

The industrial revolution essay

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



Introduction

The industrial revolution was a period in the 19th century where there were great advancements in the agricultural and technological industries of a country. These industrial advancements had a profound effect on the social and cultural lives of the people. The Industrial revolution is known as a revolution due to the impact it had on the society. The society was transformed from an agricultural society into a manufacturing society (Pollard, 1964). The industrial revolution began in Britain then it spread to the rest of Europe and North America. There was the use of machines in the textile industries and the increased use of coal. There was an improvement in the transport industry with the introduction of canals, improved roads and railroads. This caused a high increase in the production capacity of the companies. There was an increase in the factories creating more job opportunities. Families left farms so that they could work in the factories. In Europe the population increased from 120 million to 180 million between 1700 and 1800. The inventions of agricultural machines caused the workers to move to the urban areas. There was the working class made up of the miners and factory workers and the middle class who were the entrepreneurs who had invested in the mines and factories.

The Workers' Experiences during the Industrial Revolution

There were some benefits that accrued to the workers due to the industrial revolution. The revolution raised the living standards of the workers and their families. There was an increase in the real wages of workers during the industrial revolutions (Crafts, 1994). Workers earned higher wages than they

had ever earned before (Williamson, 1985, pg 18). The move from agriculture to manufacturing was beneficial since the workers moved from having seasonal employment to a stable all-year round employment. The money wages at that time were so stable such that competition between the unemployed workers did not have a lowering effect on the wages at that time.

There was a change in diet as the family consumed a higher percentage of meat, eggs, tea and beer. There was also an increase of consumption of foreign goods. The people imported coffee, cheese, tobacco, cocoa and rice. The foods that had been considered as luxuries for a long time were now being consumed regularly such as meat, vegetables and fruits. The food eaten at that time was so good such that the weekly proportion of fruits, vegetables, meat and potatoes is the same that is eaten today.

This shows the quality of life improved considering the increase of population that took place at that time. There was an explosion in the population due to the decrease in the death rate and the migration of the people from the rural areas to the towns coming to look for work (McCloskey, 1981, pg 108). The people were also able to buy better clothing.). The families had enough money such that they had some money left for entertainment. At this time, the consumer experienced the power of choice as the factories produced a variety of many cheap products (Hartwell, 1971, 326). The industrial revolution caused the transition from the poverty ridden society that was there before the revolution into the modern society of today.

However, these gains have been discredited by scholars by the unfair working conditions, child labour and pollution that the workers experienced at that time. The rate of growth though despite the increase in the real wages was slow with only real progress in the living progress evident in the 1850's and 1860's (Harley, 1982). The middle class were the biggest beneficiaries in the industrial revolution. They lived lavish lifestyles and a lot of food while they paid the workers very little considering the working conditions at that time.

The higher wages that were offered to the workers though were not worth the suffering. It could be seen that the higher wages were simply bribes to get the workers to work in the horrid factories. There have been arguments that the capitalism and free enterprise made the poor poorer and the rich richer (Hartwell, 1974). The change in real wages and living conditions came at too great a cost. There was child labour, dirty living conditions and long working conditions even before the industrial revolution. However during the industrial revolutions these ills became magnified.

During the industrial revolution, there was an impact on the workers causing a lot of unemployment and underemployment. The workers as they moved from the rural areas to the town experienced a loss of their culture and their roots. There was no individualism as all the workers spent all their working hours in the factories. The industrial revolution saw a lot of changes to the lives of the people. First of all there was an increase in the population in the cities. The living conditions were bad as there was congestion and poor

sanitary conditions. The people found it hard to get the good housing and schooling facilities.

The people had to share housing facilities and there were open sewers. There was a lot of garbage in the city. There was the spread of diseases through the contaminated water. Many workers died from chest diseases, cholera, typhoid and small pox. The government stepped in and brought structural plans in the congested areas that decreased the congestion and provided clean, sanitary facilities.

Women and children started working for a living. It was noted that the average life expectancy for an individual had decreased from 38 to 27 in the cities. The working conditions were tough. The average worker put 14 hours on the job, six days a week. In the factories, there were no health and safety regulations. In the factories there were poorly ventilated, lighted and dirty areas. Many workers were injured or killed as they worked with the machines.

Children had limited access to education opportunities as they were expected to work. They worked the same hours as the adults and could even be paid less money as they were children. The children who worked in the factory were as young as four years old. There were people who specialised in selling abandoned children to work in the factories for free. There were children who fell asleep and fell in the paths of carts and got killed. Others were killed when there were gas explosions. There were also children who got lung cancer while others lost their limbs or hands in the factories.

There were reports of children less than five years old dragging sledges of coal, crawling on their hands and feet (North, 1979, pg 3). There were reports written on the children's plight in

the factories that caused the middle class and the elite to cry out to the government to do something. There arose voices calling for reforms in the working conditions. The workers came together to form unions to fight for better working conditions. When the employers refused to give into their demands, the workers went on strike. Progress was slow and gradual.

The factory Acts that were passed forbade the employment of child labour for children that were less than 9 years. The children were not allowed to work at night and the working hours were limited to twelve hours. The British government passed labour laws that limited the extent to which the women and the children worked. Another reform that took place at this time was the end to slave trade. The government ended the slave trade in 1807. Slavery was abolished in Britain in 1833. Other countries followed suit. America abolished slavery in 1865 after the civil war. There were laws passed to limit the number of working hours in the labour market.

Conclusion

The industrial revolution led to an increase in the use of labour-saving technology in the factories. There are arguments that people moved from the rural areas to the urban areas since they deemed that that the pollution and other ills in the urban areas and factories did not outweigh the benefits that would accrue. However, during the revolution there was the increased awareness in the workers that the ills in the society could be remedied using

voluntary or legislative action(Berg and Hudson, 1992) The issue of child labour , working hours, health and safety and city sanitation were addressed by the passing of laws rather than letting the situation continuing as before.

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