



THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION IN BRITAIN



REACTIONS AND REFORMS

- This refers to attempts or efforts to correct the socioeconomic disparity suffered by the working class in British society.
- And also the strive for universal suffrage (voting rights)
- Attempts or measures could be classified as conservative (passive), moderate and radical.

CONSERVATIVE

- This refers to attempts or efforts that were averse to changing the status quo or dismantling the existing systems.
- These included self-help initiatives by the working class.
- Example – Cooperative movements such as the Rochdale Pioneers.
- By the factory owners / rich – philanthropists such as Robert Owen, Samuel Smiles and Titus Salt.

MODERATE

- This refers to attempts or efforts that operated within the legal perimeters of established socio-political system.
- Changes were however made to the prevailing system to help the working class.
- Legislation and laws passed by the Parliament are examples under Robert Peel, William Gladstone and other lawmakers / MPs.
- Not just social policies and laws but also change in the constitution to help the people.
- It could also include collective actions by trade unions, like, Amalgamated Society of Engineers.
- Others include to push for suffrage for the working class and poor.

RADICAL

- This refers to attempts or efforts to overthrow or completely remove existing established socio-political systems.
- Or it could be attempts characterised by the use of force or violent actions.
- Attempt by the Luddites was an example.
- Sometimes, radical members within the trade unions also tried to carry out without confronted employers with violent reaction – example the Sheffield Outages episode.

ENLIGHTENMENT?

- Did the British society become more enlightened in the midst of industrialisation and modernisation?
- Some glimpses of benign leadership and observance of humanity.
- Some wealthy elites and politicians were prepared to manage poverty of the working class.
- Example – Owen, Smiles, Salt, Ashley Cooper, Peel, Gladstone and others.
- Was it enough?

ECONOMY

- The economy was characteristically capitalistic.
- Britain's economy thrived on industrialization, manufacturing, trade and accumulation of wealth.
- Ports, cities, banks, infrastructure and other related economic institutions grew.
- It became a front-runner in global trade – an empire which thrived on colonialism.



WHAT CHANGED IN BRITAIN BY EARLY 20TH CENTURY?

SOCIAL

- The Industrial Revolution changed the fabric of family despite all the socioeconomic repercussion for the working class.
- The factory system and industrial technology enabled women to become wage-earning individuals.
- They were able to generate income and did not have to become a dependent.
- After some soul-searching, the 1880 Education Act made school attendance compulsory for children up to the age of 10.
- Gradually, the role of children would be students to pursue knowledge in school which would enhance their social mobility in future.

POLITICAL

- While the working class pressed for socioeconomic equality and opportunities, they were conscious that gaining voting rights would help.
- The struggle for universal suffrage was a long journey but the ruling elites did relent eventually.
- From First Reform Act of 1832, 1867 Representation of the People Act (the second Reform Act), 1884 Representation of the People Act (the third Reform Act), 1918 Representation of the People Act extends vote to all men over 21 and most women over 30.
- Conclusion – The working class gained their political rights and voice in the Parliament.