

Impact of the industrial revolution on the bourgeoisie and socialism

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



Abstract

This paper discusses how the Industrial Revolution affected the working class, or the proletariat, and the middle class, or the bourgeoisie. It discusses how the working class was forced to urbanize to work in factories due to the Enclosure Acts in the fields. As they moved to the factories, their living conditions decreased significantly as the cities were often overcrowded and extremely unsanitary. Additionally, children were also forced to work for inhumane hours; many suffered from diseases and died early deaths. As a result, the workers sought to improve conditions through unions and the idea of socialism. They brought about reforms that increased the rights of the proletariat and this improved their status in society. Additionally, the bourgeoisie experienced extremely high standards of living. Due to the advancing economy and not having to work in the factories, the middle class received a life of luxury that directly contradicts the life of the working class. The Industrial Revolution greatly affected the lives of the people in society.

Keywords : Bourgeoisie, Proletariat, Socialism, Industrial Revolution

Machines are taking over the world. First the job and soon, the wife and kids. The Industrial Revolution was a period that was marked by the introductory use of machines to manufacture rather than by hand. Industrialization greatly changed life in Europe as people were forced to urbanize as cities developed and the rural economy diminished. However, the cities that quickly grew were often characterized by their horrible sanitation and ventilation; this killed tens of thousands of people. The social class most

affected by this revolution were the proletariat, or the working people, as many of their jobs were being taken over by machines. As a result, workers sought to create cooperative societies, or unions, which were small associations that provided funeral benefits and other services to members. Despite the emphasis on improving the life of the working class, many workers found that it was only a partial solution to the problems caused by the industrialization and turned to socialism, an economic and political system where the ways of making a living are overseen by the workers. Additionally, the bourgeoisie, or middle class, began to emerge in industrialized cities. Their role in society was large enough to set the tastes and values for the people. The middle class firmly believed that professional success was the result of a person's energy, perseverance, and hard work. Therefore, the new methods of industrialization led to a struggling working class, socialist reforms, and the growth of the middle class.

Primarily, the Industrial Revolution included vast changes in the manufacturing of products; therefore, the working class would naturally be the most affected. For most, complete economic dislocation ensued and their traditional ways of life were threatened by machinery. As stated in the article "Science and its Times", the development of scientific agriculture and improved equipment reduced the necessity for an abundance of workers. As a result, this enclosure left many farmers without the means to survive. In fact, entire communities were abandoned and the working population was subsequently forced to migrate to the brimming industrial cities in search of jobs (Science and its Times, 2000). However, there were those who were

disgruntled by this change in their lives; thus, they decided to destroy the source of their problems, the machines. These disobedient laborers were known as the Luddites, which was an oath based organization that sought to destroy machines as a symbol of protest. Ultimately, the destruction of these machines resulted in no significant changes and the workers were forced to adapt with the times. The most prominent job involved factory work, which often paid very little and included horrible working conditions. As explained in Friedrich Engels' excerpt in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Engel's states, " They are herded into great cities where they breathe a fouler air than in the countryside which they have left... River water is so dirty as to be useless for cleaning purposes. The poor are forced to throw into the streets all their sweepings, garbage, dirty water, and frequently even disgusting filth and excrement" (Engels, 1845). This illuminates to the harsh and dirty living conditions that the workers were now forced to endure. Many died on a daily basis only due to unsanitary conditions. On top of this, the poor working conditions included long hours working in the factories with little to no breaks, leaving many exhausted. A typical person worked fourteen to sixteen hours a day, six times a week. This can only be described as inhumane considering the amount of effort and the dangers that come along when running the machines (Sadler, 1832). Additionally, children also lived horrible lives during the revolution. In some cases, they were forced to work for sixteen hours in a coal mine on their hands and knees. This often lead to health problems, such as pneumoconiosis. In *Sybil, or the Two Nations: Mining Towns*, Benjamin Disraeli states that these children experience " punishment which philosophical philanthropy has invented for

the direst criminals, and which those criminals deem more terrible than the death for which it is substituted" (Disraeli, 1845). This indicates that the children were being treated similar to the how the worst criminals were. This further proves that the Industrial Revolution gave way to a horrible standard of living for all types of people in society, not just men. Overall, the working conditions were cruel and brutal to individuals working in the unsanitary factories.

Consequently, workers sought to create unions, which greatly improved wages and factory conditions. This marks the beginning of social reform for workers in Europe. Many found that although unions worked on improving life, it was merely a partial solution to the problems caused by industrialization. A notable example of social reform was the Chartist Movement that existed from 1838 to 1857. The main goals of this movement included granting universal suffrage for men over 21 and annual elections for parliament. Support for this movement peaked at a period of economic depression and hunger. Many workers turned to support this movement in order to protest the rising numbers of unemployment and unfair wage cuts. In the end, this movement ended without achieving its goals, but it heavily influenced future socialist reforms in the future, namely the Reform Act of 1867 (Charlton, 1997). Additionally, as a result of the harsh working conditions, the ideology of socialism grew in popularity as the workers believed that it offered a complete overhaul to an oppressive society. The most notable socialist thinker was Karl Marx. He along with his colleague, Friedrich Engels, collaborated to create *The Communist Manifesto*, which

was one of the most influential political tracts in history. Within this document, it is stated that all conflict since the beginning of time resulted from the conflict between social classes. He firmly believed that the working class would one day arise and supplant the capitalists who had exploited them. Therefore, he advocating for class war and a society in which all property is publicly owned and each person works and is paid according to their abilities and needs (Marx, Engels, 1848). Both Marx and Engels argued that as industry and power fell into fewer hands, eventually, revolution would bring properties back to in which they would be shared. Marx described this ideology as socialism and only began using the title of "communism" once perfection was finally achieved after problems with socialism were finally worked out (Miskelly, Noce, 2002, p. 45). Ultimately, the advancing technology from the Industrial Revolution resulted in the rise of socialist reforms and ideologies within Europe

The Industrial Revolution brought about the rise of the middle class, who benefited a great deal as compared to the not so fortunate working class. The bourgeoisie enjoyed unprecedented prosperity, political power, and leisure time. As the revolution grew, they grew increasingly more powerful. The Industrial Revolution offered both new forms of manufacturing and production. The bourgeoisie had better food and housing compared to the working class; this led to fewer diseases and longer lifetimes. Since they experienced a luxurious life, the population of the middle class grew and thus had little to no difficulty living during the Industrial Revolution. However, once the problems of the middle class were solved, they began to

disregard the struggling working class. This is best seen in Samuel Smiles' book *Self-Help: Middle-Class Attitudes*, when he states, "'Heaven helps those who help themselves' is a well tried maxim, embodying in a small compass the results of vast human experience. The spirit of self-help is the root of genuine growth in an individual (Smiles, 1859). This conceited statement indicates that the bourgeoisie did not care for the people struggling to survive and were content with how their lives were going. Additionally, despite the working class having to work multiples times harder, they were still barely surviving due to their role in society and the conditions that come along with it. Therefore, the middle class grew as a result of the Industrial Revolution.

The Industrial Revolution gave way to mass production and helped strengthen the economy. However, the new methods of industrialization led to a struggling working class, socialist reforms, and the growth of the bourgeoisie. New methods, such as the Enclosure Acts, brought many urban areas as they were no longer needed in the fields and they ultimately turned to factory work for jobs. Despite some initial protest, the workers soon learned to adapt to the times. They created unions to boost standards of living and also fought for reform. As horrible working conditions remain unchanged, many turned to the idea of socialism as it represented a total overhaul of an oppressive society. A forerunner in this idea was Karl Marx, author of *The Communist Manifesto*, in which he argued that the working class was exploited by the middle class and capitalist. He advocated for no private property and that everyone is paid according to their own abilities.

Lastly, the bourgeoisie grew as they suffered no drawbacks from the increased industrialization. This class was content with this life of luxury and cared very little for their struggling counterparts. Therefore, the Industrial Revolution led to many discontent workers that sought to better their lives through ideas such as socialism, and brought about the rise of the bourgeoisie, who experienced very high standards of living during this time period.

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