More specifically, a *shared monopoly* exists when four or fewer companies supply 50 percent or more of a particular market. Examples include U.S. automobile manufacturers (referred to as the "Big Three") and cereal companies (three of which control 77 percent of the market). In 1995 some members of Congress called for an investigation of cereal companies for antitrust violations that had allegedly resulted in a 90-percent increase in the cost of cold cereal over a ten-year period (*Austin American-Statesman*, 1995).

In advanced monopoly capitalism, mergers also occur *across* industries: Corporations gain near-monopoly control over all aspects of the production



### Box 13.3 Sociology in Global Perspective

#### *McJobs: Assembling Burgers in the Global Economy*

Yesterday I was meant to go home at midnight, after working 8 hours. But they were short-staffed and asked me to clean up until 2:30 A.M. I didn't want to but there was nothing I could do. Same thing happened night before. Lots of us are working 12 hours sometimes without proper breaks. . . . John hasn't had a day off for months—they keep ringing him up on his rest day—and a bloke who refused to come in one Saturday was reported to head office.

—Julie, a worker at a McDonald's in outer London (qtd. in McSpotlight, 1999)

"McJobs" at McDonald's and other fast-food restaurants worldwide have received both praise and criticism from employees and social analysts in recent years. One thing is clear: The franchise restaurants that constitute McDonald's global corporate chain are employers of more than a million people, primarily young workers and/or people of color. When the first McDonald's restaurant opened in 1955, few people predicted that the kingdom of Ray Kroc, the company's founder, would grow to more than 25,000 restaurants, serving 40 million customers in 117 nations around the globe (McDonald's, 1999).

Does McDonald's provide a service to communities by giving job opportunities to people who might otherwise be out of work? Those who view McDonald's employment practices favorably believe that this is indeed the case. However, critics state that McDonald's and other fast-food restaurants intentionally hire young workers and members of minority groups that have experienced discrimination because they can be more easily exploited for corporate profits. From this perspective, McDonald's vast corporate profits (see <http://www.McDonalds.com> for recent financial statements) are derived at the expense of workers who are paid low wages, given few breaks, and often required to work shifts that meet fluctuating demands of customers rather than providing a liv-

ing wage and stable employment for workers. According to critics, this high-profile burger chain (along with others) is a net destroyer of jobs: It uses low wages and the huge size of its business to undercut local food outlets and thereby force them out of business (McSpotlight, 1999). McSpotlight (<http://www.mcspotlight.org>), a web site critical of McDonald's, states that the restaurant chain "feeds" on foreign visitors, women, students, and ethnic minorities who, with few other opportunities, are forced to accept the poor wages and conditions (McSpotlight, 1999). By contrast, McDonald's spokespersons adamantly disagree. For example, the manager of a McDonald's restaurant in England stated that "We don't look at people's colour or nationality but their availability" (qtd. in McSpotlight, 1999).

Would it be possible for McDonald's workers to organize and challenge this giant corporation? Labor union activists state that McDonald's crushes workers' attempts at unionization anytime they arise in a nation. For example, Natalya Gracheva, an employee of McDonald's Russia, as the McDonald's joint venture in Russia is known, wanted to form a trade union in the company's factory outside Moscow. However, she quickly learned that the company would block all her efforts for pay raises and more rest periods (Charlton, 1999). By contrast, McDonald's spokespersons state that the franchise restaurants provide equitable compensation for their workers and that their employees are happy. McDonald's Russia responded to the complaints of Natalya Gracheva and others by forming a company-supervised "workers' council," and, in return, hundreds of employees agreed to sign a document stating that they did not want a union (Charlton, 1999).

As such disputes have arisen on a global basis, this question remains: Are corporations such as McDonald's good employers and good corporate citizens in the global community? What do you think?

and distribution of a product by acquiring both the companies that supply the raw materials and the companies that are the outlets for their products. For example, an oil company may hold leases on the land where the oil is pumped out of the ground, own the plants that convert the oil into gasoline, and own the individual gasoline stations that sell the product to the public.

Corporations with control both within and across industries are often formed by a series of mergers and acquisitions across industries. These corporations are referred to as *conglomerates*—combinations of businesses in different commercial areas, all of which are owned by one holding company. Media ownership is a case in point; com-

panies such as Time Warner and Viacom have extensive holdings in radio and television stations, cable television companies, book publishing firms, and film production and distribution companies, to name only a few.

Competition is reduced over the long run by *interlocking corporate directorates*—members of the board of directors of one corporation who also sit on the board(s) of other corporations. Although the Clayton Antitrust Act of 1914 made it illegal for a person to sit simultaneously on the boards of directors of two corporations that are in *direct* competition with each other, a person may serve simultaneously on the board of a financial institution (a bank, for example) and the board of a commercial

**Table 13.2 The Music Industry's Big Five**

COMPANY	COUNTRY	LEADING ARTISTS
Bertelsmann (RCA, Arista)	Germany	Kenny G Next Usher
Seagram (MCA, Polygram)	Canada	K-Ci & JoJo George Strait Wynonna Judd
Sony	Japan	Mariah Carey Michael Jackson Savage Garden
EMI (Virgin)	United Kingdom	Spice Girls Janet Smashing Pumpkins
Time Warner (Atlantic)	United States	Brandy Hootie and the Blowfish Jewel

Source: Biagi, 1994: 248; Biagi, 1998: 149.

corporation (a computer manufacturing company or a furniture store chain, for example) that borrows money from the bank. Directors of competing corporations may also serve together on the board of a third corporation that is not in direct competition with the other two. In 1996 former Defense Secretary Frank C. Carlucci sat on the corporate boards of fourteen Fortune 1,000 companies; former Labor Secretary Ann D. McLaughlin sat on eleven; and former Health, Education, and Welfare Secretary Joseph A. Califano, Jr., sat on nine (Dobrzynski, 1996b). An example of interlocking directorates is depicted in Figure 13.2. Compensation for members of the boards of top corporations can be as high (taking into account stock, stock options, and pensions) as \$400,000 to \$500,000 per board position per year (Dobrzynski, 1996b).

Interlocking directorates diminish competition by producing interdependence. Individuals who serve on multiple boards are often able to forge cooperative arrangements that benefit their corporations but not necessarily the general public. When several corporations are controlled by the same financial interests, they are more likely to cooperate with one another than to compete (Mintz and Schwartz, 1985).

#### LACK OF GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION

Ideally, capitalism works best without government intervention in the marketplace. The policy of *laissez-faire* (les-ay-FARE, which means “leave alone”) was advocated by economist Adam Smith

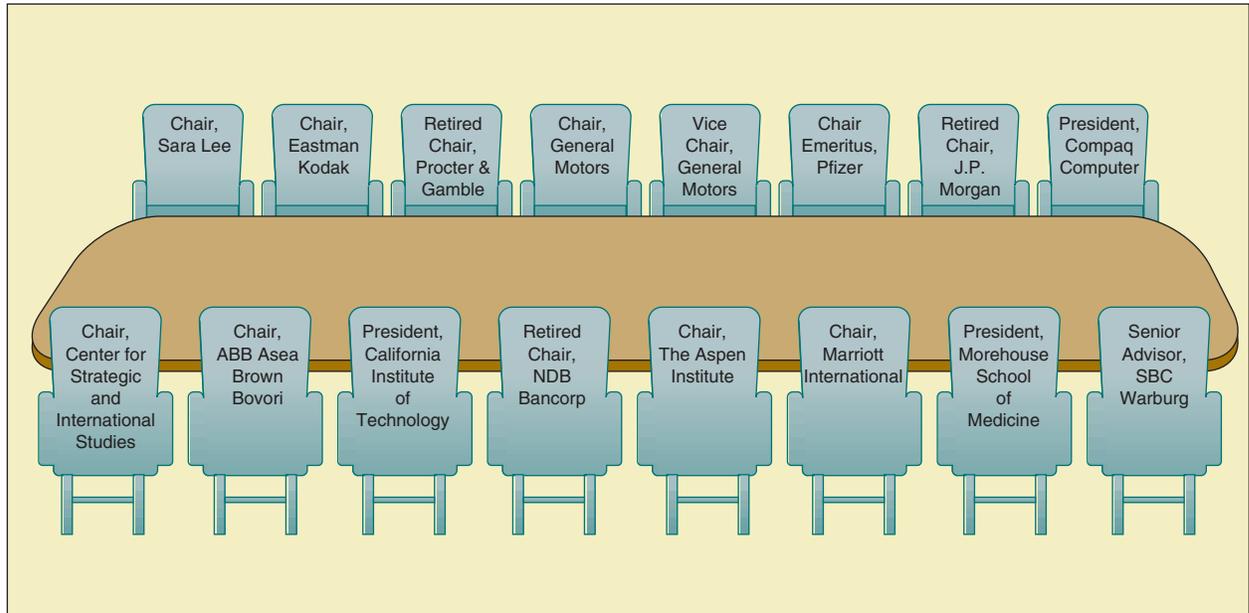
in his 1776 treatise *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. Smith argued that when people pursue their own selfish interests, they are guided “as if by an invisible hand” to promote the best interests of society (see Smith, 1976/1776). Today, terms such as *market economy* and *free enterprise* are often used, but the underlying assumption is the same: that free market competition, not the government, should regulate prices and wages. However, the “ideal” of unregulated markets benefiting all citizens has seldom been realized. Individuals and companies in pursuit of higher profits have run roughshod over weaker competitors, and small businesses have grown into large, monopolistic corporations. Accordingly, government regulations were implemented in an effort to curb the excesses of the marketplace brought about by *laissez-faire* policies.

However, much of what is referred to as government intervention has been in the form of aid to business. Between 1850 and 1900, corporations received government assistance in the form of public subsidies and protection from competition by tariffs, patents, and trademarks. The federal government also gave large tracts of land to the privately owned railroads to encourage their expansion across the nation. Antitrust laws originally intended to break up monopolies were used instead against labor unions that supported workers’ interests (Parenti, 1996).

Government intervention in the past two decades included billions of dollars in subsidies to farmers, tax credits for corporations, and large subsi-

**Figure 13.2 The General Motors Board of Directors**

The 1996 General Motors Board of Directors shows the nature of interlocking directorates. On the chair representing each of the directors is the name of another entity each director is connected with, and his or her position with that entity.



Source: General Motors, 1997.

dies or loan guarantees to automakers, aircraft companies, railroads, and others. Overall, most corporations have gained much more than they have lost as a result of government involvement in the economy.

## Socialism

**Socialism** is an economic system characterized by public ownership of the means of production, the pursuit of collective goals, and centralized decision making. Like “pure” capitalism, “pure” socialism does not exist. Karl Marx described socialism as a temporary stage en route to an ideal communist society. Although the terms *socialism* and *communism* are associated with Marx and are often used interchangeably, they are not identical. Marx defined communism as an economic system characterized by common ownership of all economic resources (Marshall, 1998). In the *Communist Manifesto* and *Das Kapital*, he predicted that the working class would become increasingly impoverished and alienated under capitalism. As a result, the workers would become aware of their own class interests, revolt against the capitalists, and overthrow the entire system (see Turner, Beeghly, and Powers, 1998). After

the revolution, private property would be abolished and capital would be controlled by collectives of workers who would own the means of production. The government (previously used to further the interests of the capitalists) would no longer be necessary. People would contribute according to their abilities and receive according to their needs (Marx and Engels, 1967/1848; Marx, 1967/1867). Over the years, state control was added as an organizing principle for communist societies. This structure is referred to as a system of “state socialism,” and the former Soviet Union (the “Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,” what today is Russia and certain other nearby countries) became the best example.

Why did state socialism in the Soviet Union not evolve into a communist economic system? For one thing, Marx’s ideas about a truly communist society were based on his perceptions of *industrialized* nations. At the time that an attempt was made to implement communism in Russia, however, it was largely a feudal society that had not experienced the type of conditions Marx envisioned would be necessary for the development of communism (Rosengarten, 1995). The system of state socialism failed for other reasons as well, as discussed later in this chapter.



Rather than state socialism evolving into communism in Eastern Europe, this form of political economy was dismantled in the early 1990s, and statues of former leaders such as Vladimir Lenin were removed from public display. However, the future of the former Soviet Republics remains in question in the twenty-first century.

**PUBLIC OWNERSHIP OF THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION** In a truly socialist economy, the means of production are owned and controlled by a collectivity or the state, not by private individuals or corporations. Prior to the early 1990s, the state owned all the natural resources and almost all the capital in the Soviet Union. In the 1980s, for example, state-owned enterprises produced more than 88 percent of agricultural output and 98 percent of retail trade, and owned 75 percent of the urban housing space (Boyes and Melvin, 1994). At least in theory, goods were produced to meet the needs of the people. Access to housing and medical care was considered to be a right.

Leaders of the Soviet Union and some Eastern European nations decided to abandon government ownership and control of the means of production because the system was unresponsive to the needs of the marketplace and offered no incentive for increased efficiency (Boyes and Melvin, 1994). Shortages and widespread unrest led to a reform movement by then-President Mikhail Gorbachev in the late 1980s.

Since the 1990s, Russia and other states in the former Soviet Union have attempted to privatize ownership of production. China—previously the world's other major communist economy—announced in 1997 that it would privatize most state industries (Serrill, 1997). In *privatization*, resources are converted from state ownership to private ownership; the government takes an active role in developing, recognizing, and protecting private property rights (Boyes and Melvin, 1994). However, the

emergent economies of Russia and China saw the value of their stock markets and currencies plunge in the economic crisis that started in Southeast Asia and spread to Russia and South America between 1997 and 1999. In the late 1990s, Russian capital flight averaged as much as \$1 billion per month, moving to places like Britain and Switzerland, which affluent, powerful Russians believed they could trust, and the economy collapsed (Banerjee, 1999; Kristof and WuDunn, 1999).

**PURSUIT OF COLLECTIVE GOALS** Ideal socialism is based on the pursuit of collective goals rather than on personal profits. Equality in decision making replaces hierarchical relationships (such as between owners and workers or political leaders and citizens). Everyone shares in the goods and services of society, especially necessities such as food, clothing, shelter, and medical care, based on need, not on ability to pay. In reality, however, few societies can or do pursue purely collective goals.

**CENTRALIZED DECISION MAKING** Another tenet of socialism is centralized decision making. In theory, economic decisions are based on the needs of society; the government is responsible for aiding the production and distribution of goods and services. Central planners set wages and prices to ensure that the production process works. When problems such as shortages and unemployment arise, they can be dealt with quickly and effectively by the central government (Boyes and Melvin, 1994).

Centralized decision making is hierarchical. In the former Soviet Union, for example, broad economic policy decisions were made by the highest authorities of the Communist Party, who also held political power. The production units (the enterprises and farms) at the bottom of the structure had little voice in the decision-making process. Wages and prices were based on political priorities and eventually came to be completely unrelated to actual supply and demand.

The collapse of state socialism in the former Soviet Union was due partly to the declining ability of the Communist Party to act as an effective agent of society and partly to the growing incompatibility of central planning with the requirements of a modern economy (see Myszta, 1993). Only a few years after centralized decision making was abolished in Russia, people are still faced with poverty, soaring unemployment, and high crime rates. Organized criminal groups have muscled their way into business and trade; many workers feel that their future is very dim. According to a thirty-year-old machinist in Moscow, “I was raised in a country that cared about its workers. . . . Life used to be simple, but we had a deal. We worked hard, and the company took care of the rest” (qtd. in Specter, 1994: A16). Ideas such as this remain strong in Russia, where, as one economic analyst noted,

Russia has always had this megalomania. The people who run things are from the old system, and they think if they develop five or six big companies, that will drive growth. What could happen with more entrepreneurs entering manufacturing is that it would create a middle class, which would have a huge influence on the social, political and economic life of Russia. (qtd. in Banerjee, 1999: C23)

### **Mixed Economies**

As we have seen, no economy is truly capitalist or socialist; most economies are mixtures of both. A **mixed economy combines elements of a market economy (capitalism) with elements of a command economy (socialism)**. Sweden, Great Britain, and France have mixed economies, sometimes referred to as **democratic socialism—an economic and political system that combines private ownership of some of the means of production, governmental distribution of some essential goods and services, and free elections**. For example, government ownership in Sweden is limited primarily to railroads, mineral resources, a public bank, and liquor and tobacco operations (Feagin and Feagin, 1997). Compared with capitalist economies, however, the government in a mixed eco-

nomy plays a larger role in setting rules, policies, and objectives.

The government is also heavily involved in providing services such as medical care, child care, and transportation. In Sweden, for example, all residents have health insurance, housing subsidies, child allowances, paid parental leave, and day-care subsidies. National insurance pays medical bills associated with work-related injuries, and workplaces are specially adapted for persons with disabilities. College tuition is free, and public funds help subsidize cultural institutions such as theaters and orchestras (“General Facts on Sweden,” 1988; Kelman, 1991). Recently, some analysts have suggested that the United States has assumed many of the characteristics of a *welfare state* (a state in which there has been extensive government action to provide support and services to its citizens) as it has attempted to meet the basic needs of older persons, young children, unemployed people, and persons with a disability (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

## **Perspectives on Economy and Work in the United States**

Functionalists, conflict theorists, and symbolic interactionists view the economy and the nature of work from a variety of perspectives. In this section, we first examine functionalist and conflict views, and then we focus on the symbolic interactionist perspective on job satisfaction and alienation.

### **Functionalist Perspective**

Functionalists view the economy as a vital social institution because it is the means by which needed goods and services are produced and distributed. When the economy runs smoothly, other parts of society function more effectively. However, if the system becomes unbalanced, such as when demand does not keep up with production, a maladjustment occurs (in this case, a surplus). Some problems can be easily remedied in the marketplace (through “free enterprise”) or through government intervention (such as paying farmers *not* to plant when there is an oversupply of a crop). However, other problems, such as periodic *peaks* (high points) and *troughs* (low points) in the business cycle, are more difficult to resolve. The *business cycle* is the rise and fall of economic activity relative to long-term growth in the economy (McEachern, 1994).

From this perspective, peaks occur when “business” has confidence in the country’s economic future. During a peak, or *expansion period*, the economy thrives: Plants are built, raw materials are ordered, workers are hired, and production increases. In addition, upward social mobility for workers and their families becomes possible. As a result, workers may hope their children will not have to follow their footsteps into the factory. Ben Hamper (1992: 13) describes how GM workers felt:

Being a factory worker in Flint, Michigan, wasn’t something purposely passed on from generation to generation. To grow up believing that you were brought into this world to follow in your daddy’s footsteps, just another chip-off-the-old-shoprat, was to engage in the lowest possible form of negativism. Working the line for GM was something fathers did so that their offspring wouldn’t have to.

The American Dream of upward mobility is linked to peaks in the business cycle. Once the peak is reached, however, the economy turns down because too large a surplus of goods has been produced. In part, this is due to inflation—a sustained and continuous increase in prices (McEachern, 1994). Inflation erodes the value of people’s money, and they are no longer able to purchase as high a percentage of the goods that have been produced. Because of this lack of demand, fewer goods are produced, workers are laid off, credit becomes difficult to obtain, and people cut back on their purchases even more, fearing unemployment. Eventually, this produces a distrust of the economy, resulting in a *recession*—a decline in an economy’s total production that lasts six months or longer. To combat a recession, the government lowers interest rates (to make borrowing easier and to get more money back into circulation) in an attempt to spur the beginning of the next expansion period.

### Conflict Perspective

Conflict theorists view business cycles and the economic system differently. From a conflict perspective, business cycles are the result of capitalist greed. In order to maximize profits, capitalists suppress the wages of workers. As the prices of products increase, workers are not able to purchase them in the quantities that have been produced. The resulting surpluses cause capitalists to reduce production, close factories, and lay off workers, thus contributing to the growth of the reserve army of the unemployed, whose presence helps reduce the wages of the remaining workers. In some situations, workers are replaced with machines or nonunionized workers. In

1994, for example, some trucking companies claimed that they could not afford to pay union truck drivers over \$17 an hour, so they hired nonunion freight carriers who made about \$9 an hour. Drivers such as Tim Hart claimed that pay was the only difference between his work and that of a union driver: “I bust my tail, doing the exact same thing the union drivers do. And they make double what I do. It bothers me. I mean, if those companies can afford to pay that much, why can’t mine?” (qtd. in D. Johnson, 1994a: 10).

Karl Marx referred to the propensity of capitalists to maximize profits by reducing wages as the *falling rate of profit*, which he believed to be one of the inherent contradictions of capitalism that would produce its eventual downfall. According to the political sociologist Michael Parenti, business is the economic system. Parenti believes that political leaders treat the health of the capitalist economy as a necessary condition for the health of the nation and that the goals of big business (rapid growth, high profits, and secure markets at home and abroad) become the goals of government (Parenti, 1996). In sum, to some conflict theorists, capitalism is the problem; to some functionalist theorists, capitalism is the solution to society’s problems.

### Symbolic Interactionist Perspective

Sociologists who focus on microlevel analyses are interested in how the economic system and the social organization of work affect people’s attitudes and behavior. Symbolic interactionists, in particular, have examined the factors that contribute to job satisfaction.

According to symbolic interactionists, work is an important source of self-identity for many people; it can help people feel positive about themselves, or it can cause them to feel alienated. *Job satisfaction* refers to people’s attitudes toward their work, based on (1) their job responsibilities, (2) the organizational structure in which they work, and (3) their individual needs and values (Hodson and Sullivan, 1995). Studies have found that worker satisfaction is highest when employees have some degree of control over their work, when they are part of the decision-making process, when they are not too closely supervised, and when they feel that they play an important part in the outcome (Kohn et al., 1990). Persons in management and supervisory positions may also feel more of a sense of ownership of the products or services produced by their organization. For example, Deborah Kent, the first African American woman to head a vehicle assembly plant



In the future, technology may make work easier and more productive, or it may increase worker alienation and unemployment. What are other advantages of new technologies? What are the disadvantages?

at the Ford Motor Company, feels such a sense of ownership that she sometimes asks strangers on the street how they like their vehicle if it was produced in her plant:

I feel this sense of ownership, responsibility and pride about every Econoline, Villager, and Quest on the road. Particularly since I know we're the only manufacturing plant producing those vehicles. And if something's wrong, I want to know about it. (qtd. in Williams, 1995: F7)

Job satisfaction is often related to both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Intrinsic factors pertain to the nature of the work itself, whereas extrinsic factors include such things as vacation and holiday policies, parking privileges, on-site day-care centers, and other amenities that contribute to workers' overall perception that their employer cares about them. In a recent study, the sociologist Ruth Milkman (1997) found that autoworkers were ambivalent about their jobs. Although they hated the chronic stress and humiliation of factory work, they liked the high pay and good benefits.

*Alienation* occurs when workers' needs for self-identity and meaning are not met and when work

is done strictly for material gain, not a sense of personal satisfaction. According to Marx, workers are resistant to having very little power and no opportunities to make workplace decisions. This lack of control contributes to an ongoing struggle between workers and employers. Job segmentation, isolation of workers, and the discouragement of any type of pro-worker organizations (such as unions) further contribute to feelings of helplessness and frustration. Some occupations may be more closely associated with high levels of alienation than others.

However, some studies have found that most U.S. employees are satisfied with their jobs. A 1997 *Inc./Gallup* survey found that 35 percent of employees are extremely satisfied with their place of employment, an additional 55 percent were satisfied, and only 10 percent were dissatisfied. In part, this was due to the fact that the vast majority (82 percent) reported that they had the opportunity to do every day what they do best, had a supervisor who appeared to care about them, and believed that their opinions mattered (Hopkins and Seglin, 1997).

## The Social Organization of Work

How do societies organize work? As societies grow larger in population and more complex in their division of labor, different categories of work are identified by government bureaucracies such as the U.S. Department of Labor or the U.S. Bureau of the Census. These classifications are often somewhat arbitrary and may not reflect the actual job descriptions and tasks associated with the work that many people do. For example, sociologists often find that Census categories such as "executive, administrators, and managerial" or "technical and related support" encompass such a wide range of jobs and differences in compensation that it is difficult to make generalizations from statistical data about workers in these employment categories.

### Occupations

**Occupations** are categories of jobs that involve similar activities at different work sites (Reskin and Padavic, 1994). Over 500 different occupations and 21,000 occupational specialties, ranging from motion picture cartoonist to drop-hammer operator, are currently listed by the U.S. Department of Labor (1993). Historically, occupations were classified as blue collar and white collar. Blue-collar workers were primarily factory and

craft workers who did manual labor; white-collar workers were office workers and professionals. However, contemporary workers in the service sector do not easily fit into either of these categories; neither do the so-called pink-collar workers, primarily women, who are employed in occupations such as preschool teacher, dental assistant, secretary, and clerk (Hodson and Sullivan, 1995).

Sociologists establish broad occupational categories by distinguishing between employment in the primary labor market and in the secondary labor market. The *primary labor market* consists of high-paying jobs with good benefits that have some degree of security and the possibility of future advancement. By contrast, the *secondary labor market* consists of low-paying jobs with few benefits and very little job security or possibility for future advancement (Bonacich, 1972). Some jobs in the secondary labor market are also characterized by hazardous working conditions and unscrupulous employers. Jane H. Lii, a Chinese-speaking journalist on an undercover assignment, described such problems when she briefly worked in a garment factory in Brooklyn, New York:

Seven days later, after 84 hours of work, I got my reward, in the form of a promise that in three weeks I would be paid \$54.24, or 65 cents an hour [much less than the minimum wage]. I also walked away from the lint-filled factory with aching shoulders, a stiff back, a dry cough, and a burning sore throat. (Lii, 1995: 1)

Like many workers in the lower tier of the secondary labor market, garment factory workers have relatively little formal education, may be working in violation of child labor laws, and may be recent immigrants who feel powerless to call attention to their plight. By contrast, professionals in the upper tier of the primary labor market are characterized by extensive education or training and some degree of control over their work.

## Professions

What occupations are professions? Athletes who are paid for playing sports are referred to as “professional athletes.” Dog groomers, pest exterminators, automobile mechanics, and nail technicians (manicurists) also refer to themselves as professionals. Although sociologists do not always agree on exactly which occupations are professions, they do agree that the number of people categorized as “professionals” has grown dramatically since World War II. According to the sociologist Steven Brint (1994), the contemporary professional middle class includes most doctors, natural scientists, engineers, computer



Professionals are expected to share their knowledge and display concern for others.

scientists, certified public accountants, economists, social scientists, psychotherapists, lawyers, policy experts of various sorts, professors, at least some journalists and editors, some clergy, and some artists and writers.

**CHARACTERISTICS OF PROFESSIONS** *Professions* are high-status, knowledge-based occupations that have five major characteristics (Freidson, 1970, 1986; Larson, 1977):

1. *Abstract, specialized knowledge.* Professionals have abstract, specialized knowledge of their field based on formal education and interaction with colleagues. Education provides the credentials, skills, and training that allow professionals to have job opportunities and assume positions of authority within organizations (Brint, 1994).
2. *Autonomy.* Professionals are autonomous in that they can rely on their own judgment in selecting the relevant knowledge or the appropriate technique for dealing with a problem. Consequently, they expect patients, clients, or students to respect that autonomy.
3. *Self-regulation.* In exchange for autonomy, professionals are theoretically self-regulating. All

professions have licensing, accreditation, and regulatory associations that set professional standards and that require members to adhere to a code of ethics as a form of public accountability. Realistically, however, professionals are often constrained by organizational power structures. Many work within large-scale bureaucracies that have rules, policies, and procedures to which professionals, like everyone else, must adhere. For example, physicians who are salaried employees in for-profit hospital corporations must follow bureaucratic rules, regulations, and controls (Ritzer, 1996).

4. *Authority.* Because of their authority, professionals expect compliance with their directions and advice. Their authority is based on mastery of the body of specialized knowledge and on their profession's autonomy: Professionals do not expect the client to argue about the professional advice rendered. Professionals also have authority over persons in subordinate occupations; for example, attorneys may delegate routine legal work, such as the completion of standard forms or documents, to paralegals or legal secretaries (Hodson and Sullivan, 1995).
5. *Altruism.* Ideally, professionals have concern for others, not just their own self-interest. The term *altruism* implies some degree of self-sacrifice whereby professionals go beyond their self-interest or personal comfort so that they can help a patient or client (Hodson and Sullivan, 1995). Professionals also have a responsibility to protect and enhance their knowledge and to use it for the public interest.

In the past, job satisfaction among professionals has generally been very high because of relatively high levels of income, autonomy, and authority. In the future, professionals may either become the backbone of a postindustrial society or suffer from "intellectual obsolescence" if they cannot keep up with the knowledge explosion (Leventman, 1981).

**REPRODUCTION OF PROFESSIONALS** Although higher education is one of the primary qualifications for a profession, the emphasis on education gives children whose parents are professionals a disproportionate advantage early in life (Brint, 1994). There is a direct linkage between parental education and income and children's scores on college admissions tests such as the SAT, as shown in Figure 13.3. In turn, test scores are directly related to students' ability to gain admission to colleges and universities, which serve as springboards to most professions.

Race and gender are also factors in access to the professions. Historically, people of color have been underrepresented. Today, as more persons from underrepresented groups have gained access to professions such as law and medicine, their children have also gained the educational and mentoring opportunities that are necessary for professional careers. Between 1980 and 1997, there was a 63-percent increase in the number of African Americans, age twenty-five and above, with at least four years of college education (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998b). However, by 1997, only 13 percent of African Americans and 10 percent of Latinos/as age twenty-five and above had graduated from college, as compared with 25 percent of whites and 42 percent of Asian Americans (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998b).

**DEPROFESSIONALIZATION** Certain professions are undergoing a process of *deprofessionalization* in which some of the characteristics of a profession are eliminated (Hodson and Sullivan, 1995). Occupations such as pharmacist have already been *deskilled*, as Nino Guidici explains:

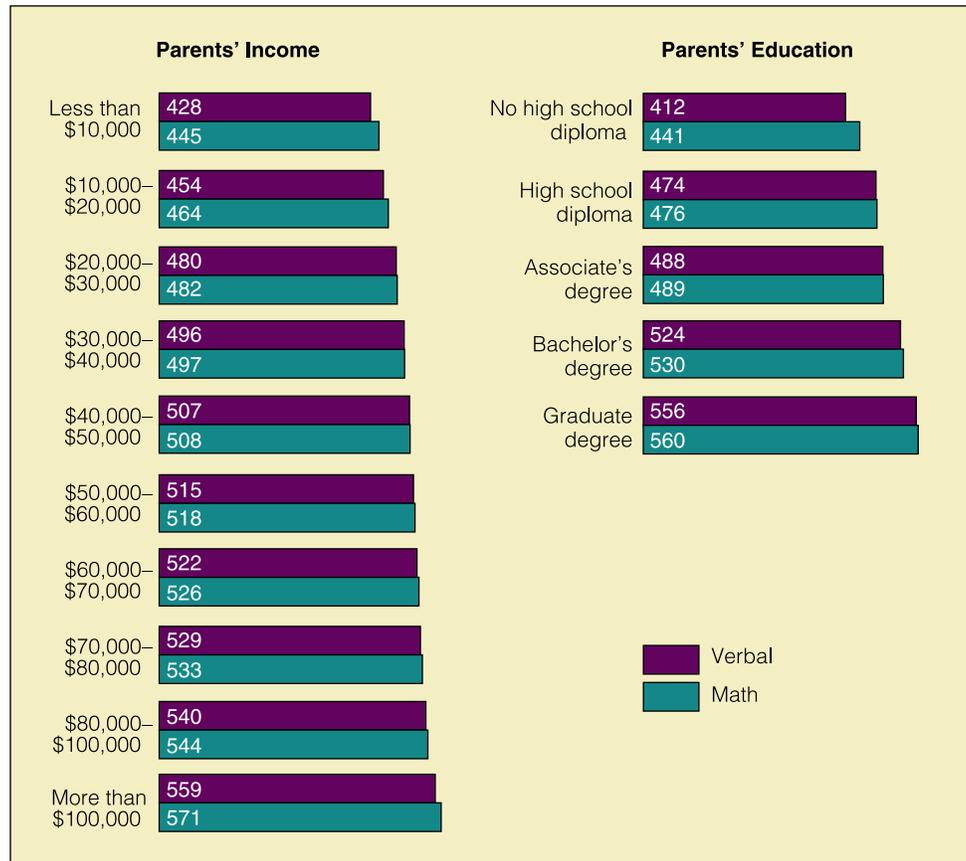
In the old days [people] took druggists as doctors. . . . All we do [now] is count pills. Count out twelve on the counter, put 'em in here, count out twelve more. . . . Doctors used to write out their own formulas and we made most of these things. Most of the work is now done in the laboratory. The real druggist is found in the manufacturing firms. They're the factory workers and they're the pharmacists. We just get the name of the drugs and the number and the directions. It's a lot easier. (qtd. in Terkel, 1990/1972)

However, colleges of pharmacy in many universities have fought against deprofessionalization by upgrading the degrees awarded to pharmacy graduates from the traditional B.S. in pharmacy to a Ph.D. This upgrading of degrees has also occurred over the past three decades in law schools, where the Bachelor of Laws (LL.B.) has been changed to the Juris Doctor (J.D.) degree.

### *Managers and the Managed*

A wide variety of occupations are classified as "management" positions. The generic term *manager* is often used to refer to executives, managers, and administrators (Hodson and Sullivan, 1995). At the upper level of a workplace bureaucracy are *executives* (Hodson and Sullivan, 1995). Today, 95 of every 100 senior management positions at the level of vice president and above are held by white men, even though white men constitute only about 29

**Figure 13.3 SAT Scores by Parents' Income and Education, 1997**



Source: College Board, 1997.

percent of the overall work force (Kilborn, 1995). *Administrators* often work for governmental bureaucracies or organizations dealing with health, education, or welfare (such as hospitals, colleges and universities, and nursing homes) and are usually appointed. White women are more likely to gain access to management positions at this level, especially middle management positions (Kilborn, 1995). *Managers* typically have responsibility for workers, physical plants, equipment, and the financial aspects of a bureaucratic organization. In recent years, more women and men of color have gained access to management positions at this level.

**MANAGEMENT IN BUREAUCRACIES** Managers are essential in contemporary bureaucracies, in which work is highly specialized and authority structures are hierarchical (see Chapter 6). Managers often control workers by applying organizational rules. Workers at each level of the hierarchy take orders from their immediate superiors and perhaps give

orders to a few subordinates. Upper-level managers are typically responsible for coordination of activities and control of workers. The *span of control*, or the number of workers a manager supervises, is affected by the organizational structure and by technology. Some analysts believe hierarchical organization is necessary to coordinate the activities of a large number of people; others suggest that it produces apathy and alienation among workers (Blauner, 1964). Lack of worker control over the labor process was built into the earliest factory systems through techniques known as scientific management (Taylorism) and mass production (Fordism).

#### SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT (TAYLORISM)

At the beginning of the twentieth century, industrial engineer Frederick Winslow Taylor revolutionized management with a system he called *scientific management*. In an effort to increase productivity in factories, Taylor did numerous *time-and-motion* studies of workers whom he considered to be rea-

sonably efficient. From these studies, he broke down each task into its most minute components to determine the “one best way” of doing each of them. Workers were then taught to perform the tasks in a concise series of steps. Skilled workers became less essential since unskilled workers could be trained by management to follow routinized procedures. The process of breaking up work into specialized tasks and minute operations contributed to the *deskilling* of work and shifted much of the control of knowledge from workers to management (Braverman, 1974). As this occurred, workers felt increasingly powerless (Westrum, 1991; Ritzer, 1996).

The differential piece-rate system, a central component of scientific management in which workers were paid for the number of units they produced, further contributed to the estrangement between workers and managers. Taylor believed that this system would reduce the antagonism that workers felt about direct supervision and control by managers. However, just the opposite often tended to occur: Workers felt distrustful and overworked because managers often increased the number of pieces required when workers met their quotas. Overall, scientific management amplified the divergent interests of management and workers rather than lessening them (Zuboff, 1988). And management became even more removed from workers with the advent of mass production.

**MASS PRODUCTION THROUGH AUTOMATION (FORDISM)** Fordism, named for Henry Ford, the founder of Ford Motor Company, incorporated hierarchical authority structures and scientific management techniques into the manufacturing process (Collier and Horowitz, 1987). Assembly lines, machines, and robots became a means of *technical control* over the work process (Edwards, 1979). The *assembly line*, a system in which workers perform a specialized operation on an unfinished product as it is moved by conveyor past their work station, increased efficiency and productivity. On Ford’s assembly line, for example, a Model T automobile could be assembled in one-eighth the time formerly required. The assembly line also allowed managers to control the pace of work by speeding up the line when they wanted to increase productivity. As productivity increased, however, workers began to grow increasingly alienated as they saw themselves becoming robot laborers (Collier and Horowitz, 1987).

The role of contemporary managers was strongly influenced by the development of the assembly line and mass production techniques, which made it possible to use interchangeable parts in a variety of products. According to the sociologist George Ritzer

(1996), the assembly line and machine technology have come to dominate even work settings such as fast-food restaurants. For example, Burger King uses a conveyor belt to cook hamburgers, and food is produced in assembly-line fashion. McDonald’s has a soft-drink dispenser with a sensor that shuts off when the glass is full so that the employee does not have to make this decision (Ritzer, 1996). What do managers do in such a highly rationalized, technically controlled setting? According to Jon DeAngelo, a McDonald’s manager,

You have to trust the computer to do a lot of the job. These computers . . . calculate the payrolls, because they’re hooked into the time clocks. My payroll is paid out of a bank in Chicago. . . . It’s so fast that the manager hasn’t got time to think about it. He has to follow the procedures like the crew. And if he follows the procedures everything is going to come out more or less as it’s supposed to. So basically the computer manages the store. (qtd. in Garson, 1989: 36)

Of course, managers also hire workers, settle disputes, and take care of other tasks, but in many work settings automation has dramatically deskilled their jobs (Garson, 1989; Zuboff, 1988; Ritzer, 1996).

Automation has also contributed to increased surveillance of employees. With linked or integrated computer networks, managers can measure productivity without employees even realizing it. Ceal Paoli, a word processing clerk, feels anxiety when she thinks about it:

With computers they can always look. And I hate for anyone to see something full of typos. You can type so fast now, you fly with these new machines. But what it looks like before you correct it! And what a table looks like before you format it! My boss would get scared if he saw it on the screen. . . . So what I do . . . if I’d be embarrassed to have somebody see it half done, I change the document’s title to something like XMASMEMO. . . . If I couldn’t hide my unfinished files, I would be working at a glass desk. Would you want everyone to be able to see right into your drawers? (qtd. in Garson, 1989: 213–214)

Whereas early forms of management involved direct supervision of workers, technology now makes it possible for a limited number of managers to control many more workers (see Zuboff, 1988).

### *The Lower Tier of the Service Sector and Marginal Jobs*

Positions in the lower tier of the service sector are part of the secondary labor market, characterized by low wages, little job security, few chances for advancement, higher unemployment rates, and very



Occupational segregation by racial group and gender is clearly visible in personal service industries, such as fast-food chains and the hotel industry. Women and people of color are disproportionately represented in marginal jobs such as fast-food server or hotel maid—jobs that typically do not meet societal norms for minimum pay, benefits, or security.

limited (if any) unemployment benefits. Typical lower-tier positions include janitor, waitress, messenger, sales clerk, typist, file clerk, migrant laborer, and textile worker. Large numbers of young people, people of color, recent immigrants, and white women are employed in this sector (Callaghan and Hartmann, 1991). In a study of Mexican American women, for example, the sociologist Denise Segura (1994) concluded that people are often channeled into lower-tier jobs based on their race/ethnicity, class, and gender. In addition, schooling and employment training programs rarely provide Mexican American women with a sense that they have employment options outside those traditionally ascribed to Latinas (Segura, 1994).

According to the employment norms of this country, a job should (1) be legal; (2) be covered by government work regulations, such as minimum standards of pay, working conditions, and safety standards; (3) be relatively permanent; and (4) provide adequate pay with sufficient hours of work each week to make a living (Hodson and Sullivan, 1995). However, many lower-tier service sector jobs do not meet these norms and are therefore marginal. **Marginal jobs differ from the employment norms of the society in which they are located;** examples in the U.S. labor market include personal service and private household workers.

**PERSONAL SERVICE WORKERS** More than eleven million workers are employed in personal service industries. Almost six million of them are employed in eating and drinking places, about two million in hotels, and another three million in laundries, beauty shops, and household service, primarily maid service (Hodson and Sullivan, 1995).

Service workers are often viewed by customers as subordinates or personal servants. Frequently, they are required to wear a uniform that reflects their lowly status as a waiter/waitress, fast-food server, maid, or porter. Occupational segregation by race and gender (see chapters 10 and 11) is clearly visible in personal service industries. In 1990, for example, 23.9 percent of all employed Latinas age sixteen and over were employed in service occupations, as compared with 16.9 percent of white (non-Latina) females and 9.2 percent of white (non-Latino) males (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1992).

**PRIVATE HOUSEHOLD WORKERS** Household service work has shifted from domestics who work full time with one employer to part-time workers who may work several hours a week in the homes of several different employers. Private household workers include launderers, cooks, maids, housekeepers, gardeners, babysitters, nannies, chauffeurs, and butlers. These workers often must travel long distances to get to work, and having to rely on public transportation can add hours to their workday.

Household work is marginal: It lacks regularity, stability, and adequacy. The jobs are excluded from most labor legislation, the workers are not unionized, and employers often feel that they can flaunt any rules or regulations. Many employers pay cash in order to avoid payroll taxes and Social Security; the jobs typically have no unemployment, health insurance, or retirement benefits (Hodson and Sullivan, 1995). In many cities, an increasing number of household workers are recent immigrants, some of whom are undocumented and could easily be deported by immigration authorities if their whereabouts were known.



Workers in low-income nations—often women or young girls—make or assemble a number of products sold in the United States and other high-income nations. These workers in Mexico are assembling computers that will probably be imported into the United States. How do jobs such as this benefit workers in low-income nations? How might work such as this be to their detriment?

Consequently, these workers are among the most powerless. They cannot rely on any resources, including local law enforcement, to protect them from abuse—whether financial, physical, or sexual—by their employers.

**INTERNATIONALIZATION OF MARGINAL JOBS** Some manufacturing jobs may also be marginalized. Marginal jobs are more likely to be found in peripheral industries than in core, or essential, industries. Peripheral industries tend to be in highly competitive industries (such as garment or microelectronics manufacturing) that operate in markets where prices are subject to sudden, intense fluctuations and where labor is a significant part of the cost of the goods sold (Hodson and Sullivan, 1995).

Although “high-tech” occupations (such as engineering and computer technology) are viewed by some as the wave of the future, many jobs in this field are marginal. Assembly jobs in high-tech industries are often boring, low-paying, and hazardous. These industries are also more likely to export jobs to other regions of the country or to low-income nations, where labor costs are lower, as an employer in an assembly plant in the microcomputer industry explained:

If I had to pay higher wages, I wouldn't stay in business here [in the “Silicon Valley” in California]. It's not that I couldn't “afford” it per se, but the profit margin would be smaller, obviously. In Singapore, labor costs one-fifth of what it does here. (qtd. in Hossfeld, 1994: 74)

The term *global assembly line* is used to describe situations in which corporations hire workers, usually girls and young women, in low-income nations

at very low wages to work under undesirable and sometimes hazardous conditions. Despite the grim work environment, such jobs represent a temporary respite from grinding poverty for many workers (Ehrenreich and Fuentes, 1981; *Women Working Worldwide*, 1991).

To gain the same benefits of “cheap labor,” some U.S. companies hire women who have recently migrated to this country. This hiring practice makes it possible for management to pay workers less and to divide and control them by race and nationality (Hossfeld, 1992, 1994). As a production manager and hiring supervisor in a Silicon Valley shop that assembles printed circuit boards stated,

I have a very simple formula for hiring. You hire right, and managing takes care of itself. Just three things I look for in hiring [entry-level manufacturing operatives]: small, foreign, and female. You find these three things and you're pretty much automatically guaranteed the right kind of work force. These little foreign gals are grateful to be hired—very, very grateful—no matter what. (qtd. in Hossfeld, 1994: 65)

In her study of immigrant women workers in Silicon Valley, the sociologist Karen J. Hossfeld (1994: 69) noted that “capitalist economic development utilizes and thrives on racism as a method of labor division and control.” Gender segregation is also readily apparent in this type of work. Although women make up nearly 50 percent of the work force in Santa Clara (California) County, they constitute 85–90 percent of the operative workers in high-tech industries. However, only 18 percent of the managers and 17 percent of professional employees in the area are women (Hossfeld, 1994).

Some women may become homeworkers, especially if they cannot find adequate child care or are not located near a work site. Homework, like piece-work in previous centuries, moves the workplace into women's homes and may expose them to exploitation in the form of lower wages and dangerous working conditions. In some home-based semiconductor work, for example, workers are exposed to hazardous substances that can contaminate sewage systems (DuRivage and Jacobs, 1989).

### Contingent Work

**Contingent work is part-time work, temporary work, or subcontracted work** that offers advantages to employers but that can be detrimental to the welfare of workers. Contingent work is found in every segment of the work force, including colleges and universities, where tenure-track positions are fewer in number than in the past and a series of one-year, non-tenure-track appointments at the lecturer or instructor level has become a means of livelihood for many professionals (Mydans, 1995). The federal government is part of this trend, as is private enterprise. In addition, the health care field continues to undergo significant change, as physicians, nurses, and other health care workers are increasingly employed through temporary agencies (Rosengarten, 1995).

Employers benefit by hiring workers on a part-time or temporary basis; they are able to cut costs, maximize profits, and have workers available only when they need them. As some companies have cut their work force, or downsized, they have replaced “staffing table” employees who had higher salaries and full benefit packages with part-time and hourly employees who receive lower wages and no benefits. Although some people voluntarily work part time (such as through job sharing and work sharing), many people are forced to do so because they lack opportunities for full-time employment. About six million persons, or 29 percent of the twenty-one million part-time workers, hold part-time jobs involuntarily. Most part-time workers are women, teenagers, and older persons; women constitute 75 percent of all part-time workers (Applebaum and Schettkat, 1989).

Temporary workers are the fastest-growing segment of the contingent work force, and agencies that “place” them have increased dramatically in number in the last decade. The agencies provide workers on a contract basis to employers for an hourly fee; workers are paid a portion of this fee. Temporary workers usually have lower wages and fewer benefits than permanent, full-time employ-



Hiring contingent workers frequently increases the profitability of many corporations. Other companies make their profits by furnishing these contingent workers to the corporations. What message does this ad convey to corporate employers?

ees in the same field. Among manual laborers who earn the minimum wage or slightly more, very little is left after the temporary agency takes its fee.

Subcontracted work is another form of contingent work that often cuts employers' costs at the expense of workers. Instead of employing a large work force, many companies have significantly reduced the size of their payrolls and benefit plans by **subcontracting**—an agreement in which a corporation contracts with other (usually smaller) firms to provide specialized components, products, or services to the larger corporation. Companies ranging from athletic shoe manufacturers to high-tech industries have found that it is more cost efficient (and profitable) to subcontract some of their work to small contractors. For example, a construction company may enter into a contract to build an airport or commercial building and then subcontract components of the work (such as electrical, plumbing, and carpentry) to other firms. Hiring and paying workers on the project becomes the responsibility of the subcontractor, not the general contractor. The employment practices of some sub-



Despite widespread media reports of low unemployment rates in recent years, many people remain unemployed or underemployed and spend significant amounts of time seeking a job. Many other people fear that they will lose their jobs and face the same situation.

contractors are unethical, if not illegal. In the garment industry in El Paso, Texas, for example, subcontractors' plants are referred to as *talleres de hambre* (workshops of hunger) (Myerson, 1994).

Many contingent workers experience *underemployment*, as do other workers when their job is permanent but provides fewer hours of work than they desire or when their qualifications are far greater than those required for the job. Age, race, gender, and disability are factors frequently associated with underemployment and unemployment (Shapiro, 1993).

## Unemployment

Even when national or regional unemployment rates are low, there are still people looking for a job. As companies restructure, downsize, or go out of business, tens of thousands are at least temporarily jobless. Disputes with employers cause some workers to quit a job and look for another one, and other workers may leave a job because they believe that they need time to find a job that pays more money than they are currently making (Hight, 1999).

There are three major types of unemployment—cyclical, seasonal, and structural. *Cyclical unemployment* occurs as a result of lower rates of production during recessions in the business cycle; although massive layoffs initially occur, some of the workers will eventually be rehired, largely depending on the length and severity of the recession. *Seasonal unemployment* results from shifts in the demand for workers based on conditions such as the weather (in agriculture, the construction industry, and tourism) or the season (holidays and summer vacations). Both of these types of unemployment tend to be relatively temporary in nature.

By contrast, structural unemployment may be permanent. *Structural unemployment* arises be-

cause the skills demanded by employers do not match the skills of the unemployed or because the unemployed do not live where jobs are located (McEachern, 1994). This type of unemployment often occurs when a number of plants in the same industry are closed or when new technology makes certain jobs obsolete. For example, workers previously employed in the Appalachian coal industry or in the midwestern steel industry found that their job skills did not transfer to other types of industries when the plants closed. Workers who lose their jobs when a factory closes down or moves or when their positions or shifts are abolished experience worker displacement. Between 1979 and 1983, over five million workers were displaced, and another four million lost their jobs between 1985 and 1989 (Amott, 1993). Those who were employed in secondary sector factory jobs (toy and microcomputer assembly lines, for example) were the most likely to become unemployed, primarily because they lacked union protection and typically did not have the education and skills necessary to find better jobs. Structural unemployment often results from capital flight—the investment of capital in foreign facilities, as previously discussed. Today, many workers fear losing their jobs, exhausting their unemployment benefits (if any), and still not being able to find another job.

The *unemployment rate* is the percentage of unemployed persons in the labor force actively seeking jobs. In 1999 the U.S. unemployment rate was 4.2 percent, and workers who have historically suffered from high unemployment rates made some gains. For example, unemployment among African Americans, Latinas/os, women, and workers with high school educations or less were at near-historic lows (Nasar, 1999). However, like other types of “official” statistics, unemployment rates may be misleading. For example, Bureau of Labor Statistics data do not include the approximately 3.2

million people who are working part time because full-time work is unavailable or the 0.3 million who are “discouraged” workers (Nasar, 1999: B3). Individuals who become discouraged in their attempt to find work and who are no longer actively seeking employment are not counted as unemployed.

*Unemployment compensation* provides unemployed workers with short-term income while they look for other jobs. Since this concept was first introduced in the 1930s, federal laws have set the guidelines and minimum standards for the program, which is administered by the states. Although some states exceed the minimum standards, many provide the bare minimum of benefits required by law. For a person to acquire benefits, his or her eligibility must be established. In many states, for example, a person must have worked at least twenty weeks to be eligible. Workers who quit their jobs without “good cause” or who are fired for misconduct or are engaged in a work stoppage due to a labor dispute are usually not eligible for benefits. Fear of losing unemployment benefits, coupled with high rates of underemployment and unemployment, appears to have limited worker resistance and activism in recent years.

## Worker Resistance and Activism

In their individual and collective struggles to improve their work environment and gain some measure of control over their work-related activities, workers have used a number of methods to resist workplace alienation. Many have also joined labor unions to gain strength through collective actions.

### Labor Unions

U.S. labor unions came into being in the mid-nineteenth century, as previously discussed. Unions have been credited with gaining an eight-hour workday, a five-day work week, health and retirement benefits, sick leave and unemployment insurance, and workplace health and safety standards for many employees. Most of these gains have occurred through *collective bargaining*—negotiations between employers and labor union leaders on behalf of workers. In some cases, union leaders have called strikes to force employers to accept the union’s position on wages and benefits. While on strike, workers may picket in front of the workplace to gain media attention, to fend off “scabs” (nonunion workers) who might take over their jobs, and in some cases to discourage customers from purchasing products made

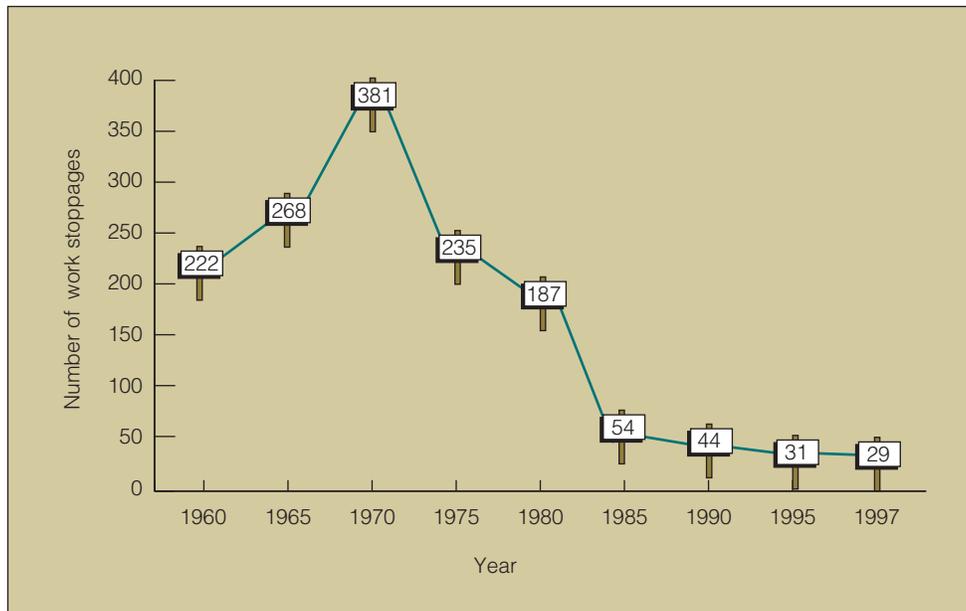


Seeking to improve economic and social opportunities for farm workers, the late César Chávez held rallies and engaged in other protest activities in an effort to better the workers’ lives.

or sold by their employer. In recent years, strike activity has diminished significantly as many workers have feared losing their jobs. As Figure 13.4 shows, in 1997 only twenty-nine strikes, or work stoppages, involving more than 1,000 workers were reported, as compared with significantly higher numbers in the 1960s and 1970s. The number of workers involved in the actions declined from a peak of more than 2.5 million in 1971 to 339,000 in 1997 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998b). However, a 1997 strike by the 185,000 members of the Teamsters Union against United Parcel Service (UPS), the nation’s largest package-shipping company, virtually closed UPS down until a settlement was reached under which the union gained many of the benefits it had sought from the company.

Although the overall *number* of union members in the United States has increased since the 1960s, primarily as a result of the growth of public employee unions (such as the American Federation of Teachers), the *proportion* of all employees who are union members has declined. Today, about 17 percent of all U.S. employees belong to unions or employee associations. Part of the decline in union participation has been attributed to the structural shift away from manufacturing and manual work and toward the service sector, where employees have been less able to unionize.

Historically, labor unions contributed to the employment gains of people of color. In 1997, for example, the highest rates of union affiliation were among African American men (20 percent) and women (16 percent), as compared with white men (13 percent) and women (11 percent), and Latinos (13 percent) and Latinas (11 percent) (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998b). African Americans have higher rates of union affiliation because of extensive public sector employment, where workers are more likely to be unionized (Costello and

**Figure 13.4 Major Work Stoppages in the United States, 1960–1997**

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Compensation and Conditions*, monthly.

Stone, 1994). In the past, many African Americans moved into the middle class through unionized jobs in heavy industry. More recently, the loss of many of these jobs has been especially damaging for people of color (Higginbotham, 1994).

A “spillover” effect exists between union and nonunion firms in the area of wages and benefits; nonunion firms must compete for labor with union firms. Some nonunion firms pay higher wages in order to dissuade union membership. However, the spillover effect may work in the opposite direction as well: If unionized workers lose wages and benefits, nonunion workers may also see a lowering of their wages and benefits (Amott, 1993). Usually, union members earn higher wages than nonunion workers in comparable jobs. In 1997 union workers averaged over \$8,000 a year more in wages than did nonunion workers (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998b). Women in unions earn an average weekly wage that is 1.3 times that of nonunionized women.

Although labor union membership has declined in most industrialized countries, including the United States, unions are still highly influential in labor negotiations involving wages and working conditions in Scandinavia, Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland, and much of Eastern Europe (Greenhouse, 1997). In most industrialized countries, collective bargaining by unions has been dominated by men. However, in countries such as Sweden, Ger-

many, Austria, and Great Britain, women workers have gained some important concessions as a result of labor union participation (Cook, Lorwin, and Daniels, 1992).

### ***Absenteeism, Sabotage, and Resistance***

Absenteeism is one means by which workers resist working conditions that they consider to be oppressive. Ben Hamper (1992: 47) describes how employees were chastised in a meeting for their absenteeism at the Flint, Michigan, GM plant:

The Plant Manager introduced the man in charge of overseeing worker attendance. . . . He didn't seem happy at all. The attendance man unveiled a large chart illustrating the trends in absenteeism. . . . He pointed to Monday. . . . Monday was an unpopular day attendance-wise. He moved the pointer over to Tuesday and Wednesday which showed a significant gain in attendance. The chart peaked way up high on Thursday. Thursday was pay night. Everybody showed up on Thursday.

“Then we arrive at Friday,” the attendance man announced. A guilty wave of laughter spread through the workers. None of the bossmen appeared at all amused. Friday was an unspoken Sabbath for many of the workers. Paychecks in their pockets, the leash was temporarily loosened. To get

a jump on the weekend was often a temptation too difficult to resist.

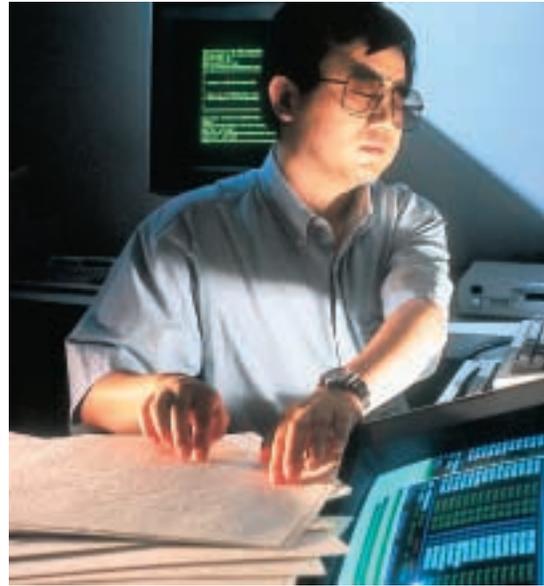
Other workers use sabotage to bring about informal work stoppages. The phrase “throwing a monkey wrench in the gears” originated with the practice of workers “losing” a tool in assembly line machinery. Sabotage of this sort effectively brought the assembly line to a halt until the now-defective piece of machinery could be repaired. Industrial sabotage has been described as an expression of workers’ deep-seated frustrations about poor work environments (Feagin and Feagin, 1997).

Although most workers do not sabotage machinery, a significant number do resist what they perceive to be oppression from supervisors and employers. In a study of Asian American women who work in low-status occupations such as hotel housekeepers, the sociologist Esther Ngan-Ling Chow (1994) found that many of the women felt they had little to lose if they chose to resist or rebel. Onyoung, one of the Korean American women interviewed by Chow, described how she felt:

Many of us depend on this job to support our families. When I am blamed for the things that I do not do and have no part of it, I will yell my guts out to protest. At most I will lose this job. I want my dignity, to be an honorable person, which my parents taught me. (qtd. in Chow, 1994: 214)

Resistance helps people in lower-tier service jobs survive at work (Dill, 1988; Chow, 1994). In interactions with their employers, domestic workers attempt to maintain their personal dignity and to gain mastery of situations in which they are defined as objects, not as human beings. Scholars have documented resistance by African American domestic workers (Rollins, 1985; Dill, 1988), Chicana private housekeepers (Romero, 1992), and Japanese domestic helpers (Glenn, 1986). According to Chow (1994: 218), many Asian American women become “active agents and goal-oriented actors, capable of taking charge of their own lives” in their interactions with supervisors and co-workers. Workers who feel that they can take charge of their own lives may be less likely to experience high levels of alienation than do workers who feel powerless over their plight.

Studies of worker resistance are very important to our understanding of how people deal with the social organization of work. Previously, workers (especially women) have been portrayed as passive “victims” of their work environment. As we have seen, this is not always the case for either women or men; many workers resist problematic situations and demand better wages and work conditions.



Workers with disabilities are able to engage in a wide variety of occupations when they are offered the opportunity to do so. Despite a visual impairment, this computer software developer is able to perform his job with the assistance of instructions in Braille.

## Employment Opportunities for Persons with a Disability

An estimated 48 million persons in the United States have one or more physical or mental disabilities that differentially affect their opportunities for employment. This number continues to increase for several reasons. First, with advances in medical technology, many people who formerly would have died from an accident or illness now survive, although with an impairment. Second, as more people live longer, they are more likely to experience diseases that may have disabling consequences (Albrecht, 1992). Third, persons born with serious disabilities are more likely to survive infancy because of medical technology. However, less than 15 percent of persons with a disability today were born with it; accidents, disease, and war account for most disabilities in this country.

In 1990 the United States became the first nation to formally address the issue of equality for persons with a disability. When Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), this law established “a clear and comprehensive prohibition of discrimination on the basis of disability.” Combined with previous disability rights laws (such as those that provide for the elimination of

architectural barriers from new federally funded buildings and for the maximum integration of schoolchildren with disabilities), the ADA is a legal mandate for the full equality of people with disabilities.

Despite this law, about two-thirds of working-age persons with a disability are unemployed today (Shapiro, 1993). Most persons with a disability believe they could work if they were offered the opportunity. However, even when persons with a disability are able to find jobs, they earn less than persons without a disability (Yelin, 1992). On the average, workers with a disability make 85 percent (for men) and 70 percent (for women) of what their co-workers without disabilities earn, and the gap is growing (Shapiro, 1993). Studies have shown a thirty-year overall decline in the economic condition of persons with disabilities (Yelin, 1992; Burkhauser, Haveman, and Wolfe, 1993). The problem has been particularly severe for African Americans and Latinos/as with disabilities (Kirkpatrick, 1994). Among Latinos/as with disabilities, only 10 percent are employed full time; those who work full time earn 73 percent of what white (non-Latino) persons with disabilities earn.

What does it cost to “mainstream” persons with disabilities? Disability expenditures for 1986 were estimated to be \$169.4 billion for the working-age population, taking into account money spent by both the government and the private sector (Albrecht, 1992). However, between 1978 and 1992, Sears, Roebuck found that the average cost of an accommodation for a worker with a disability was only \$126, with some accommodations involving little or no cost (such as flexible schedules, back-support belts, rest periods, and changes in employee work stations). Other accommodations cost about \$1,000, with the largest single cost being \$14,500 each for special Braille computer displays for visually impaired employees (Noble, 1995). As employment opportunities change in the global economy, it is important that employers use common sense and a creative approach to thinking about how persons with disabilities can fit into the marketplace (see Box 13.4).

## The Global Economy in the Future

How will the U.S. economy look in the future? What about the global economy? Although sociologists do not have a crystal ball with which to predict the future, some general trends can be suggested.

### *The U.S. Economy*

Many of the trends we examined in this chapter will produce dramatic changes in the organization of the economy and work in the twenty-first century. U.S. workers may find themselves fighting for a larger piece of an ever-shrinking economic pie that includes a trade deficit and a national debt of over \$5 trillion. Even as the gender and racial-ethnic composition of the labor force continues to diversify, many workers will remain in race- and/or gender-segregated occupations and industries. At the same time, workers may increasingly be fragmented into two major labor market divisions: (1) those who work in the innovative, primary sector and (2) those whose jobs are located in the growing secondary, marginal sector. In the innovative sector, increased productivity will be the watchword as corporations respond to heightened international competition. In the marginal sector, alienation will grow as temporary workers, sometimes professionals, look for avenues of upward mobility or at least a chance to make their work life more tolerable. Labor unions will be unable to help workers unless the unions embark on innovative programs to recruit new members, improve their image, and recover their former political clout (Hodson and Sullivan, 1995). However, in spite of these problems, most analysts predict that the United States will remain a major player in the world economy (see P. Kennedy, 1993).

### *Global Economic Interdependence and Competition*

Most social analysts predict that transnational corporations will become even more significant in the global economy of the twenty-first century (see Korten, 1996). As they continue to compete for world market share, these corporations will become even less aligned with the values of any one nation. However, those who advocate increased globalization typically focus on its potential impact on industrialized nations, not the effect it may have on the 80 percent of the world's population that resides in low-income and middle-income nations. Persons in low-income nations may become increasingly baffled and resentful when they are bombarded with media images of Western affluence and consumption; billions of “have nots” may feel angry at the “haves”—including the engineers and managers of transnational companies living and working in their midst (P. Kennedy, 1993).

The chasm between rich and poor nations will probably widen as industrialized countries



### Box 13.4 You Can Make a Difference

#### *Creating Access to Information Technologies for Workers with Disabilities*

People are shocked I can do this. They have never imagined a blind person could find a use for a computer, much less make a business out of it.

—Cathy Murtha, a partner in Magical Mist Creations, a company that designs and evaluates sites on the World Wide Web (qtd. in Sreenivasan, 1996: C7)

If you are a person with a visual impairment or a person who plans to supervise workers—some of whom may be visually impaired—you can make a difference in the workplace by learning about new technologies that make jobs more accessible for workers with disabilities. For example, new computer hardware and software programs and the Internet are having a profound effect on workers who are visually impaired. According to Larry Scadden, technological consultant for persons with disabilities at the National Science Foundation, “The Internet has changed forever the lives of blind people, mainly because it provides independent access to information” (qtd. in Sreenivasan, 1996: C7). The goal of making the Internet and the World Wide Web accessible to visually impaired persons requires several things:

- Text must be in such a form that it can be read aloud by a speech synthesizer with text-to-speech software or be output in a Braille format.
- The user must be able to navigate the screen with a keyboard, not a mouse.
- Good descriptions must be given of photos and graphics that the user will not be able to see.

To find out more about creating greater access to information for persons with visual impairment and other disabilities, contact the following agencies:

- American Council of the Blind, 1155 15th St., NW, Suite 720, Washington, DC 20005. (202) 393-3666 or (800) 424-8666.
- American Foundation for the Blind, 15 W. 16th St., New York, NY 10011. (212) 620-2000 or (800) 232-5463.

On the Internet:

- The Americans with Disabilities Act page provides information on the act and links to disability-related sites, organized by subject:

<http://www.public.iastate.edu/~sbilling/ada.html>

- Blind- and Deaf-Specific Resources includes resources targeted to vision- and hearing-impaired persons and links to general disability web sites such as web-ABLE, Handsnet, and Disability Net, as well as assistive technology sites such as Apple’s Disability Solutions Online:

<http://198.234.201.48/spedpointers.html>

- Electronic Resources Regarding Persons with Disabilities is a list of sites pertaining to people with disabilities. Computer information and disability information are available:

<http://www.gallaudet.edu/~cadsweb/disability.html>

- International Disability Information Resources is a site connecting to other links that feature organizations, guides, and directories to assist persons with disabilities. Among them are the Alliance for Technology Access and the Handicap Information Resources:

<http://www.contact.org/disabled.html>

To reach web sites that are “user-friendly” for persons with visual impairments, contact the following sites:

- Caldwell College:

<http://www.njin.net/caldwell/front.html>

- On Island Communications:

<http://www.onisland.com/>

- Cathy’s Newstand:

<http://www2.cdepot.net/~mist/>

- Young Opportunities Inc.:

<http://www.voicenet.com/~youngopp/>

- Ann Morris Enterprises:

<http://tribeca.ios.com/~annm2/>

- The Outpost:

[http://users.deltanet.com/users/tdb/public\\_html/](http://users.deltanet.com/users/tdb/public_html/)

purchase fewer raw materials from developing countries and more products and services from one another. This change will take place because raw materials of all sorts are no longer as important to manufacturers in developed nations. For example, oil may become less important as a power source because of the development of solar power and controlled nuclear fusion. Initial losers in the global marketplace may be the Arab states of the Middle East, where economies will become less stable and elites and workers much poorer

when the petroleum age comes to an end (P. Kennedy, 1993).

In recent years, the average worker in the United States and other high-income countries has benefited more from global economic growth than have workers in lower-income countries. For example, the average citizen of Switzerland has an income several hundred times that of a resident of Ethiopia. More than a billion of the world’s people live in abject poverty; for many, this means attempting to survive on less than \$370 a year (P. Kennedy, 1993).



The fate of high-income nations is increasingly linked to the globalization of markets. In the late 1990s, a major decline in prices on Asian stock exchanges created reverberations that were felt in economic markets throughout the world.

A global workplace is emerging in which telecommunications networks will link workers in distant locations. In the developed world, the skills of some professionals will transcend the borders of their countries. For example, there is a demand for the services of international law specialists, engineers, and software designers across countries. Even as nations become more dependent on one another, they will also become more competitive in the economic sphere. Although the prospects for greater economic equality do not appear hopeful, we should not be unduly pessimistic. According to the sociologist G. William Domhoff (1990: 285), “No one foresaw the New Deal [during the Depression], and no one expected a massive civil rights movement [in the 1950s and 1960s]. If history teaches us anything, it is that no one can predict the future.”

## Chapter Review

### What is the primary function of the economy?

The economy is the social institution that ensures the maintenance of society through the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services.

### What are the three sectors of economic production?

Economic production is divided into primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors. In primary sector production, workers extract raw materials and natural resources from the environment and use them without much processing. Industrial societies engage in secondary sector production, which is based on the processing of raw ma-

terials (from the primary sector) into finished goods. Postindustrial societies engage in tertiary sector production by providing services rather than goods.

### How do the major contemporary economic systems differ?

Throughout the twentieth century, capitalism, socialism, and mixed economies were the main systems in industrialized countries. Capitalism is characterized by ownership of the means of production, pursuit of personal profit, competition, and limited government intervention. Socialism is characterized by public ownership of the means of production, the pursuit of collective goals, and centralized decision making. In mixed economies, elements of a capitalist, market economy are combined with elements of a command, socialist economy. These mixed economies are often referred to as democratic socialism.

### What are the functionalist, conflict, and symbolic interactionist perspectives on the economy and work?

According to functionalists, the economy is a vital social institution because it is the means by which needed goods and services are produced and distributed. Conflict theorists suggest that the capitalist economy is based on greed. In order to maximize profits, capitalists suppress the wages of workers, who, in turn, cannot purchase products, making it necessary for capitalists to reduce production, close factories, lay off workers, and adopt other remedies that are detrimental to workers and society. Symbolic interactionists focus on the microlevel of the economic system, particularly on the social organization of work and its effects on workers' attitudes and behavior. Many workers experience job satisfaction when they like their job responsibilities and the organizational structure in which they work and when their individual needs and values are met. Alienation occurs when workers do not gain a sense of self-identity from their jobs and when their work is done completely for material gain and not for personal satisfaction.

### What are occupations, and how do they differ in the primary and secondary labor markets?

Occupations are categories of jobs that involve similar activities at different work sites. The primary labor market consists of well-paying jobs with good benefits that have some degree of security and the possibility for future advancement. The secondary labor market consists of low-paying jobs with few benefits and very little job security or possibility for future advancement.

### What are the characteristics of professions?

Professions are high-status, knowledge-based occupations characterized by abstract, specialized knowledge, autonomy, authority over clients and subordinate occupational groups, and a degree of altruism.

### What are marginal jobs?

Marginal jobs differ in some manner from mainstream employment norms: Jobs should be legal, be covered by government regulations, be relatively permanent, and

provide adequate hours and pay in order to make a living. Marginal jobs fall below some or all of these norms.

### What is contingent work?

Contingent work is part-time work, temporary work, or subcontracted work that offers advantages to employers but may be detrimental to workers. Through the use of contingent workers, employers are able to cut costs and maximize profits, but workers have little or no job security.

## Key Terms

capitalism 402  
 conglomerates 405  
 contingent work 418  
 corporations 403  
 democratic socialism 409  
 economy 397  
 interlocking corporate directorates 405  
 labor union 403  
 marginal jobs 416  
 mixed economy 409  
 occupations 411  
 oligopoly 404  
 primary labor market 412  
 primary sector production 397  
 professions 412  
 secondary labor market 412  
 secondary sector production 398  
 shared monopoly 404  
 socialism 407  
 subcontracting 418  
 tertiary sector production 399  
 transnational corporations 403  
 unemployment rate 419

## Questions for Critical Thinking

1. If you were the manager of a computer software division, how might you encourage innovation among your technical employees? How might you encourage efficiency? If you were the manager of a fast-food restaurant, how might you increase job satisfaction and decrease job alienation among your employees?
2. Using Chapter 2 as a guide, design a study to determine the degree of altruism in certain professions. What might be your hypothesis? What variables would you study? What research methods would provide the best data for analysis?
3. What types of occupations will have the highest prestige and income in 2020? The lowest prestige and income? What, if anything, does your answer reflect about the future of the U.S. economy?

## Media Resources

### Internet Exercises



1. Visit the Adam Smith Institute (<http://www.cyberpoint.co.uk/asi/>). Read through some of Adam Smith's writings. How do his ideas of capitalism compare with the way you see capitalism operating today?
2. Use Yahoo (<http://www.yahoo.com>) or Lycos (<http://www.lycos.com>) to search for *labor unions*. What union seems to be the most well represented on the Internet? Visit the Bureau of Labor Statistics (<http://stats.bls.gov/blshome.html>) and see how well this Internet presence reflects the numbers of union members.
3. Go to the Intel web site (<http://www.intel.com/education/college/index.htm>) and click on "Cool Links for Students." View some of the links to see how colleges are "going high tech," and describe the effect you think this might have on students' employment opportunities. Are race, ethnicity, class, gender, and choice of academic major factors in determining which students may have greater access to computer technology on campus? Why or why not?

### Wadsworth Sociology Resource Center, Virtual Society



*Virtual Society* (<http://sociology.wadsworth.com>), the companion web site for *Sociology in Our Times*, provides numerous helpful hints and useful features created specifically for this book in order to enrich your learning experience in your introductory sociology course. At the *Virtual Society* site you will find hints on how to use the Internet. The site also maintains a list of highly relevant, updated sociological links called hypercontents, which parallel each chapter of the text. To help you study for exams, you can take online quizzes for each chapter. There is even a link to sites that will help you prepare your résumé and offer you information on possible careers in sociology. If you have not already bookmarked *Virtual Society*, you should do so now to help you study throughout the course.

### InfoTrac College Edition

The following central sociological topics are all discussed in this chapter. You can find relevant articles for these as well as other topics in this chapter by using InfoTrac College Edition, the online library.

Labor unions

Underemployment

Xenophobia

To aid in your search and to gain useful tips, see the "Student Guide to InfoTrac College Edition" on the *Virtual Society* web site.

## Interactions: A Sociology CD-ROM

Review and test your knowledge on what you have learned from this chapter by using the interactive CD-ROM, *Interactions*. *Interactions* includes an in-depth review of the chapter, enriching images, and links to relevant web sites you can access through your computer's Internet browser. After you have reviewed each chapter, test your understanding by taking the chapter quiz. If some of your answers are incorrect, *Interactions* will direct you to the pages in the chapter that cover the concepts you should review.

## Suggested Readings

These books provide more information about capitalism:

Peter L. Berger. *The Capitalist Revolution: Fifty Propositions About Prosperity, Equality, and Liberty*. New York: Basic Books, 1986.

Harry Braverman. *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974.

Karl Marx. *Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*. Ed. Thomas B. Bottomore and Maximilian Rubel. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964.

Easy-to-read books that provide interesting insights on the sociology of work include the following:

Sharlene Hesse-Biber and Gregg Lee Carter. *Working Women in America: Split Dreams*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Robin Leidner. *Fast Food, Fast Talk: Service Work and the Routinization of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

George Ritzer. *The McDonaldization of Society: An Investigation into the Changing Character of Contemporary Social Life*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge, 1996.

Studs Terkel. *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do*. New York: Ballantine, 1985.

Shoshana Zuboff. *In the Age of the Smart Machine: The Future of Work and Power*. New York: Basic Books, 1988.

The relationship among race, gender, and work is explored in these books:

Teresa L. Amott and Julie A. Matthaei. *Race, Gender, and Work: A Multicultural Economic History of Women in the United States*. Boston: South End Press, 1991.

Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill (Eds.). *Women of Color in U.S. Society*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994.

Steve Fox. *Toxic Work: Women Workers at GTE Lenkurt*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991.

Jacqueline Jones. *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present*. New York: Basic Books, 1985.

Recent scholarly works on labor unions include these:

Samuel B. Bacharach, Ronald Seebe, and David Walsh (Eds.). *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*. Greenwich, CT: JAI, 1993.

Berch Berberoglu (Ed.). *The Labor Process and the Control of Labor: The Changing Nature of Work Relations in the Late Twentieth Century*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993.

William J. Puette. *Through Jaundiced Eyes: How the Media View Organized Labor*. Ithaca, NY: ILR, 1992.

