

## Answer Key for In-Text Questions

### Chapter 12

**Title:** Chapter 12 Questions for Review

**Question/Prompt:** 1. How do mass production, consumption, communication, and distribution create a consumer society?

**Correct Answer Example(s):**

Your answer should include or relate to the following points:

- There can't be a consumer society without a full-fledged revolution in mass production that produces a great deal of stuff for people to buy. Mass production emerged in response to a rapidly growing demand for goods. This demand grew so big that production could satisfy it only by expanding significantly.
- There can't be a consumer society without a full-fledged revolution in mass consumption. In other words, there must be many consumers with money to spend and the desire to spend it. People typically have money to spend when they live in societies with a high standard of living, such as Canada. This high standard of living requires massive public spending, state wealth redistribution, and minimum wage laws.
- There can't be a consumer society without a full-fledged revolution in mass communication. Every second in Canada, mass media try to tell people what to want, buy, and enjoy. They suggest people can achieve personal happiness by buying goods and services. Today, this urgent sales campaign happens all the time, on a global scale. When you can instantly communicate product information to billions of people around the world, you can easily encourage people to spend their money. And this global advertising also fosters an endless search for pleasure and novelty through buying.
- Finally, there can't be a consumer society without a full-fledged revolution in mass distribution. At its core, consumerism is about world commerce. Global flows of people, materials, and capital are needed to produce this mass culture of buying and selling. In turn, those global flows mean political, commercial, and sometimes military imperialism. These global flows began 500 years ago and our current financial and commercial world system has been around since the end of the Second World War.

**Question/Prompt:** 2. What is McDonaldization?

**Correct Answer Example(s):**

McDonaldization combines four elements that separately are already familiar to us. First, this approach includes a concern with efficiency—reducing the time to complete a task, such as filling an order. Second is calculability—getting workers to quantify how much they’re delivering, and letting customers know, in numbers, how much they’re getting versus how much they’re paying. Third is predictability—standardizing price, product, and service delivery from one location to another. All work tasks must be repetitive, routine, easily taught, and quickly learned. The final element is control—having all employees trained in the same way. This means easy replacement of workers by other workers and human workers by technologies.

**Question/Prompt:** 3. How do Marx and Weber’s definitions of class differ?

**Correct Answer Example(s):**

According to Karl Marx, class refers to a group of people who share the same relationship to the means of production, or to capital. In his theory, capitalists (or bourgeoisie) and workers (or proletariat) are the two principal classes in a capitalist industrial society. According to Max Weber, class refers to a group of people who share a common economic position, based on (among other things) income, property, and authority. Weber also focused his attention on power, not class, by identifying two other sources of power in industrial society: parties and status groups.

**Question/Prompt:** 4. How has neoliberalism affected work in Canada today?

**Correct Answer Example(s):**

Your answer should include or relate to the following points:

- Neoliberalism is an ideology or philosophy of government widely understood to promote global manufacturing. By encouraging the transfer of jobs to other countries, and in other ways, neoliberalism undermines the strength of trade unions. This, in turn, undermines the unions’ capacity to safeguard workers’ interests within the labour market, employment relationship, and society.
- Neoliberalism increases workplace danger, since it assumes an individual responsibility to avoid risk. When employees are injured, it is seen as a result of their own lack of discipline and neglect. This effect on job safety and security is part of a worldwide transition to less safe work. For example, the increase of precarious work in industrial countries harms the health of workers.
- Increasingly, employers seek to increase their profits at the expense of workers’ health. The growth and resurgence of precarious work drives down wages. It also poses severe hazards to the health of workers.

**Question/Prompt:** 5. What is meant by the phrase “feminization of work”?

**Correct Answer Example(s):**

The “feminization of work” refers to not only the increase of women in the workforce but also the increase of precarious employment, in which women predominate. Precarious employment here includes various part-time jobs (for example, as a cashier in a liquor store) and jobs with a high worker turnover (for example, as a burger flipper at McDonald’s). In other words, some of the gender equality that women have achieved in the past few decades has been through the downward mobility of men into similarly precarious jobs.

**Title:** Chapter 12 Questions for Critical Thought

**Question/Prompt:** 1. Why do you think unionization has declined in Canada and elsewhere? How might we link this decline to the increase in nonstandard work?

**Correct Answer Example(s):**

Your answer should include or relate to the following points:

- A necessary result of neoliberalism and globalization has been a decline in the power of labour unions. Union membership has declined over the last 30 years, especially in male-dominated (largely, manufacturing) occupations that have moved overseas. This drop reflects dramatic changes in Canada’s labour movement, workforce demographics, labour laws, and economic structure.
- Today, people who work for a wage or a salary find themselves in an increasingly precarious position, in part due to globalization and automation. A main problem is consumerism: people, as consumers, are contributing to the continued loss and degradation of paid work. As employees, they want wages as high as possible and a workplace near home. As consumers, however, they want the goods they buy to be as cheap as possible and, if necessary, produced far away or by machines. So, we will not resolve the problems of modern work—if ever—until people reunite the two sides of their own personalities, as workers and consumers. That said, we cannot ignore worker exploitation: so long as workers are not paid enough for their labour, they cannot pay for more costly good.
- Globalization and automation have weakened the status and security of wage workers—so has the rise of an uncontrollable financial class and the decline of jobs for unskilled and semiskilled workers, and so has the ethos of consumerism. A result is the weakening of both labour unions and traditional class-based politics.

**Question/Prompt:** 2. Do you think that modern technology and social media have increased or decreased alienation in contemporary society? Why or why not? Describe what you mean by “alienation.”

**Correct Answer Example(s):**

Your answer should include or relate to the following points:

- A central property of capitalism is alienation, which occurs when exploitative labour processes rob workers of satisfying or fulfilling work. According to Marx, capitalism distances workers from production, from themselves, and from others. This alienation or estrangement is a form of dehumanization.
- Today, most work is exploitative and alienating, not self-actualizing. Modern technology like automation and assembly lines exploit and alienate workers from the products of their labour and from their coworkers. Further, workers are dehumanized and treated as mere instruments to achieve someone else’s goal of power or enrichment.
- Communication technologies that facilitate the rise of virtual work can alienate workers from traditional offices and from their coworkers.
- Social media exploit user data and make profits through targeted advertising.
- Some argue that social media decrease alienation by facilitating content creation, sharing, and engagement with peers. However, if social media is used to gain social capital, it can become alienating. Further, users can become addicted to social media and become alienated from their everyday lives.

**Question/Prompt:** 3. What do you think will be the long-term effects of the shift toward nonstandard work? Is a system based on precarious employment sustainable? Why or why not?

**Correct Answer Example(s):**

Your answer should include or relate to the following points:

- Nonstandard work is the fastest-growing form of employment in high-income countries today. This type of work is often unpredictable, precarious, dangerous, and unsustainable. It also lacks the benefits of permanent employment, such as paid sick days and vacation, health insurance, and pension.
- The rise in nonstandard work arrangements, such as part-time work, has even affected full-time workers. With fewer full-time jobs, employers expect more of full-time workers. They force many to work longer hours, often unpaid, to compensate for the shortage of workers on site.
- In the new “gig economy,” individuals work for themselves and stitch together a living income from multiple part-time jobs.
- Union membership, which provides many benefits to workers, has declined over the last 30 years. This drop reflects dramatic changes in Canada’s labour movement, workforce demographics, labour laws, and economic structure.
- Uncontrolled automation and globalization have weakened the status and security of wage workers—so has the rise of an uncontrollable financial class and the decline of jobs

for unskilled and semiskilled workers, and so has the ethos of consumerism. A result is the weakening of both labour unions and traditional class-based politics.

**Question/Prompt:** 4. How have advances in science and technology, like the Industrial Revolution, electricity, and social media, changed the work environment? Do you believe the experience of modern-day workers is better or worse than that of workers who lived before these advances? Explain your answer.

**Correct Answer Example(s):**

Your answer should include or relate to the following points:

- The Industrial Revolution markedly changed people’s lives. For many in the nineteenth century, it changed life for the worse, making it dark, dingy, and dangerous. In the shift to an industrial society, subsistence farming began to disappear, replaced by commercial farming and industrial agriculture. Workers began to produce goods in large factories that rely on machinery for production, and jobs and workers became increasingly specialized. More and more people moved to cities to work in factories.
- For some, the division and specialization of labour transforms societies and is the basis of the “wealth of nations.” For others, it creates new problems of social consensus and integration.
- Industrial production that breaks down the tasks of individual workers into small, repetitious steps that workers can carry out without any wasted time is dehumanizing and alienating. Automation, like globalization, displaces workers through unemployment and allows employers to ramp up their pursuit of profit at any cost.
- Too much specialization poses a threat to social solidarity. If few people make a living in the same way, members of the community will not feel a sense of unity based on their common experiences, feelings, values, and beliefs. This can lead to a condition of anomie: normlessness causing feelings of doubt and insecurity.
- There has been a worldwide transition to less safe work. The increase of precarious work in industrial countries harms the health of workers. Today, precarious work is familiar once again in North America and other poorly regulated Western economies. Increasingly, employers seek to increase their profits at the expense of workers’ health. The growth and resurgence of precarious work drives down wages. It also poses severe hazards to the health of workers.
- In today’s knowledge economy, The workforce has shifted from a focus on physical work (such as building roads or working on an automobile assembly line) to knowledge-intensive forms of work. Such work typically requires advanced education and specialized technical or scientific knowledge.
- Some think that digital technology will make work become less exhausting, more satisfying, and more humane. Mechanization might lead workers to expect more leisure time, more job autonomy, fewer repetitive tasks, more opportunity to spend time on interesting work, and a more satisfying work experience.

- That said, computer technology has harmful as well as positive effects. For one, technology increases workplace inequality. This is due to computers replacing people at the bottom of the work hierarchy or making their skills redundant. More and more, organizations reduce the number of full-time and permanent jobs to increase their profitability and flexibility. Though technology is not the sole cause of this trend, it makes many people more readily replaceable. Workers need periodically to upgrade their skills to remain competitive in a continuously changing job market.
- New communication technologies allow workers separated by great physical distances to remain in real-time contact with one another, either over a wire or in cyberspace. These technologies have resulted in the rise of virtual work: doing one's work away from the traditional office—for example, at home—using computer technology.
- Investors and managers have sent jobs overseas, driven down wages, and increased the demand for nonstandard work arrangements.

**Question/Prompt:** 5. If you were designing an education system to prepare young people for the workforce as it exists today, what would you teach and how would you teach it?

**Correct Answer Example(s):**

Your answer should include or relate to the following points:

- It is important to teach information and communication technologies (ICTs) skills. Today's rate of technological development is astounding, and new information and communication technologies appear continually in the workplace. However, the rate at which these new technologies appear may be too fast for most employees to keep up, resulting in a growing skills divide. Further, employers still need many people to invent, run, and repair technology in the workplace.
- It is important to teach people to have a cooperative outlook. Under conditions of organic solidarity, the specialized division of labour means no one can live without the contributions made by other people. We may not know all the people we depend on, but we need them, and we know that we do.
- Teaching young people the importance of unions can help improve pay, job security, and working conditions.
- It is important to teach young people about the role of neoliberalism, globalization, and technological advancements on increasing global inequality and poor working conditions.
- Teaching with an intersectional lens is important to highlight the interlocking disadvantages experienced by disadvantaged groups, such as low-income people, racialized people, women, and Indigenous Peoples.