

Industrialisation and the Middle Class

How does industrialisation as well as its consequences make a middle class visible in the first half of the 19th century?

“It seems no coincidence that the first nation to experience industrialisation, the industrial revolution and mass migration from rural to urban areas should have developed such intense nostalgia for the countryside (Atchison et. al., 2000, Pg. 50)”.

Introduction

While things such as the Glorious Revolution, the French Revolution and the American Revolution are important to historians, The Industrial Revolution is one of more important to sociologists and economists since it was a major factor in the development of new socioeconomic and cultural changes in the 18th and 19th centuries. It started in Britain and depending on the speed of knowledge transfer in that age and time, it soon spread throughout the world in some shape or the other. Within a few decades, the socioeconomic system that was based on manual labour was to be replaced by a culture which was dominated by industry and manufactured goods (Hobsbawm, 1999).

The Revolution Begins

Hobsbawm (1999) suggests that the revolution started with the changes to the textile industries which were the first to start using machines. The creation of the machines themselves was based on the refinements in how iron was produced that allowed the creation of new tools and equipment. At the same time, other elements required for improved communications, delivery of goods and transport were more or less in place which helped to expand the trade between cities as well as countries. Waterways, improved conditions of roads and the presence of railways all helped in making sure that goods as well as people could move from one location to another without significant investments of time and money.

Additionally, Mr. Watt had understood the genie contained in steam power and had unleashed it by 1760. Although earlier designs also existed he is credited with creating the first working steam engine which allowed machines to work much faster, better and at an untiring pace as compared to human effort. Steam power was also added to boats, ships and other means of transport but the effect it had on the workshops and industrial plants was the greatest in terms of how it would change the fabric of society.

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