



March 2002

Sustaining the New Economy: Work, Family and Community in the Information Age. Martin Carnoy.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

(2002) "Sustaining the New Economy: Work, Family and Community in the Information Age. Martin Carnoy," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 29 : Iss. 1 , Article 21.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol29/iss1/21>

This Book Note is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Work at ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.



of a social democratic disposition have a quite different view of state collectivism.

Although the authors would have offered a more sophisticated account of liberation sociology if they had contrasted their own position with that of others who are equally passionate about their beliefs, they have written an engaging and informative text which will inspire many students. The authors provide excellent case study material and their frequent biographic references to sociologists who have campaigned for social betterment in the past are instructive. They also refer to other disciplines that have informed critical analysis and action. However, the neglect of social work is a glaring omission. Indeed, several historically important social workers who have made a significant contribution to social development are coopted and described as sociologists. The authors would have enriched their book if they had taken the time to refer to social work's historic commitment to the values that they espouse. Despite its shortcomings, this book will show students that sociology has been involved in promoting progressive social change. Its account of participatory research and other forms of left-progressive sociological involvement is thorough and informative.

Martin Carnoy, *Sustaining the New Economy: Work, Family and Community in the Information Age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000. \$39.95 hardcover.

Like the social changes that accompanied industrialization, changes in social institutions characterize the current Information Age. Modifications in the organization of work, the structure of the family and the community characterize life in information-based societies. Focusing on this issue, Carnoy examines similarities and differences in the social changes occurring in OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries. He argues that the nature of these changes and the ways governments respond to them, will determine which OECD economies succeed and which do not.

Global economic competition has forced companies to change the nature of work in order to survive. As a result, many have disaggregated work into discrete tasks that can be completed by

temporary, part-time or contract workers. However, this trend results in less stable employment for workers and a decrease in the firm's ability to function as a social institution. Thus, in contrast to firms of the previous industrial era, which frequently provided lifetime employment, social wages and a focus for social network formation, few Information Age firms provide such benefits.

Changes in the workplace also affect the family. As workers compete as economic actors, they are required to be flexible, spend long hours on the job or engaged in activities not compatible with family life. These changes, and related changes in family structure, make it difficult for the family to fulfill its role as the primary institution facilitating the inter-generational transmission of knowledge. Ironically, this is occurring precisely at a time when national economic success will depend on knowledge transmission.

Sustaining the Economy contributes to the literature on the information economy in several ways. First, it presents a great deal of data demonstrating the amount of variation in the changes taking place in OECD countries. Second, it shows that the relationship between technological change and changes in the social institutions of work, family and community are quite complex and rarely linear. Third, it emphasized the role of knowledge and the production of knowledge as essential to any nation that aspires to succeed in the new economy. Finally, it supplements its analysis with important policy propositions. Carnoy argues that a strong state is essential to guide nations through the current economic transformation. However, large state bureaucracies are no longer viable and like private firms, national governments must be flexible. In addition, policies that strengthen the family, schools and other organizations and address issues of parental leave, developing high quality child care centers and retooling schools to serve as centers of education for the entire community, are urgently needed.

The book addresses the economic and social changes faced by many societies as they cope with the new, information economy. Although the focus is on OECD countries, the global nature of the information economy makes it likely that social changes related

to the current transformation will affect other nations as well, even if different patterns emerge. This interesting and informative book will be helpful in understanding the way the world's rich nations are responding to the new economy. It will also help in the formulation of policy responses that may facilitate effective transitions in other parts of the world.