

# The factory system and its impact on the labor movement before the civil war

[History](#)



The paper "The Factory System And it's Impact on the Labor movement before the Civil War" is a wonderful example of a history essay.

The factory system is a product of the industrial revolution and started in England and spread to other countries. The new system centralized the production. The worker and the costly machinery were brought under the same roof. With mechanization in the farms, workers started migrating from the rural areas to the urban factories. This changed the class structure of urban America, which in turn lead to the emergence of labour unions.

It is the centralization of industrial production that led to the emergence of the factory system. Before that, production was organized in the form of rural-based cottage industry. The worker was almost a total producer. His relationship with the product was more intimate. The worker had control over his working hours. Prior to 1760 textile manufacturing was happening in the homes of textile workers in England. It was during the Industrial Revolution (1760-1850) that all the production system underwent drastic changes leading to the emergence of the factory system. The factory system emerged first in England and spread to other countries.

Introduction of costly machines and method of mass production necessitated such a system. Thus the production became concentrated under a single roof, where the machines are installed. This single roof production gave the owner more power and control over the workers, as the workers couldn't afford to own such expensive machinery and because he was forced out of his homely ambience of production to the factory space alien to him. It was a new way of organizing labor. The new control and power gained by the owners helped him to exploit the workers more. Children and women were

the most exploited. Working hours were like that of a farmer, from dawn to dusk. But the farmer had control over his working time; the factory worker never had it. The worker also lost his control over the total production process. The fundamental concept of the factory system is that each worker will create only a part of the product, in an assembly line. He ceased to be a total producer. Gordon Marshall (1998), the sociologist describes the advantages of the owner in the factory system thus:

As a productive system it possess three main types of efficiency gains for the owner or controller: economic, by allowing advantages of scale, while reducing the cost of distribution of raw materials and finished product; technical, by making possible the deskilling of craft labor and use of machines; and managerial, by increasing the scope for disciplined control of the effort bargain, (Factory System, A dictionary of sociology.)

The factory system thus made the class division in the society acute.

According to Robert W. Kweit (1998), " The factory system coupled with changes in transportation altered the class structure and the physical form of urban America. Technological change acted as a centrifugal force pushing people off the farm, as mechanization replaced workers" (People and Politics in Urban America, Page 49,) This situation led to the migration of workers from the rural areas to the urban factories, which provided steady employment during economically good times. But the working hours were long and the working conditions very bad. During recessions, there were threats of unemployment too. This situation led to the emergence of labour movements.

Two types of labour unions emerged at the early stage-- craft unions of

skilled workers and general unions of unskilled workers. Philadelphia Shoemakers (1792) Boston Carpenters (1793) New York Printers (1794) were few of the early craft unions. This division in unionizing of labour affected the effectiveness of the unions adversely. Only by 1827, labours working in the same industry started to form unions irrespective of their specific jobs. United Steel Workers and Teamsters were one such union. The 1837 depression nearly wiped out these unions. But just before the civil war (1861-1865) the Unions reemerged and held out against recession. Though these unions could organize strikes demanding better wages and working conditions, the factory owners survived these strikes easily, because of the absence of political awareness, and due to lack of support of the law and the ruling machinery.

After the civil war, major labour unions started emerging on a national level. It is these unions and their efforts that improved the working conditions of the American Labor from what it was in the early factory system.