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5. Some Social Effects of the Industrial Revolution

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5. Some Social Effects of the Industrial Revolution

Abstract

The demands made by industrialization upon the worker were often severe, whether in England or France, Russia or the United States. He had to give up the somewhat desultory habits of work which had usually sufficed him and his ancestors from the beginnings of time. Significantly enough, one of Arkwright's first steps after establishing his factory was to draw up a code of discipline designed to keep his employees steadily on the job. The worker also gave up the ownership of his tools, if he had not already done so under the domestic system, and was thus left a proletarian, with nothing to bring the employer but his labor. This was an asset which afforded him little in the way of bargaining power, especially as the employers began using women and children, the latter in England often recruited from nearby orphanages as an alternative source of cheap labor. [excerpt]

Keywords

Contemporary Civilization, Industrialization, Industrial Revolution, Low Wages, Child Labor, Worker Safety, Working Conditions, Workers Unions, Supply and Demand, Factory Workers, Slums

Disciplines

History | Labor History | Social History | Women's History

Comments

This is a part of [Section XIV: The Industrial Revolution, Classical Economics, and Economic Liberalism](#). The [Contemporary Civilization](#) page lists all additional sections of *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man*, as well as the [Table of Contents](#) for both volumes.

More About Contemporary Civilization:

From 1947 through 1969, all first-year Gettysburg College students took a two-semester course called Contemporary Civilization. The course was developed at President Henry W.A. Hanson's request with the goal of "introducing the student to the backgrounds of contemporary social problems through the major concepts, ideals, hopes and motivations of western culture since the Middle Ages."

Gettysburg College professors from the history, philosophy, and religion departments developed a textbook for the course. The first edition, published in 1955, was called *An Introduction to Contemporary Civilization and Its Problems*. A second edition, retitled *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man*, was published in 1958 and 1960. It is this second edition that we include here. The copy we digitized is from the Gary T. Hawbaker '66 Collection and the marginalia are his.

Authors

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5. Some Social Effects of the Industrial Revolution *Know this*

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An enormous adjustment for the worker and his family was made necessary by the practical demand that they give up their rural existence and live near the factory. Rural life had long had its widespread poverty and misery, but to many these seemed to be of a less serious order than the poverty and misery of the burgeoning industrial city. Here large numbers of people were crowded together along streets and alleys that soon came to be called slums. Society was painfully slow in providing these people with the sanitary facilities necessary to control disease, the recreational facilities for a more wholesome life,

or the public education which could perhaps assist them to improve their lot. Lacking the economic power which strong trade unions could give and often without political power, even the right to vote, the proletariat was divided in its opinions. As the control of society passed from the landed aristocracy to the bourgeoisie, and the gap between the upper and lower classes seemed if anything to widen, some proletarians in torpor resigned themselves to their fate. Others provided a fertile field for the growth of bitter discontent.

It must be said that the conscience of Western society did at length awaken to the many gross inequities which industrialization had fostered. This awakening took many forms. For example, novelists and poets condemned the pursuit of wealth by individuals without regard to the interests of others. Beginning in 1833, the British Parliament passed a series of acts inaugurating effective regulation of working conditions in factories. This use of the power of government to influence the balance between capital and labor suggested a method of reforming capitalism which many later championed. Meanwhile, the Utopian Socialists urged a reorganization of society on a co-operative basis. The Marxian Socialists predicted that the proletariat would soon seize control from the bourgeoisie and establish an equitable social order of their own. These various proposals will be discussed in later chapters.