

The Condition of the Working Class in England

Friedrich Engels

To many contemporaries, child labor in factories and mines under harsh conditions was the most shocking change in working conditions brought on by industrialization. However, several investigators documented a whole range of problems facing England's industrial working class. One of the most famous of these investigators was Friedrich Engels (1820–1895), the son of a German textile manufacturer. Engels moved to England in the 1840s, where in addition to learning about business he traveled through cities visiting working-class areas and interviewing people. He would soon become a collaborator with his friend, Karl Marx, and one of the founders of modern socialism. The following excerpt is from the book that arose from his studies, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, first published in 1845. Here Engels focuses on worker's living environment in England's industrial cities.

CONSIDER: What Engels considers the worst health conditions facing the poor; Engels' analysis of how the environment affects the poor mentally as well as physically; how this description adds to the testimony before the commission on child labor (in a previous excerpt).

The way in which the vast mass of the poor are treated by modern society is truly scandalous. They are herded into great cities where they breathe a fouler air than in the countryside which they have left. They are housed in the worst ventilated districts of the towns; they are deprived of all means of keeping clean. They are deprived of water because this is only brought to their houses if someone is prepared to defray the cost of laying the pipes. River water is so dirty as to be useless for cleansing purposes. The poor are forced to throw into the streets all their sweepings, garbage, dirty water, and frequently even disgusting filth and excrement. The poor are deprived of all proper means of refuse disposal and so they are forced to pollute the very districts they inhabit. And this is by no means all. There is no end to the sufferings which are heaped on the heads of the poor. It is notorious that general overcrowding is a characteristic feature of the great towns, but in the working-class quarters people are packed together in an exceptionally small area. Not satisfied with permitting the pollution of the air in the streets, society crams as many as a dozen workers into a single room, so that at night the air becomes so foul that they are nearly suffocated. The workers have to live in damp dwellings. When they live in cellars the water seeps through the floor and when they

live in attics the rain comes through the roof. The workers' houses are so badly built that the foul air cannot escape from them. The workers have to wear poor and ragged garments and they have to eat food which is bad, indigestible and adulterated. Their mental state is threatened by being subjected alternately to extremes of hope and fear. They are goaded like wild beasts and never have a chance of enjoying a quiet life. They are deprived of all pleasures except sexual indulgence and intoxicating liquors. Every day they have to work until they are physically and mentally exhausted. This forces them to excessive indulgence in the only two pleasures remaining to them. If the workers manage to survive this sort of treatment it is only to fall victims to starvation when a slump occurs and they are deprived of the little that they once had.

How is it possible that the poorer classes can remain healthy and have a reasonable expectation of life under such conditions? What can one expect but that they should suffer from continual outbreaks of epidemics and an excessively low expectation of life? The physical condition of the workers shows a progressive deterioration.

SOURCE: Engels, Friedrich, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, trans. and ed. by W. O. Henderson and W. H. Chaloner. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1968, pp. 110–111.

SOCIALISM

② Louis Blanc: The Organisation of Labour, 1840

Louis Blanc (1811-1882), called a "utopian Socialist" by Marx looked for a solution to the pain of the industrial revolution by reorganizing the economy. He was heavily influenced by the Saint-Simonians of the 1830s. During the Revolution of 1848, Blanc became director of a commission on labor, but his plans did not come to fruition.

The question should be put thus: Is competition a means of ASSURING work to the poor? To put a question of this kind, means to solve it. What does competition mean to workingmen? It is the distribution of work to the highest bidder. A contractor needs a laborer: three apply. "How much do you ask for your work?" "Three francs, I have a wife and children." "Good, and you?" "Two and a half francs, I have no children, but a wife." "So much the better, and you?" "Two francs will do for me; I am single." "You shall have the work." With this the affair is settled, the bargain is closed. What will become now of the other two proletarians? They will starve, it is to be hoped. But what if they become thieves? Never mind, why have we our police? Or murderers? Well, for them we have the gallows. And the fortunate one of the three; even his victory is only temporary. Let a fourth laborer appear, strong enough to fast one out of every two days; the desire to cut down the wages will be exerted to its fullest extent. A new pariah, perhaps a new recruit for the galleys....

Who would be blind enough not to see that under the reign of free competition the continuous decline of wages necessarily becomes a general law with no exception whatsoever? Has population limits which it may never overstep? Are we allowed to say to industry, which is subjected to the daily whims of individual egotism, to industry, which is an ocean full of wreckage: "Thus far shalt thou go and no farther." The population increases steadily; command the mothers of the poor to be sterile and blaspheme God who made them fruitful; for if you do not command it, the space will be too small for all strugglers. A machine is invented; demand it to be broken and fling an anathema against science! Because if you do not do it, one thousand workmen, whom the new machine displaces in the workshops, will knock at the door of the next one and will force down the wages of their fellowworkers. A systematic lowering of wages resulting in the elimination of a certain number of laborers is the inevitable effect of free competition....

The government ought to be considered as the supreme regulator of production and endowed for this duty with great power.

This task would consist of fighting competition and of finally overcoming it.

The government ought to float a loan with the proceeds of which it should erect *social workshops* in the most important branches of national industry.

As these establishments would demand considerable investments, the number of these workshops at the start ought to be carefully limited, still they would possess, by virtue of their organization-as we shall see later-an unlimited expansion.

The government, considered as the only founder of the workshops, must determine the statutes regulating them. This code, deliberated and voted for by the representatives of the people ought to have the power and force of a law.

All workmen who can give guarantee of morality shall be called to work in these social workshops up to the limit of the original capital gathered together for the purchase of tools....

For the first years after the workshops are established, the government ought to regulate the scale of employment. After the first year it is no longer necessary, the laborers would then have time enough to truly estimate their respective work, and, all being equally interested as we will soon see, the success of the association would eventually depend on the elective principle....

Every member of the social workshops would have the right to use, according to his discretion, the profits of his labor; but it would not be long before the evident economy and the incontestable excellence of this communal life would call forth other voluntary associations among the workmen according to their needs and pleasure.

Capitalists can also be taken into the association and would draw interest on their invested money, which would be guaranteed by the budget; but in the profits they would participate only if they were laborers at the same time.

If the social workshops were once established according to these principles, you could easily understand what the results would be. In every great industry, in machinery, for example, or the silk or cotton industry, or in printing establishments, the social workshops would be in competition with private industries. Would the fight be a long one? No, for the social workshops would have advantages over the others, the results of the cheaper communal life and through the organization by which all laborers, without exception, are interested in producing good and quick work. Would the fight be subversive? No, for the government would always endeavor to prevent the prices of the products of the social workshops from dropping to too low a level. If today an extremely rich man were to enter into a contest with another less wealthy, this unequal fight would be only disastrous, for the private man looks only to his personal interest, if he can sell twice as cheap as his competitors, he will do so, in order to ruin them and be master of the situation. But when the power itself steps into the place of a private individual, the question develops a different phase....

From the common interest of all the laborers in the same workshop we infer the common interest of all workshops in the same industry. In order to complete the system, we must establish the solidarity of the various industries. Therefore, from the profit yielded by each industry, we must set aside a sum by means of which the State could give aid to every industry, which has suffered through extraordinary and unforeseen circumstances. Besides, in the system which we propose, crises would become rare. What causes them most frequently today? The veritable murderous contest between the interests, a contest from which no victor can come forth without leaving conquered ones on the field of battle; a combat, that like all wars, chains slaves to the chariot of the victor. In destroying competition we strangle at the same time the evils which it brings forth. No more victories and no more defeats! . . .

Is it necessary that I should continue to enumerate the advantages which the new system brings about? In the industrial world in which we live, all the discoveries of science are a calamity, first because the machines supplant the laborers who need work to live, and then, because they are also murderous weapons, furnished to industry which has the right and faculty to use them against all those who have not this right and power. What does "*new machines*" mean in the system of competition? It means monopoly; we have proven it. However, in the new system of association and solidarity there are no patents for inventors, no individual exploitation. The inventor will be recompensed by the State and his discovery is then placed at the service of all. What is today a means of extermination, becomes an instrument of universal progress; what today reduces the laborer to hunger, to despair and drives him to revolt, will serve only to render his task lighter and to produce a sufficient leisure to live a life of intelligence and happiness, in one word, that which has tolerated tyranny will aid in the triumph of fraternity.

SOCIALISM

③ Charles Fourier: from *Theory of Social Organization*, 1820

Charles Fourier later called a "utopian socialist" by Marx, was one of the earliest to realize that while industry could produce wealth, its methods of work were intensely alienating. His proposal was for a type of work unit - called a Phalanx - in which work was distributed on a rational and rotating basis. Several phalanxes were set up in the United States, although none succeeded for long. The idea, however, bore more significant fruit in the institution of the kibbutz among Zionist settlers in Palestine/Israel.

The spectacle of the wonders which the trial of The Phalanx will produce such as (1) the tripling of the products of industry; (2) industrial attraction; and (3) concord of the passions, will suffice to transform the rich and great into active cooperators. . . In the course of a few years the entire globe could be organized into Phalanxes. . . They will be affected by the Passional Series substituted in place of the present individual and incoherent system, from which the human race has reaped only indigence, fraud, oppression and carnage. . . There exists for Man a unitary destiny--a Divine social order to be established on the earth for the regulation of the social and domestic relations of the human race. . . It is the height of folly to wish to improve a system which is radically defective in its nature! It is only reproducing the same evil under other forms. The real task of political economy is to seek an outlet from civilization, not to perfect it. There is then but a very small minority who accept and adhere to the civilized state as now organized. This minority is composed of men of leisure and fortune. As to social liberty, the poor classes are wholly deprived of it. . . If, then, civilization pretends to elevate men to liberty combined with industry, it must insure him a satisfactory equivalent for the loss of his natural rights. . .

Liberty, unless enjoyed by all, is unreal and illusory. . . to secure liberty a Social Order is necessary which shall (1) Discover and organize a system of industry; (2) Guarantee to every individual the equivalent of their natural rights; and (3) Associate the interests of rich and poor. It is only on these conditions the masses can be secured a minimum of comfortable subsistence and enjoyment of all social pleasures. Man has seven natural rights: (1) Gathering of Natural Products; (2) Pasturage; (3) Fishing; (4) Hunting; (5) Interior Federation (association with others); (6) Freedom from care; (7) External marauding (to pillage others).

The present system of Commerce was the growth of circumstance and accident. Never did such a system better deserve condemnation as being vicious and corrupt. What is the power to intervene to repress this fraud? Government. To elevate Nature Humanity must create and organize a perfect system of industry, discover and perfect the physical sciences, and establish on a peaceful and industrial basis an order of Society that will direct its labors to the work of terrestrial cultivation and improvement. To elevate itself Humanity must create the Fine Arts, discover the Sciences and establish an order which will lead to social harmony. Under a true organization of Commerce, property would be abolished, the Mercantile classes become agents for trade of industrial goods and Commerce would then be the servant of Society.

We are amazed when we calculate the benefits which would result from a union of 1600-1800 persons occupying a vast and elegant edifice in which they would find apartments of various sizes, tables at different prices, varied occupations and everything that can abridge, facilitate and give a charm to labor. . .The Phalanx will produce an amount of wealth tenfold greater than the present. The system allows for a multitude of economies of operations and sales which will increase the return enormously. . .The officers are chosen from among the experienced and skillful members--men, women and children, each elected from the members of the Phalanx. . .By means of short industrial sessions everyone will be enabled to take part in seven or eight different attractions with industry not now done, and will eliminate discord of all kinds. A refinement of taste will be cultivated. Minute division of labor will increase production and lower costs. It requires a tract of land three miles square, well-watered, flanked by a forest. The personal and real estate of the Phalanx will be represented by stock divided into shares. Each Phalanx will engage in both agriculture and industry. Meals will be in common but there will be at least three different tables with different prices and children will have their own tables, separate from the adults. The Phalanx will construct a vast and regular edifice suited to material and social needs, modified only by topography, climate and national experience. The only buildings not connected being the stables, barns, factories, kitchens, and warehouses. The aim is to be self-sufficient in both the agricultural and industrial spheres. Plus there will be laid-out gardens, grounds for physical exercise, and so forth, all, including the edifice logically laid out. We shall see people engaged in attractive occupations, giving no thoughts to material wants, free from all pecuniary cares and anxieties. As women and children all work, there will be no idlers, all will earn more than they consume. Universal happiness and gaiety will reign. A unity of interests and views will arise, crime and violence disappear. There will be no individual dependence---no private servants, only maids, cooks, and so forth all working for all (when they please). Elegance and luxury will be had by all. The Phalanx will be devoted to the service of useful labor, of the sciences, the arts, and of the culinary department. They will render Industry attractive and end the evil distinction between Producers and Consumers. Unity of manners and civility will reign, acquired by universal free education---but study in the schools should occupy a subordinate place, connected with labors in the gardens and workshops. To secure the execution of uncleanly and offensive labors a body of youths--those attracted to much dirty work (youngsters aged nine to sixteen, composed of one-third girls, two-thirds boys)--what we shall call the Juvenile Legion--who shall perform them all. The young love to wade in the mire and play in dirt, are self-willed, rude, daring, and fond of gross language. From a sense of honor the Juvenile Legion will do the dirty jobs--highway repair, cleaning the stables, feeding and slaughtering animals, maintaining the buildings, and so forth.

COMMUNISM

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The Communist Manifesto

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

Although initially only one of many radical doctrines, Marxism proved to be the most dynamic and influential challenge to industrial capitalism and middle-class civilization in general. Its most succinct and popular statement is contained in the Communist Manifesto, written by Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) and first published in 1848. Karl Marx was born in Germany, studied history and philosophy, and entered a career as a journalist, writer, and revolutionary. For most of his life he lived in exile in London. His collaborator, Friedrich Engels, was also born in Germany and lived in England, but there he helped manage his family's cotton business in Manchester. Their doctrines directly attacked the middle class and industrial capitalism, presenting communism as a philosophically, historically, and scientifically justified alternative that would inevitably replace capitalism. They saw themselves as revolutionary leaders of the growing proletariat (the working class). The following is a selection from the Communist Manifesto.

CONSIDER: *The appeal of the ideas presented here; the concrete policies advocated by Marx and Engels; the historical and intellectual trends reflected in the Manifesto.*

A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of Communism. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this specter; Pope and Czar, Metternich and Guizot, French radicals and German police spies.

Where is the party in opposition that has not been decried as Communistic by its opponents in power? Where the opposition that has not hurled back the branding reproach of Communism, against the more advanced opposition parties, as well as against its reactionary adversaries?

Two things result from this fact.

I. Communism is already acknowledged by all European powers to be in itself a power.

II. It is high time that Communists should openly, in the face of the whole world, publish their views, their aims, their tendencies, and meet this nursery tale of the Specter of Communism with a Manifesto of the party itself.

To this end the Communists of various nationalities have assembled in London, and sketched the following manifesto to be published in the English, French, German, Italian, Flemish and Danish languages.

In what relation do the Communists stand to the proletarians as a whole?

The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working class parties.

They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole.

They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement.

The Communists are distinguished from the other working class parties by this only: 1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality. 2. In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.

The Communists, therefore, are on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement.

The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all the other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat.

The theoretical conclusions of the Communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer.

They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes. The abolition of existing property relations is not at all a distinctive feature of Communism.

All property relations in the past have continually been subject to historical change, consequent upon the change in historical conditions.

The French revolution, for example, abolished feudal property in favor of bourgeois property.

The distinguishing feature of Communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property. But modern bourgeois private property is the final and most complete expression of the system of

producing and appropriating products, that is based on class antagonisms, on the exploitation of the many by the few.

In this sense the theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property.

We have seen above that the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of the ruling class; to win the battle of democracy.

The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie; to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the State, *i.e.*, of the proletariat organized as the ruling class; and to increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible.

Of course, in the beginning this cannot be effected except by means of despotic inroads on the rights of property and on the conditions of bourgeois production; by means of measures, therefore, which appear economically insufficient and untenable, but which, in the course of the movement, outstrip themselves, necessitate further inroads upon the old social order and are unavoidable as a means of entirely revolutionizing the mode of production.

These measures will, of course, be different in different countries.

Nevertheless in the most advanced countries the following will be pretty generally applicable:

1. Abolition of property in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes.
2. A heavy progressive or graduated income tax.
3. Abolition of all right of inheritance.
4. Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels.
5. Centralization of credit in the hands of the State, by means of a national bank with State capital and an exclusive monopoly.
6. Centralization of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the State.