

The Changing World of Work

Lecturer: Jon Peirce

Bio:

JON PEIRCE is a labour and social historian, essayist, and community theatre actor and playwright with extensive experience in the world of work. That experience has included significant periods working as labour relations practitioner, researcher, and professor, and has resulted in numerous publications. Forced to reinvent himself in industrial relations after early experience as a journalist and English professor, Jon did a master's degree (MIR) at Queen's, and then spent nearly five years at the Economic Council as a researcher-writer-editor. Following further graduate work at the University of Toronto, Jon taught Canadian and international industrial relations at Memorial University of Newfoundland. On his return to Ottawa, he taught industrial relations and human resource management part-time at Carleton and at the University of Ottawa, and spent a year and a half as research director for the Advisory Committee on Labour-Management Relations in the Federal Public Service, more commonly known as the Fryer Committee after its founder, public sector unionist John Fryer. Jon then spent the final 11 years of his professional career working for the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada (PIPSC), serving first as a researcher and then as a labour relations officer, with a one-year detour into policy. After his retirement in 2011, Jon taught a wide variety of Seniors' College of Nova Scotia courses, acted in many community theatre plays, and served on a number of local boards before relocating to Gatineau, Quebec in 2020.

For publications, Jon is the author of *Work Less: New Strategies for a Changing Workplace*, a book on work hours which Dundurn Press will be bringing out in early 2024. His previous publications include *Canadian Industrial Relations*, an introductory industrial relations textbook published by Pearson Education Canada which ran to three editions, as well as a broad range of articles and reviews on work-related subjects, which have appeared in such periodicals as the *Ottawa Citizen*, *Globe & Mail*, *Toronto Star*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and *Kingston Whig-Standard*. He's a long-time board member of Ottawa Independent Writers and was for many years a member of the Canadian Industrial Relations Association.

Series Description:

The world of work has recently undergone huge, perhaps irreversible changes. What have some of those changes been, and what is their significance, both to those still working and to those of us who have left the work force?

In this course, we'll look at changes in the world of work that have occurred since the middle of the 20th century. We will consider, among other things, changes in the type of work being done, in the

equipment we use to get work done, and in the schedules according to which we work, as well as changes in the people doing the work and in our overall attitude toward work and its significance to our lives as a whole. We will even look at changes in what people wear to work, and how they socialize at work. While major emphasis will be put on shifts occurring since the COVID-19 pandemic, and as a result of that pandemic, we'll also consider the important roles played by the introduction of new technologies and the move to a more diverse work force.

The class will be a mix of lecture and discussion. During the first hour, I will take the lead by introducing the subject or subjects under consideration. The second hour, after the break, will be devoted to discussion, sharing of students' experiences, or some combination of the two. I will be happy to entertain suggestions for topics for discussion or sharing.

Schedule of Topics:

1. The Way We Were

What work was like prior to about 1980—what kinds of work we did, what equipment we used to do it, how we felt about our work, how and with whom we socialized, and more.

2. How and When Things Started to Change

Though we didn't all realize it at the time, major changes in the world of work began to occur during the 1980s. What form did those changes take, and how did they affect us physically, emotionally, and in our attitude toward work?

3. COVID and Work: Part I

Changes occurring during the COVID pandemic's first year, and what the effect of these changes has been on workers and on society at large.

4. COVID and Work: Part II

Changes occurring since the pandemic's first year, with emphasis on work schedules, work location, and workplace technology (whether used on site or off). Can we expect to return to any sort of "old normal" when it comes to work? Will there be a "new normal," and, if so, what will that new normal look like?

5. Work and the Arts

From time immemorial, work has inspired some of the best efforts of creative and performing artists, from poets and novelists to dancers, painters, and musicians. After taking a look at some of this rich harvest, we briefly consider the type of art that we might expect to emerge from a post-pandemic world of work.

6. The Future of Work?

Course wrap-up. Does work, at least as we have known it, have a future? Some say that artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies will likely be giant job-killers. Others suggest that there will still be plenty of jobs in the future, but that they may be quite different from the jobs generally available now. For this class, I'll keep my introductory talk shorter than usual, to allow plenty of time for free-wheeling discussion, and for a wrap-up discussion which will take in where we have been and what approach a similar course might take another time.