

## The Cottage Industry and Factory Production

Between 1750 and 1850 more and more Western Europeans were employed in cottage industry and factory production. Analyze how these two types of employment affected employer-employee relations, working conditions, family relations, and the standard of living during this period (1989, #5)

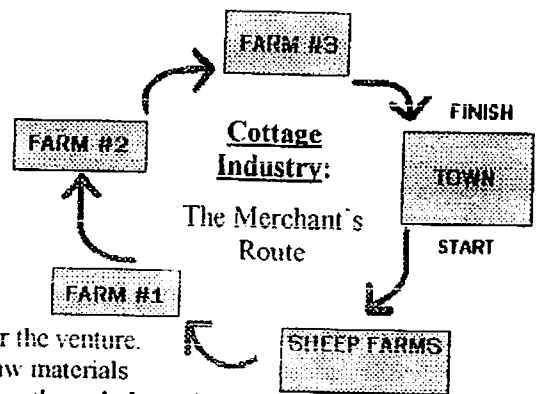
Mid 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe oversaw a formidable breakthrough in societal functioning, known as the Industrial Revolution of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. First observed in Great Britain, the revolution progressed into Continental Europe, spreading mechanization and modernization. The traditional cottage industry, characterized as the family economy, started to fade away as factories made headway. As additional mechanization emerged, such as the water frame and steam engine, factories began to move from waterbeds to cities, which also grew tremendously. A vast labor population scurried to the cities to pursue the factory jobs, which would later prove gruesome. Society had observed a transition from the tranquil domestic system to a turbulent factory employment. Due to the fact that the latter developed a principled oblivion, measures had to be enforced in order to promote public security, unity, and prosperity. The middle class astoundingly raised itself in the social order of the duration, as they claimed ownership of most of the factories. The peasantry and lower class were relegated to the tedious labor force, many of which suffered fatality through harsh working climates. On the other hand, the prior cottage industry allowed a collaborative domestic employment, honorable family bond, tranquil working environments, and a balanced standard of living. The factory system, however, oversaw a hire-fire employee-employer relation, harsh working conditions, a damaged family bond, and a deplorable standard of living.

### I. Background

#### A. The Cottage Industry, Family Economy, Domestic System, Putting-Out System (Pre-1750)

##### 1. Pre-Industrial System of Production: Old Regime

- All work was carried out within the household, with the entire family contributing.
- An example of this pre-industrial system of production was the textile system: A merchant in a town or city would raise the capital needed for the venture. The merchant then proceeded into the countryside to buy wool. The raw materials were then distributed to a number of family farms where they were taken through the various stages of production until, at last, the merchant returned to the city (or town) to sell or export the final product.
- The family economy first promoted the concept of capitalism, which would be fully established in the Industrial Revolution.
- Historians believe that cottage industry was an important warm up to the Industrial Revolution. It allowed countries like England to begin increasing their overseas trade before the Industrial Revolution began.



#### B. Societal Transition with the Industrial Revolution

##### 1. Timeline / Developmental Overview

- Population Explosion of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century → Food demand → Inflation → nobles profit through inflation → nobles start to invest in new techniques – agricultural efficiency (commercialization of agriculture) → Agricultural Revolution → nobles make substantial profit/capital → it is now possible to make investments into industry → IR.

##### 2. Industrialization: man-made vs. mechanization (early factories)

- First made headway in Great Britain (7 Prerequisites): labor, natural resources, entrepreneurship, capital, transportation, markets/colonies, and governmental support.
  - The Enclosure Movement released a substantial work force, which was directed toward the cities into the factories.
- Introduction of the water frame by Richard Arkwright attacks the crux of the cottage industry. Hydraulic power could now be utilized to operate factories, which at the time needed to be located by a body of water.
- James Watt introduces the steam engine, and its portability allows factories to shift to cities.
- Industrialization, mechanization, and urbanization now make a successful launch in cities, as thousands of workers hunt for available jobs (which would prove harsh and strenuous): rise in capitalism.

## II. Cottage Industry

### *A. Employer-Employee Relations*

1. Due to the fact that the cottage industry was a joint collaboration between family members, all members from children to the elderly contributed (to earn their "fair share of bread")
2. Within this family enterprise, however, there was constantly an imbalance between workers and material. Thus, additional laborers had to be hired.
  - a. Relations between workers and employers were often marked by sharp conflict.
  - b. Merchants exploited the lower class (labor), beating down its wages that were already unreasonable (underpayment).
3. There were constant disputes over the weights of materials and the quality of cloth within this domestic system.
  - a. Merchants accused workers of stealing raw materials, and weavers complained that merchants delivered underweight bales. Suspicions abounded.
4. Another problem existed, at least from the capitalist merchant's point of view: the rural labor was cheap, scattered, and poorly organized. For these reasons it was hard to manage.
  - a. Cottage workers tended to work in spurts. After they were paid on Saturday afternoon, the men in particular tended to drink and relax for two or three days.
  - b. By the end of the week, the weaver (worker) was probably working feverishly to make his quota ("pulling an all-nighter").
  - c. When times were good and the merchant could easily sell everything produced, the weaver and his family did fairly well and were inclined to loaf – to the dismay of the capitalist.
  - d. Thus, the employers observed various shortcomings in this system, and therefore intensified their search for ways to produce more efficiently and to squeeze still more work out of the "undisciplined" cottage workers.

### *B. Working Conditions*

1. The domestic system mostly took place within the household, and therefore working conditions varied per individual maintenance. General conditions were relaxed.
  - a. The rural worker worked in a small cottage with tiny windows and little space. The worker's cottage was often a single room that served as workshop, kitchen, and bedroom. Furniture was generally limited, the most important being commercial equipment such as Kay's Shuttle Loom (especially in the Textile system).
2. In comparison to the upcoming Industrial duration, poverty was generally at an average.

### *C. Family Relations*

1. The cottage industry, which was a family enterprise, oversaw a close family bond, as all members worked together.
2. All members had an individual responsibility. For instance, in the textile system,...
  - a. Women and the children prepared the raw material and spun the thread, while the man of the house wove the cloth.
3. Because of their subjection to this system, children were not educated in school, although they were usually taught by their parents.

### *D. Standard of Living*

1. The family: Unit of Production / Unit of Consumption.
  - a. The family's production was also for their own consumption. Thus, its ability to function and function properly played a decisive role in standard of living.
2. The standard of living also heavily depended on the family's productive status. If it was able to flourish in the system, which was set in a launching capitalist society, then living standards proved well or satisfactory.

### III. Factory Production

#### *Employer-Employee Relations*

1. Wage Economy
  - a. Factory workers, in their quest for survival, only sought the wages associated with their work.
2. Employers related with workers on a hire-fire basis: If work were complete, wages would be granted.
  - a. If a worker expired, the employer would simply substitute the position with another worker, as many were in line for any job available.
    - i. Further exemplifies the desperation of the working class regarding survival in a capitalistic society.
3. Employees often worked under pressure of factory discipline and the demands of the strict employer, fearing replacement (and thus failure of survival).
  - a. all workers were expendable

#### *B. Working Conditions*

1. The substantial population of this duration put considerable pressure on the physical resources of the cities: overpopulation
  - a. Migration from the countryside meant that existing housing, water, sewers, food supplies, and lighting were completely inadequate.
  - b. Shums with indescribable filth grew, and disease, especially cholera, ravaged the population.
2. Factory conditions proved harsh, and sometimes lethal, for the labor force.
  - a. Men, women and children (skilled / unskilled) all worked, for instance, in underground mines - often killed off due to "black lungs" from the soot of the coal.
  - b. Child labor was fully exploited, such as in chimney sweeping.
  - c. Workers received barely enough money (after working a strenuous 12 hour shift) to support themselves and their families. Meals were often confined to a piece of bread and beer. Poorhouses were constructed for the lower class.
3. Capitalism brought on a rise of poverty for the industrial working class (proletariat), while the wealthy middle class factory owners led comfortable lives.
  - a. Friedrich Engels (*The Condition of the Working Class in England*) attributed this to industrial capitalism, with its relentless competition and constant technical change (rise in socialism).
  - b. The Marxist movement was mainly inspired by this concept of capitalistic vice.
4. Governmental reform: The governments finally acknowledged the immorality and social devastation of the factory system, and sought to better the bitter situation
  - a. Factory Act of 1833 (England) limited the factory workday for children and adolescents, although it made no effort to regulate the hours of work for children at home.
    - i. Children under nine were to be enrolled in elementary schools that factory owners were required to establish. Thus, the employment of children declined rapidly.
  - b. Mines Act of 1842 prohibited underground work for all women as well as for boys under ten.
  - c. Act of 1847 (England) confirmed that overtime had to be paid. The Act also sought to restore a minuscule part of the family bond by bringing the father back home (less working hours for more time with family - if skilled worker).

#### *Family Relations*

1. With the advent of the factory system, the family bond was negatively altered (at least, in comparison to the cottage industry). Long work hours made it difficult for families to spend time with each other.

- a. Early factory owners permitted men to employ his wife and children as assistants, and thus the family unit was sometimes able to work together.
2. Factory Act and Act of 1847 allowed some regulation that was aimed at bettering family relations.
  - a. the concept of separate spheres was promoted for men and women, and the man emerged as the breadwinner.
  - b. Women found only limited job opportunities, but if they were married to skilled men, they found themselves regulating the domestic household.
  - c. If women were married to unskilled men, they often found themselves in prostitution, as they were forced to resort to anything in order to make some money (survival).
3. As children were sent off to school, the family unit was also interrupted, further increasing the gap in relations/bond.

#### D. Standard of Living

1. One can obviously conclude that the standard of living of this period varied per class.
  - a. The middle class enjoyed lives of luxury, bolstered by the influx of wealth from the hard-working laborers (proletariat).
  - b. The proletariat obviously led miserable lives of agony, despair, and poverty.
2. From an optimistic point of view the Industrial Revolution offered...
  - a. additional jobs, efficiency through mechanization, and growth in Gross Domestic Product (value of all goods and products sold within the *country*, usually measures standard of living).
    - i. the latter is deceiving because it ignores the mass poverty and social/proletariat destruction caused by industrialization.
3. From a pessimistic, but more accurate, point of view, the Industrial Revolution gave rise to...
  - a. exploitation of workers, overpopulation, slums, poverty, pollution, prostitution, rise in crimes/thievery, initial lack of police force, and segregation between skilled-unskilled employment.
  - b. Unskilled employment was a decisive factor in the rise of poverty, slums, prostitution, etc.

European Industrialization of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century brought immense alterations to major societal components, such as employer-employee relations, family relations, working conditions, and standard of living. The early domestic system, observed before 1750, was a family enterprise, allowing a collaborative effort between family members. All work was carried out in the home, and the family was a unit of production as well as a unit of consumption. As the turn of the century was approaching, an Industrial Revolution emerged and established itself in Western Europe. A mass work force was directed toward the cities to be employed in factories. What the working class, or proletariat, would soon take on proved appalling: strenuous work hours, harsh working conditions, measly wages, child labor, and confrontation of poverty. As the proletariat entered a capitalistic society, only survival was on their mind. Under the ideology of Hegelian philosophy, the cottage industry and Industrial Revolution would now synthesize into a revolutionary, Socialist movement.

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