Industrial Revolution: Class Discussion

**Why were the English the first society to industrialize?**

The English were the first society to truly industrialize because of their accessibility of labor and resources. Foremost, the isle which England stands on is minerally rich with coal which provided the energy that allowed for the industrial revolution to occur. Furthermore, as the land England has is very restricted in terms of geography with seas and oceans to all sides of its borders, land was difficult to come by for most people and so when farming advances occurred, English farmers who were laid off had no choice but to labor for factories, as there was no more land for them to get on their own.

At this same time, the British (English) empire was expanding across the globe, beginning to create markets in faraway lands and colonize minerally rich areas such as Africa. With these new natural resources, the English were able to industrialize quicker as resources were not a limiting factor in their growth. Furthermore, through mercantilist trade policies, English colonies had to trade with England which meant there was a demand for products, resulting in innovation to meet said demand with supply.

Further adding on to the English’s ability to industrialize was their disconnect from the raging politics of mainland Europe. Around the time of the 19th century, revolutions in French along with wars with the new French Republic caused inland European nations to spend most of their government resources on wars. The English had their settlements a whole sea away which meant that they were less involved in politics, meaning that innovative inventions could be subsidized by their governments. This also provides an incentive for entrepreneurs in England to innovate because they were safe doing so with the stability England had across the English Channel.

**How did the Industrial Revolution affect European social classes?**

Before the Industrial revolution, the social structure of Europe was simple. The middle class “bourgeoisie” owned much of the land where peasants, who made up most of the population, worked. Much of this social structure came from the feudal system that had persisted in Europe during the Middle Ages. Many people worked in similar ways to what they would have done in a feudal system.

After the industrial revolution, society changed as people moved to urbanized cities. This urbanization led to more workers which led to a growing middle class or bourgeoisie, who were now capitalists/entrepreneurs. This growing middle class profited off the success of the working class. The economic system that Europe had been living under, which was similar to a feudal system, changed to a more capitalist system in which corporations and companies owned the capital required to create products.

**Who wrote this source (more than just their name)? When? Where? What kind of document is it?**

Elizabeth Bentley, John Wright, Edward Potter, Hannah Richardson, George Armitage, Robert Willan, and Thomas Wilson gave the testimonies. These testimonies before Parliament were given between 1830 and 1845 in England, which is right around the time of the industrial revolution in England.

Bentley, Wright, Potter, Richardson, and Armitage are both factory/mine workers who experienced the suffering at the hands of poor conditions. Many of them lack concern with the current conditions as they had never experienced anything better pre-industrial revolution. However, their testimonies reveal the exploitation of the working-class during the industrial revolution. Robert Willan’s testimony, although he was not a worker, also highlights the poor conditions and how detrimental the new system of employment was.

Harter and Wilson are both members of the bourgeoisie and so their testimonies are specifically skewed to favor the owners of capital and entrepreneurs who own the means of production. They oppose the labor laws being laid out by Parliament at this time.

This document is a collection of testimonies to Parliament. These testimonies are to see whether a change in labor laws is necessary, and so some accounts, especially on the side of the capitalists, may be skewed to favor one side over the other.

**What differences were there between working conditions in the mines and those in the cotton factories?**

As seen in the documents, the biggest difference between the working conditions is the veracity of the poor conditions experienced. In the mines, conditions were distraught and terrible to the point that some children who work in the mines get killed. Not only that, but the mines also are extremely confined and lonely, which led some children to become less social and more “sinful” when compared to those who had the luxury of being able to go to school/not work.

However, the conditions in cotton factories were not much better in comparison. Similarly, children and workers are confined in small areas to maximize efficiency and they work for more than 2/3 of a single day.

Not only that, but the conditions in the mine also seem to be unfavorable to most people, as is seen with the demand for children to get jobs in the mines. These jobs are given to the least productive of people, those being children, and parents that need their children to work go to the mines instead of the cotton mills. This further exacerbates the idea that the work in the mines is unfavorable and challenging.

**As revealed by the questions they asked, what were the committee members most concerned about?**

The committee members are asking questions specifically about the conditions of the workplace and the daily tenure of workers at the factories and mines across England. They are most concerned about these facts because, as a Parliamentary body, they were formed out of the enlightenment, which means their goal is to improve the human condition by applying scientific reasoning. Their collection of data here displays that they are trying to improve the stark conditions of humans, which is an enlightenment style application of evidence.

However, the committee members also are concerned with the act of child labor within factories, which is likely because English factories need workers in every generation, and if children die in factories/mines, there would be no output in the next generation. In this way, the conditions of workers and the daily shifts they undertake seem to be of utmost concern to the Parliament.

**What does the testimony of Hannah Richardson and George Armitage reveal about the economic circumstances of working-class families?**

Richardson states that she must send her children in to work because they do not, as a family, have enough jobs generating income to live. Working-class families were used by the bourgeoisie and middle class to generate revenue for factories, and they often were exploited, which explains why Richardson’s sons must work to keep them afloat.

In history up until now, women have had a more domestic role when compared to men. Yet, in Armitage’s account, we see that women are working in the mines alongside men. The fact that women are working showcases that there is a need for families to send even their daughters, whom, according to societal norms, were to stay at the home, into the mines, which highlights how exploited people were under the working conditions of this time.

**What does the testimony of Hannah Richardson and George Armitage reveal about the attitudes of working-class families towards their children?**

Richardson and Armitage’s accounts reveal the fact that for most working-class families, their children are just another hand for labor rather than the innovators of the next generation. Richardson explained that her sons worked in the mines and, according to her, were fine in terms of their physical appearance. This lack of care for children coupled with the fact that Richardson’s family was struggling to live with the lack of money they had showcases that to many people, children were just assets for work rather than members of a family. Armitage’s account also highlights that many working-class families denied their children the right of education to send them into the pits to work to keep their family afloat. Again, the immense poverty felt by working-class citizens is shown in this account and the desperation of the working-class to have to use their children to work highlights this desperation.

**For what reasons do William Harter and Thomas Wilson oppose factory laws?**

Harter and Wilson are both factory owners and thus, as capitalists, their goal is to maintain a profit at their factories. If Parliament were to regulate their factories, their profits would decrease, and this would negatively impact their businesses.

Harter also provides an argument revolving the fair treatment of employers, as he tries to reason that it is unjust to apply the rule of educating children to just one employer; this is an enlightenment argument with the rule of law in mind, which likely boded well with the Parliament which was primarily made of representatives who were elected to a body that was formed in wake of the enlightenment.

**Consider the testimony of the workers themselves. Do the workers express anger? Do they demand changes? What might explain their attitudes? Do they welcome the intervention of Parliament?**

The testimonies of the workers are mundane and tame in tone. Instead of expressing anger and demanding change, they are calm, as if they are just restating their experiences with no personal stake. Their attitude can be explained by the relative change between life before and after the industrial revolution. For the average person, work before the industrial revolution was just as grueling and just as tiring as the work they were dealing with currently and so many of them did not care for if change would occur as their conditions were the same as before.

Not only that, speaking out about work in this time, where labor laws were virtually nonexistent, may have costed people their job, and considering the economic status of most people, losing their job would destroy their livelihoods. Therefore, many of them did not demand change to keep their job.

However, many did express their concerns and hatred towards the current system with no personal stake. These concerns seem to indicate that they welcome Parliament intervening but have little to no care because their conditions were manageable/similar to what they always had put up with.

**TQES**

How did the enlightenment influence the arguments made on both sides about the working conditions in factories?

In what ways did the feudal system influence the employment during the industrial revolution?