

The impact of the industrial revolution on british society and economy

[History](#), [Revolution](#)



The impact of the Industrial Revolution on British society and economy There is no doubt that the Industrial Revolution plays a central role in the modern British history. The structure of British society has forever changed by the impact and consequences of Industrial Revolution. The Industrial Revolution is often stated as the increase of the number of factories, the exercise of steam power in a wide range of area and the mass-production produced by new technology in the course of 1750 to 1850 (Lane, 1978: 72).

Engles (1986: 37) argued that the Industrial Revolution's mainly development were the invention of the steam engine and the cotton industry. As the improvement of technology, the steam engine could produce more power with less energy than before. As a result, it leads to the improvement and industrialization in other areas (Lane, 1978). Hobsbawm (1968: 53) viewed cotton to be the principal revolution, it played a leader role in the British economy throughout the process of industrialisation. The use of equipment in factory took place in the cotton industry firstly, aimed to match the society's demands by increase production (Porter, 1999).

The Industrial Revolution changed economic, political and social factors. This essay will analyze the impact of the Industrial Revolution on society and economy, the content will dived into parts. In the first stage, it will argue the positive impact of the Industrial Revolution on economy and urbanisation. Second part will focus on the impact on society, and dived into four points: overcrowding due to the urbanisation, phenomenon of child labour, poor working conditions and movement by working class to improve their condition and political rights.

The collusion will be given out after analyze, the tremendous profit gained from the Industrial Revolution by the upper class and government, however working class suffered from the impact of industrialization in early stage. Pre-industrial life had considered to be short of sources and hardly meet people's demands. Hobbes (1968: 186) once describes man's life as "poor, nasty, brutish and short". Due to the invention of the steam engine, the total output of coal rose from 3 million tons to 49 million tons in the course of 1740 to 1850 (Hobsbawm, 1968: 53).

There was a massive expansion of cities and industrial towns centred around the new factories, for example, Manchester used to be a small town with almost 28,000 residents in 1780. By 1850, the population had increased to more than 300,000 (Hobsbawm, 1968: 40). As the Industrial Revolution took place at first in Britain, then spread to other Euro nations later. Contrast with British and Europe in the percentage of total population in cities, with the process of urbanisation, British recorded significantly increase and even twice than Europe in 1850 (More, 2005: 5).

As a result of the Industrial Revolution, in 1840 the UK's national wealth nearly doubled compare to data in 1790, however the most of the benefit were gained by upper class. This remarkable growth and benefit was one of the social change that happened in the course of the Industrial Revolution. The laissez-faire economics which advocated by Adam Smith, became widely accepted and contribute to the flourish of capitalism. By that time, Government seldom regulated or published policies to limit the business (Porter, 1999).

On the contrary, it allowed the middle-class to engaged into whichever process was lead to the most benefit, despite the safety and health of their employee (Stearns, 1998). Although the revolution provided profitable to Britain, unfortunately, the large amount of population did not share the benefit. During the early parts of the Industrial Revolution, it had significantly negative impact on society. Hobsbawm (1968) argued that no matter what advancements occurred reached the public slowly and often could not compensate for the added burdens of industrial employment or the growing wealth gap in society.

Overcrowding mainly caused by city migration which people moved from countryside. Most British used to live in small villages before the Industrial Revolution, working in agriculture or being craftsmen (Porter, 1999). People often lived and worked in family unit, presenting everything by their own hand. Porter (1999) points out that around 75% British lived in the village, and most people ensure their life by farming. As a result of the Industrial Revolution, this situation no longer continued.

The new law required that all owner's of grazing grounds must afford the expense for fence, which lead to many farmers go bankrupt, at the meantime, many hand weavers unemployed because the new machines capability of produce big amount outputs (Stearns, 1998). Consequently, it forced many people find jobs in new factories, and moved to cities where the factory located (Porter, 1999). It is also important to state that although they worked for long hours, they only get paid little money. As they could not

afford the higher living expenses in big cities, they had to move into the slum house.

It is necessary to point out that over 12, 000 people lived in 1, 400 houses, nearly one family shared per room (included about nine people at average) (Engles, 1968: 62). This lead to several distress like air pollution, typhoid and cholera to threaten people's lives (Stearns, 1998). Dean (1983: 104) also describes that the living conditions were fearful, in the course of early year of Industrial Revolution, over half of children aged under five years old dead because of the infectious diseases in overcrowding area in town.

With the raise in population, the phenomenon of child labour became more obvious in the course of the Industrial Revolution. According to Galbi (1994), in Britain about two out of three of workers in 143 water-powered cotton factories were children in 1788. Stearns(1998) states that as a consequence of Revolution, around three quarter of early workers are children and women. It could be due to several reasons. First, employers could pay children less money than adults even if their productive forces were equally (Dean, 1983).

Secondly, as Sadler states that compare to adults, children are easier to control (Galbi, 1994). As the machine was totally new and adult labourers were lack of experience, employers regards that children were much easier to adapt the new methods and operate machine than adults (Galbi, 1994). This lead to the child labour became major choice for manufactory business in the early year of the Industrial Revolution. And according to Stearns

(1998), employers also sent children to work in mines, as they were capable to get more coal and ore from the deep and unsafe cave.

Above all, children also could be forced to work as long as adults, about eighteen hours one day (Galbi, 1994). To conclude these reasons, children were treated like adult labour to work manufactories, making part of the increasing and beneficial business. In result, children were most likely lack of education, also suffered from maldevelopment (Stearns, 1998). In the early year of Industrial Revolution, the working conditions were extremely harsh and labour's right without protection by law (Porter, 1999). Employers required workers labour for long hours with low wage, and evenly no breaks (Porter, 1999).

As labours, especially children and women were working for nearly eighteen hours per day (Galbi, 1994). Until the Sadler Report published in 1833, the poor conditions of child labour in Britain were long-neglected by the government (Galbi, 1994). The Sadler Report finally evidence the aggression in human rights of child labour and poor working conditions, Sadler suggested that improvement must to be accomplished to prevent the general social unrest from happening (Porter, 1999). In 1833, British passed the Factory Acts, the first general laws in opposition to child labour.

According to the acts, Children aged fewer than 9 were not permitted to work in factories, children under 18 also were not allowed to work during night, and children under 13 were limited to work less than 9 hours per day and 48 hours per week (Factory Legislation 1802-1878). Although inspectors

monitored the achievement of the acts by factory, the lack of inspectors caused difficulty in execution (Galbi, 1994). By 1850, according to the Factory Act, children and women who worked in factories only laboured from 6 a. m. to 6 p. . or 7 a. m. to 7 p. m. Working hours were raised half hour or one hour per day than the act in 1847 (Factory Legislation 1802-1878) . Although some regions of Britain got huge benefit during the Industrial Revolution, the numbers of class conflict movement came up because of the unsable political environment, the occurred of the Luddites was one of the results (Lane, 1978). The Luddites were regarded as anti-modernism group, aimed to against to the industrialization, especially the new manufactory machine (Porter, 1999).

The Britain government's response to Luddites was quick and harsh. At the end, more than 20 people were executed and more people were sent to Australia (Porter, 1999). As a result of the Luddites, labours became more interested in politics than ever before, hunting for better conditions to work and promoting their political rights (Engels, 1968). Labour were concentrated into factories, mines and mills by the Industrial Revolution, therefore facilitated the organization for workers from different trade areas to improve their interests (Engels, 1986: 45).

As union could cause the break down of production, employers had to meet union's demands to avoid the further lost (Engels, 1968: 45). The strike action was the major approach of unions to have effectively advancement. Many strikes not only harm the employers' profit but also the workers interests (Lane, 1978). Government passed the Combination Act in England

in 1799, prohibiting labours to organise any kind of union (Porter, 1999). Even after the repeal of this law in 1824, unions were remaining under rigorous limitation (Porter, 1999).

In the course of 1830s and 1840s, the Chartist movement viewed as the first political movement in large-scale which organised by labourers aimed to promote their political rights and social justice (Stearns, 1998). Although the movement gained a large population's support, their appeal was refused by British Parliament (Engles, 1968). In 1842, the cotton labourers and miners were organized a general strike across the Chartist movement which obstacle to transfer production in Great Britain (Engles, 1968).

As the effect of political movement run by the working class, they achieved their objectives in 1867 and 1885. Since then, working class was viewed as a important political group, it also led to the form of the British labour Party in future. In conclusion, this study focuses on the impact of the Industrial Revolution on the British society and economy. In the course of analysis, this essay have develop the Industrial Revolution lead to several factors as overcrowding, child labour, working conditions for workers (especially the youth), the Luddites movement and organisation of workers to improve their rights.

It shows that in the course of the Industrial Revolution, the increase profit gained by the upper class and country, was based on the sacrifice of working class which suffered from poor living conditions and working conditions. However, advancements in social, economic, technological and financial

areas could be regarded proportionality with the cost of human being. It also leads to the working class started to improve either their human rights or political rights, and the establishment of Labour party in future.

Ultimately, the Industrial Revolution encouraged British Empire became the most powerful country in nineteenth centuries. References Deane, P. (1983). *The First Industrial Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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