

Child Labor In Factories

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A new workforce during the Industrial Revolution

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When the industrial revolution first came to Britain and the U.S., there was a high demand for labor. Families quickly migrated from the rural farm areas to the newly industrialized cities to find work. Once they got there, things did not look as bright as they did. To survive in even the lowest level of poverty, families had to have every able member of the family go to work. This led to the high rise in child labor in factories. Children were not treated well, overworked, and underpaid for a long time before anyone tried to change things for them.

Wages and Hours:

Children as young as six years old during the industrial revolution worked hard hours for little or no pay. Children sometimes worked up to 19 hours a day, with a one-hour total break. This was a little bit on the extreme, but it was not common for children who worked in factories to work 12-14 hours with the same minimal breaks. Not only were these children subject to long hours, but also, they were in horrible conditions. Large, heavy, and dangerous equipment was very common for children to be using or working near. Many accidents occurred injuring or killing children on the job. Not until the Factory Act of 1833 did things improve. Children were paid only a fraction of what an adult would get, and sometimes factory owners would get away with paying them nothing. Orphans were the ones subject to this slave-like labor. The factory owners justified their absence of payroll by saying that they gave the orphans food, shelter, and clothing, all of which were far below par. The children who did get paid were paid very little. One boy explained this payment system:

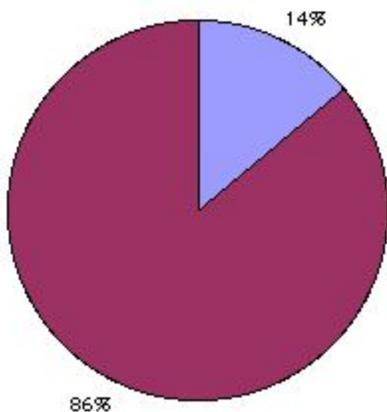
"They [boys of eight years] used to get 3d [d is the abbreviation for pence] or 4d a day. Now a man's wages is divided into eight eighths; at eleven, two eighths; at thirteen, three eighths; at fifteen, four eighths; at twenty, a man's wages is divided into eight eighths. About 15s [shillings]."



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Workforce in 1750 (Britain)

■ Workers Under 14 ■ Workers over 14



Treatment:

The treatment of children in factories was often cruel and unusual, and the children's safety was generally neglected. The youngest children, who were not old enough to work the machines, were commonly sent to be assistants to textile workers. The people who the children served would beat them, verbally abuse them, and take no consideration for their safety. Both boys and girls who worked in factories were subject to beatings and other harsh forms of pain infliction. One common punishment for being late or not working up to quota would be to be "weighted." An overseer would tie a heavy weight to worker's neck, and have them walk up and down the factory aisles so the other children could see them and "take example." This could last up to an hour. Weighting could lead to serious injuries in the back and/or neck. Punishments such as this would often be dispensed under stringent rules. Boys were sometimes dragged naked from their beds and sent to the factories only holding their clothes, to be put on there. This was to make sure the boys would not be late, even by a few minutes.

Child labor: Movements to Regulate

There were people in this time period that strongly advocated the use or the abolishment of child labor, or at least the improvement of conditions. Factory owners loved child labor, and they supported their reasoning with ideas that it was good for everything from the economy to the building of the children's characters. Parents of the children who worked were almost forced to at least approve of it because they needed the income. There were, however, some important figures that fought for the regulation, improvement, and/or abolishment of child labor. The first step to improving conditions was in 1833 with the Factory Act passed by Parliament. This limited the amount of hours children of certain ages could work. Specifically, children 9 to 13 years of age were only allowed to work 8 hours a day. Those 14 to 18 years of age could not work more than 12 hours a day. Children under 9 were not allowed to work at all. Also, the children were to attend school for no less than two hours during the day. Perhaps the most important part of this act was the part that said the government would appoint officials to make sure the act was carried out and complied with. Later, in the early 20th century, activists went even further to protect children's rights in labor. Among these figures was Jane Addams, founder of the Hull House. Activists in the U.S. made the government set up the



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Children's Bureau in 1912. This made it the U.S. government's responsibility to monitor child labor.

In the time of the Industrial Revolution, the children of the families who moved to the crowded cities had their work situation go from bad to worse. In rural areas, children would have worked long hours with hard work for their families farms, but in the cities, the children worked longer hours with harder work for large companies. Harsher treatment, fewer rewards and more sickness and injury came from poorly regulated child labor. Child labor today is still apart of many economies. 59,600 of the workers in the U.S. are under 14 and many other countries have huge child labor troubles. Child labor came from the Industrial Revolution and is still around today.

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