

Free essay on range of political responses to the industrial revolution

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Three key historical events are linked to the emergence of the industrial revolution in the western world. These are:

- The scientific discoveries which led to advancements in technology and development of machinery that made industrial manufacturing possible through efficiency and profitability due to large-scale production that created economies of scale.
- Emergence of the protestant work ethic during the 18th century that stated heaven belonged to the hard working individuals Industrialists used this to encourage workers to give their best input in exchange for little earthly reward in form of wages as they would be rewarded handsomely in heaven.
- The dominant autocratic political systems predominant during the early stages made the industrial revolution a reality. These political systems inspired nationalism among citizens and gave nations structures to produce goods and services in large quantities so that the nation and its King became glorified. This paper examines the impact and political responses that emerged as a result of the Industrial Revolution.

A typical English factory town during the 1800's is described as consisting of machineries and long chimneys that emitted interminable serpents of smoke that trailed it without getting uncoiled. Dickens describes how the ugly towns were characterized by black canals, rivers that running ill smelling dyes, and buildings characterized by large windows. Inside these buildings emanated trembling and rattling all day from pistons of steam engines rotated monotonously. The factories were filled with underpaid and overworked laborers. Women and Children were the ones who suffered the ordeal of working long hours for lesser pay in order to maximize output and profits for

the factory owners.

The impact of the Industrial revolution included shifting of work sites from the rural farms to urban factories, the increase in population growth rate due to availability of better quality and quantity food in the urban areas, increased life expectancies and urbanization that led to expansion of public schooling and opportunities for upward social mobility resulting to emergence of new social classes emerged. These were the industrial middle class who comprised the factory owners and the industrial working class who were the factory workers.

The political responses to the above impacts of the industrial revolution were many. The government played the role of a referee and took the initiative to curb abuses that took place in the factories. Reforms were expedited to improve working and living conditions in the urban centers. For instance, a direct response to the challenges brought by the industrial revolution was the improvement of living conditions and health of urban dwellers in the city of London after the year 1850. These reforms were necessitated by the discovery that workers who were the foundation of the factory system would revolt due to abusive working conditions and cause the crumbling of the whole system. Around the same time, the oil industry began to rise as discoveries were made about the internal combustion engine. This was critical because the city of London had almost died out during the Middle Ages because its dwellers had exhausted all the available energy sources. Oil provided the critically needed energy in factories which saw a rapid development of the industrial revolution.

As urban planners discovered that the 19th century deadly cholera epidemic

was caused by overcrowding, unsanitary, and dirty living conditions among slum dwellers in the urban areas, parliament was forced to take action. This led to the drafting and passing into law the Public Health Act of the year 1875. This act made it mandatory for all factory owners to pave light and clean town streets and to appoint a sanitary inspector and a medical officer of health to give advice about problems concerning clean water supply, sewerage, food, diseases and housing conditions. Positions such as street sweepers, public bath and wash-houses emerged to help improve hygiene and contain the spread of diseases.

In 1833, the British parliament passed the Althorp's Act that sought to ban the employment of underage persons below 9 years of age. Working hours were limited to twelve hours for children aged between 13 to 18 years. The youngest lot aged between 9 to 13 years was allowed to work for a maximum of nine hours. Night work was completely forbidden for persons aged below 18 years. Nine years later (1842), mine owners were prohibited by the British parliament from employing boys aged below 10 years, girls and women in underground tasks of mining. Soon after, children's attendance at school was made mandatory and this saw the Factory Act amended to limit further the working hours of children and women. Factory owners were instructed by policy guidelines to fence their machinery to improve safety and limit the number of accidents.

Labor unions emerged and started gaining legal recognition after the year 1824 but the members were not allowed to strike not until the 1870's. The unions helped the member to bargain for better working conditions. After the 1870's, British labor unions could now strike legally without being held liable

for losses incurred by the factory owners. The unions mainly focused on fighting for better remunerations for their members, improved working conditions and lesser working hours.

The Industrial revolution saw the emergence of two reformists, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. The former was a first-hand witness of British's Industrial Revolution. He was outraged by the exploitation of workers and the unequal distribution of wealth between the Industrial capitalists and the factory workers. This led him to publish the communist manifesto in the year 1848, in conjunction with Friedrich Engels. In his manifesto, he advocated for the overthrow of the upper middle class who were the factory owners by the working class. He believed that power and wealth naturally tended to concentrate in the hands of the upper-middle class who exploited the factory workers. He believed that the society would become liberalized if the working class united and overthrew the upper middle class. Based on the principle, " From each according to his ability and to each according to his need," a classless society would emerge in which the wealthiest who pocketed cash that represented the difference between a worker's wages and the value of his or her labor would no longer exist. Under this new system called communism, wealth would be equally distributed and no single individual would be exploited.

Bibliography

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