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Q6(a)

Trace the changing nature of organisation of work in capitalist society over the years

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2017 · Sociology GS 1 · 20 marks · Works and Economic Life

Works and Economic Life: Social organization of work in different types of society; Formal and informal organization of work; Labour and society.

Core demand of the question

- Trace the changing nature of organisation of work in capitalist society over the years
- Keep the tracing within a 20-mark length

Revision summary

Capitalist work organisation changed from manufacture and factory to line, office, and platform.

Marx analysed cooperation, machines, and the working day.

Taylor and Ford split skill and standardised the product.

Weber and Mills described office and white-collar layers.

India's contractors, informality, and gig apps skip a full Fordist stage.

Introduction

Capitalist work is organised to extract surplus under changing technical and legal forms. From the workshop to the mill, the assembly line, the office, and the platform, the wage relation remains. How time, skill, and control are bundled has shifted.

Body

Early manufacture and the factory

- **Karl Marx** described cooperation, manufacture, and modern industry: tools leave the worker, and the machine sets the pace.
- The working day became a political and legal battlefield, which **Marx** analysed as a limit on absolute surplus value.

Scientific management and Fordism

- F. W. Taylor split conception from execution. Henry Ford added the moving line and a high wage for a standardised product.
- Harry **Braverman** read this as a long deskilling of craft.

Bureaucracy and the white-collar layer

- **Max Weber**'s rational-legal office organised files and careers.
- C. Wright Mills mapped white-collar work as a new middle of sales and clerks.

Post-Fordism and flexibility

- **From the late twentieth century:** outsourcing, just-in-time, and lean production.
- Women entered paid work in large numbers, yet unpaid care stayed a parallel factory, as Ann Oakley showed.

Informal and platform capitalism, with India

- Jan **Breman**'s circulation of labour, contractors, and putting-out never waited for a Fordist golden age in India.
- Gig apps now organise piece-time with algorithmic control and little social security.
- PLFS files show persistence of self-employment and casual work beside a thin formal core.

What did not change

- The need to control labour time and to cheapen reproduction of labour power.
- Conflict over the working day reappears as unpaid overtime and log-in hours.

Flow diagram

Marx factory -> Taylor Ford
Taylor Ford -> Weber office
Weber office -> Flexibility informal platform
Flexibility informal platform -> Control of time still

Conclusion

Organisation of capitalist work moved from craft and mill through Taylorism and **Fordism** to flexible, informal, and platform forms. **Marx**, **Braverman**, and **Weber** name the classic controls. Indian informality shows that **Fordism** was never the universal middle chapter.

Facts & figures

Marx on the working day

Legal and political limits on the length of labour as a class issue.

Braverman

Labor and Monopoly Capital: deskilling under scientific management.

Fordism

Mass production plus a wage that could buy the mass product, in a historically specific core.

Breman

Indian labour circulation as a durable capitalist organisation, not a lag.