

# The industrial revolution: social changes

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



## **Abstract**

The Industrial Revolution inspired a lot of change. The Enclosure Acts pushed small farmers off of their land and caused them to migrate to cities in search of work. Massive numbers of people during this time migrated to inner cities in search of work in factories. The middle class was formed and slowly grew in prominence. Eventually, the middle class gained more rights, such as suffrage, and even representation in government. The middle class was centered around hard work, but it also had a strong desire for consumer goods. Beneath the middle class was the working class, or proletariat. The proletariat worked in factories and were subject to awful living and working conditions. The working class often worked long hours with little pay. Many workers were injured or even killed on the job and did not receive compensation. Over time, more and more support more socialist ideas began to grow. Many believed that the small aristocracy would eventually be overthrown by the large working class, which would yield a society of equality. The formation of the middle class and inspiration of socialist reforms were two very influential results of the Industrial Revolution.

Keywords: Urbanization, Industrialization, Socialism, Marx, Middle Class

### The Industrial Revolution: Social Changes

During the Agricultural Revolution, a multitude of advancements were made in technology used for growing crops. Due to the Enclosure Acts in countries like Great Britain, previous common lands were now owned by large commercial farmers who mechanized most processes regarding food

production, bearing a greater crop yield. Farmers began to use selective breeding when it came to plants and livestock which created bigger crops, and bigger, stronger livestock. Altogether, these factors rapidly increased the amount of food being produced in countries, which lowered food prices. More families were now able to supply themselves with sufficient amounts of food. Healthier, and stronger people resulted in a population boom. Additionally, the small farmers who lost their land due to the Enclosure Acts were now in search of work, heading to urban areas to find it. The major increase in population created a huge consumer market for goods, and the urbanization of workers created a massive workforce. Manufacturers seized this opportunity, mechanizing their processes, and put the jobless men, women, and even children in factories to work and create products at a never before seen efficiency to supply the new market. Thus, the Industrial Revolution was born and became an extremely important part of the eighteenth century that shaped today's world. Although the Industrial Revolution caused many technological advancements, ultimately the most revolutionary outcomes of the Industrial Revolution were the creation of the middle class and inspiring socialist reforms.

The Industrial Revolution was responsible for the creation of a strong middle class. The Enclosure Acts left many small farm owners jobless. These farmers moved to cities in search of work and found them in factories. In fact, during the Industrial Revolution, countries began to have more people located in urban areas, than rural, which was never seen before. Eventually, these changes decreased the power of the aristocracy, and the middle class gained more power. For example, an article written by James Farr states, " A new

class, alternately called the bourgeoisie, or middle class (for example, manufacturers, bankers, lawyers, store owners), gained political, economic, and social dominance," (Farr, 2003, p. 131). The middle class grew in number and influence in society as a result of the new industries.

Additionally, a middle class was formed in the rural community as the commercial farmers gained large sums of land after the Enclosure Acts (Farr, 2003, p. 131).

The Industrial Revolution gave rise to the middle class, which includes a wide variety of jobs, such as bankers, lawyers, manufacturers, store owners, and artisans, and is therefore further divided into smaller categories like the lower-middle class or upper-middle class. The middle class had its own set of values as well its wide range of wealth. Middle class views were often centered around work. Members of the middle class believed in hard work and were sparing with their money. Members of the middle class would often reinvest income back into their businesses. They were highly motivated and ambitious, trying to provide for their families. One Scottish author, named Samuel Smiles, wrote, " Youth must work in order to enjoy," and " Nothing credible can be accomplished without application and diligence," as well as, " Heaven helps those who help themselves," (Farr, 2003, p. 140). These statements made by an author during this time conveys the common mentality of the middle class. A mentality that worshipped hard work and that praised traits like ambition and determination. All of these traits were necessary for the middle class who mostly worked long hours, in hopes of making good livings. They also placed high value on morality and love as well as secularism. Although the middle class was sparing with its money, it

soon became a massive force of consumption and had a strong desire for consumer goods, like nice clothes, nice houses, delicacies, and other luxuries for pleasure, not necessity (Farr, 2003). Money became more abundant in society, which the middle class greatly benefited from. However, there was a newfound importance placed on the obtainment of money, shown by the author Honore de Balzac, a French writer who wrote the story *Father Goriot* in 1834, a story about a man whose daughters disown him after he lost his riches. The story is meant to convey the stress people in society were beginning to place on money and material goods. (Balzac, 1835).

Before Europe industrialized, most families were nuclear, and included a father, mother, and children. Families worked together in their home. The father manufactured goods, the wife sold the goods and tended to their shop, while the children did chores. However, all of this changed during the Industrial Revolution. Families often worked in separate jobs, not located in their homes. This made it difficult for women to balance their work, with their child care, yielding the Cult of Domesticity. In the upper-middle class, women did not need to work and enjoyed leisure time, and eventually became household wives who were in charge of tidying the house and watching over the children and their education while the husband was at work (Farr, 2003, p. 131). In this new society, men became the sole breadwinners while women stayed home and cleaned the home and watched over their children as well as their education. In fact, in the upper-middle class, it was admirable and respected when men's wives stayed in the home to tend to "motherly duties." The emphasis on the importance of children's education is a quality that was particular of the middle-class (Farr, 2003). Although the Industrial

Revolution was influential in the creation of a middle class, it also inspired socialist reform.

The Industrial Revolution directly led to the creation of socialist reforms. The working class, located in the growing cities, were subject to awful conditions. Friedrich Engels wrote, " The way in which the vast mass of the poor are treated by modern society is truly scandalous. They are herded into great cities where they breathe a fouler air than in the countryside which they have left. They are housed in the worst ventilated districts of the towns; they are deprived of the means of keeping clean," (Shermann, 1845, p. 140).

Here, Friedrich depicts the vile conditions that working class individuals were forced to live in during this time. The awful living situations enraged Engels and he eventually went on to co-author *The Communist Manifesto* , along with Karl Marx. Not only were the conditions growing worse in cities, but the gap between the rich and the poor was also growing at a fast rate.

Eventually, more organizations were formed to support the interests of the oppressed middle class. Socialist Parties began to appear in the late nineteenth century that eventually earned representation in legislation. Workers would also go on strike to demand better conditions from their employers. Eventually, governments passed legislation that granted the workers better pay, shorter hours, and better benefits (Farr, 2003). Karl Marx, one of the most influential socialist thinkers in history, believed that all conflict in history has derived from struggles among the different social classes. He believed that capitalism furthered the gap between the social classes and exploited the workers in a way that is similar to slavery.

Capitalism during the Industrial Revolution was becoming more and more

prominent throughout Europe and the inequalities among the social classes were growing which prompted Marx and Engels to write *The Communist Manifesto*. Marx believed that the growing differences among the social classes would lead to a revolution in which socialism would rise from. Also according to Marx, in all societies, there is something called a, “superstructure.” Superstructure, “ was comprised of the religious beliefs, laws and customs, and the political institutions and ideas. The superstructure protected the upper classes more than the lower. Religion, for example, would teach the poor that it was a virtue to live in poverty and to concentrate on the afterlife rather than on the life being lived at the moment. The poor would therefore not have a good reason to object to their condition, given the explanation of its worth,” (Miskelly & Noce, 2002, p. 218). There is a repeating theme in these socialists beliefs; the upper class continuously oppresses and exploits the lower working classes in society. The Industrial Revolution strengthened the barriers between the social classes, and socialism grew during this time as well to help to reverse this trend.

Crime became a more prominent issue in the new cities, as a result of poverty and unemployment. One issue was a lack of social security. If a worker were to be fired or injured, he would be vulnerable to a loss of income. The dreaded conditions of the working class depicted a pessimistic view of their future. The hardships of the working class and economic oppression they faced yielded socialism, “...an alternative theory, based upon the premise that true economic equality could only be attained if the workers controlled the means of production as well as the distribution of

goods," (Fitzgerald, 2000, p. 381). Socialists believed that the small, wealthy upper class would eventually be overthrown by the oppressed, large working class which would yield economic equality. Eventually, more and more legislation was created in the favor of the working class like social welfare, higher wages, better conditions, and less working hours (Fitzgerald, 2000, p. 381). Workers were subject to long hours and one factory inspector wrote in 1836, " The stated to me that they commenced working on Friday morning, the 27th of May last, at six A. M., and that, with the exception of meal hours and one hour at midnight extra, they did not cease working till four o'clock on Saturday evening having been two days and a night thus engaged," ( *The Factory Act of 1833* , 1972, p. 5). This eyewitness account conveys the hardships that the working class faced which inspired them to want change. The upper class saw a rise in possible adversaries being the middle class due to its growth in prominence as a result of the Industrial Revolution, and the proletariat who demanded more rights and representation, as a result of their poor conditions during the Industrial Revolution. (Charlton, 1997, p. 79).

The Industrial Revolution was responsible for many technological advancements, but ultimately the most revolutionary outcomes of the Industrial Revolution were the creation of the middle class and inspiring socialist reforms. Factories attracted many lower class families to cities in search of work. Products were produced at a much faster rate than before, which created a huge demand for raw materials. Industrialized European countries thus turned to lesser developed regions in continents like Africa and Asia in search of plentiful and cheap sources of raw materials, yielding Imperialism. Imperialism caused a race among highly industrialized



European countries for colonies in Africa and Asia. Countries also sought colonies because they were a sign of a country's dominance and prestige during this time. Ultimately, the Berlin Conference, organized by Otto Von Bismarck, created regulations that countries must follow in their scramble for Africa and Asia. Nonetheless, the tension among European countries as a result of Imperialism helped lead to future conflicts like World War I.

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