The Sociology of Work

STRUCTURES AND INEQUALITIES

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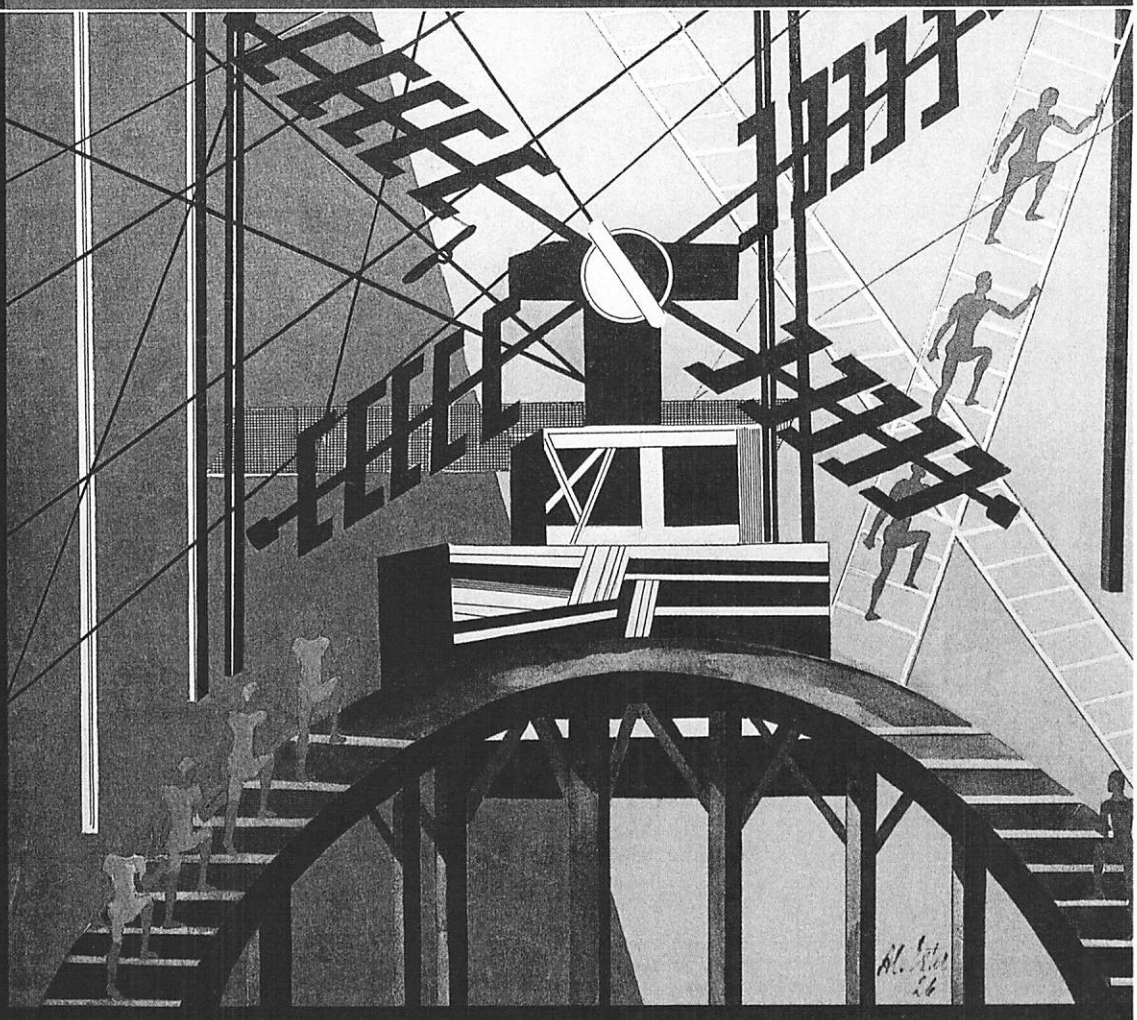

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Chapter 4

The Industrial Revolution and Beyond: Culture, Work, and Social Change

Work, in one form or another, is a primordial feature of human life. As part of any culture's survival strategies, humans create not only tools, but also institutional and cultural arrangements that envelop such tools: norms governing who should perform given types of work; customs or laws that define what can be exchanged, when, and under what terms; and notions of honor (and, by implication, shame) that accompany the performance of various types of work. Although each culture tends to define its own work arrangements as "natural," anthropological and historical research indicates just how variable work arrangements are. To take but one example, while our own society often holds medical doctors and surgeons in especially high esteem, the culture of medieval Europe lumped surgeons in with butchers and executioners, affixing to them a "blood taboo" that defined these three trades as unclean (Le Goff 1980). If "work" is a universal feature of human life, the institutional and cultural forms that accompany it can take many forms.

Those who live in the advanced industrial world are most familiar with work in terms of paid employment—that is, labor performed in exchange for a wage. Yet this arrangement is itself a relatively recent invention; it was relatively uncommon even into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Even into the late 1800s, American farmers and workers often regarded wage labor as a morally suspect way of eking out one's living. (Labor unionists often used the term "wage slavery" as a critique of the factory system.) The triumph of wage labor in fact owes much to the Industrial Revolution, which first gripped Great Britain in the late 1700s and eventually launched Western Europe into a position of global dominance. In so doing, the Industrial Revolution set in motion unprecedented shifts in work and economic institutions that have engulfed not only Western Europe and North America, but eventually the entire world. Therefore, to understand work in its peculiarly modern guise requires that we begin our investigation by exploring the massive changes that took hold of work at this historical juncture.

We begin by exploring the cultural meanings that work held prior to industrialization. These meanings, as we will see, were not static, but evolved in ways that actually set the stage for the Industrial Revolution and the coming of the factory system, which in turn have exerted massive effects on virtually all aspects

of modern life. An important part of this story involves the sharp separation that arose between home and work, for this division had important effects on gender and intimate life: It positioned men within the public realm of paid employment while confining women workers to unpaid work within the home. This division was fateful, for it gave rise to the traditional notion of the male as breadwinner, which persisted until relatively recent times.

Understanding the Industrial Revolution

It is difficult for us today to grasp the enormity of the institutional and cultural changes that the Industrial Revolution brought in its wake. There had been periods of great expansion and economic growth in previous epochs of history. Some historians point to the importance of such technological developments as the invention of the horse-drawn plow, or water- and wind-driven milling machines, as part and parcel of economic expansions that happened during the preindustrial period of European history. Nor were economic expansions limited to the West. The Qing (pronounced "Ching") dynasty, for example, ruled China for two centuries after the middle 1600s and demonstrated impressive economic growth in the 1700s: Its population doubled in size and enjoyed a standard of living that outstripped the conditions that English and Dutch societies then enjoyed (Goldstone 2002: 348–353). Thus economic growth was hardly new. What *was* unprecedented was the explosive, self-sustaining nature of the industrial expansion that began during the late 1780s.

According to the historian Eric Hobsbawm, what was decisive about the Industrial Revolution was that "for the first time in human history, the shackles were taken off the productive power of human societies, which henceforth became capable of the constant, rapid, and up to the present limitless multiplication of men, goods and services" (1962: 45). From Hobsbawm's perspective, the Industrial Revolution cannot be conceived as a distinct episode or period in economic and social history. Rather, it involved a "restless, self-sustaining expansion, involving as it does the creation of a mechanized 'factory system' which in turn produces such vast quantities and at such rapidly diminishing cost as to be no longer dependent on existing demand, but to create its own market" (1962: 50). In a sense, the Industrial Revolution inaugurated an era of ongoing expansion—a kind of permanent revolution, to borrow a phrase—that has yet to come to come to a close.

The Meaning of Work in Preindustrial Societies

The triumph of the factory system and of the Industrial Revolution more broadly would have been unimaginable without the unfolding of a centuries-long process that led from classical Greek conceptions of work and leisure, through Judeo-Christian themes of work as moral deliverance, to the Protestant notion of the calling (see Chapter 2). By tracing this cultural evolution we can learn three things. First, we can see just how dramatic were the cultural changes the Industrial Revolution demanded of the laboring masses. Second, we can appreciate how these cultural changes, once spread throughout Western societies, helped advance industrial capitalism, eventually ushering in what one scholar has called "the work society" (de Grazia 1994).

Third, we can begin to see some of the ways in which our contemporary views of work have inherited certain features from societies embedded in the distant past.

One of the earliest conceptions of work that left an imprint on Western society was that of the ancient Greeks. A slave society, ancient Greece was characterized by two key social institutions: the *polis*, or the political realm of government, and the *oikos,* the household (the word *oikos* is in fact the basis for our modern term "economy"). In the Greek worldview, the only honorable forms of work were those that equipped one to participate in the *polis*. Autonomous work within one's *oikos*, such as the cultivation of one's land, met this moral test. But farming was the only manual activity that the ancient Greeks found admirable. Mere toil, undertaken out of economic necessity, was viewed as a degrading activity that ill equipped one to participate in the *polis*; such work was deemed worthy only of a slave. Physical toil was thus viewed with great disdain and as a debilitating involvement that prevented the individual from acquiring the virtues required of all proper citizens.

These themes are evident in the writings of the most important Greek and many Roman philosophers. Thus Plato complained of too many unqualified men being allowed to participate in the *polis* and referred to them as "men with imperfect natures—just as their bodies are mutilated by the arts and crafts, so too are their souls doubled up and spoiled as a result of being in mechanical occupations" (Applebaum 1992: 61; see de Grazia 1994; Gamst 1995). Likewise, Aristotle held that "none of the occupations followed by a populace which consists of mechanics, shop-keepers, and day labourers, leaves any room for excellence" (Applebaum 1992: 65). From the Greek point of view, those who were forced to toil out of sheer need were thereby unfit to rule, for their souls would be "doubled up and spoiled." Only those who were free from such necessity, and who could enjoy the contemplation that unlimited leisure made possible, could cultivate the habits needed to rule in a wise and effective manner.

With the rise of the Judeo-Christian era, this conception of "work as degradation" underwent a significant change. In the Old Testament, for example, Genesis gives us a distinctively different and more contradictory conception of work. Here, after all, we encounter "a God who *works*, who creates the universe, and must rest; who creates humans in his image, placing them in Eden to 'dress and keep it'..." (Le Goff 1980: 78). At the same time, however, when humans engage in sin and are cast out of Eden, God curses them with the ever-present need to toil (as in God's edict that only "[i]n the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread"). In this biblical account, the notion of work has grown more complex: The world (including humanity itself) is viewed as the product of God's own work—a shift that "blesses the idea of labor" (Ovitt 1986: 487). Yet work also acquires a punitive element, as befits those who engaged in sin.

Christianity continued this twofold conception of work, in which labor appeared as both an ennobling activity and a form of atonement. In the writings of the early apostles, we even begin to encounter a conception of work as a means of spiritual fulfillment and moral purification. Indeed, what the Greeks had most valued—a life of leisure and contemplation and of distance from manual toil—had, by the early medieval period, been redefined as a sinful tendency that was repugnant in the eyes of God. Christian

theologians such as Saint Augustine warned against idleness, arguing that "only those who labor and produce an excess of goods can be in a position to practice charity rather than to receive it" (Ovitt 1986: 492).

This moral precept to work on behalf of God was not simply a free-floating doctrine. Rather, beginning in the sixth century, it was put into practice within Christian monasteries spread throughout Western Europe. Monastic orders, especially the one led by Saint Benedict, engaged in a rigid regimen of daily tasks that served to purify their members' souls. The first duty of a monk was one of prayer and worship, but the virtuous effect of manual labor was stressed, partly because it provided training in the practice of self-denial and partly because the products of such labor were materially useful in spreading the word of God. In fact, monasticism helped to fuel economic expansion throughout much of Europe, as its infusion of moral virtue into economic activity inspired such new technologies as wind- and water-driven milling implements, canals, and irrigation methods, whose appearance owed much to the discipline and moral regulation the laboring monks provided.

The broader effects of the monastic orders made themselves felt by the twelfth century, as the "spectacle of the monk at labor impressed his contemporaries in its favor," prompting a broader cultural shift that "raised labor in general esteem" (Le Goff 1980: 80–81). As this new ethos of labor spread to artisans, merchants, and craftsmen generally, the notion of labor as imparting a form of dignity took hold. Summarizing this shift, Le Goff writes that "with the beginning of the 13th century, the working saint was losing ground, giving way to the saintly worker" (1980:115; see also Ovitt 1986; Applebaum 1992; de Grazia 1994).

The Protestant Reformation signaled a massive break with the Roman Catholic Church, but in many ways the doctrines of Protestant theologians like Martin Luther and John Calvin only reaffirmed core themes concerning labor that had long gestated within the Christian fold. Thus, Lutheran criticisms of the Catholic Church rested on the Vatican's tendency to luxuriate in illicit wealth and pleasure, which Luther and his followers condemned. By articulating a doctrine that emphasized the purifying nature of hard work, the Protestant Reformation continued the historical trend that invested work with spiritual significance. To pursue idle pleasures, or to languish in wasteful activities, was to commit sinful affronts to God's will. "In the things of this life," concluded one sixteenth-century theologian, "the laborer is most like to God" (Rodgers 1974: 8).

This spiritualization of labor, once established across the Western European landscape, eventually went so far as to define work as the cardinal virtue through which one defined one's identity, quite apart from any theological significance. The point is evident in the writings of later moralists such as Thomas Carlyle, who in 1843 wrote these words, effusively exclaiming the virtues of the productive life:

> Whatsoever of morality and of intelligence, what of patience, perseverance, faithfulness; of method, insight, ingenuity, energy; in a word, whatsoever of Strength the man had in mind will lie written in the Work he does... Produce! Produce! Were it but the pitifullest, most infinitesimal fraction of a product, produce it, in God's name! (Rodgers 1974: xiv)

Thus was born an ethos that sanctified work—a cultural construct that was well adapted to the

moral compulsions needed by "the work society" (de Grazia 1994).

Several broad observations can be made on the basis of this brief historical discussion. First, the Christian conception of work served to turn Greek ideals on their head. Leisure and contemplation, which for the Greeks constituted the highest virtues, were recast by Christianity as sinful indulgences. In the Christian view, it was only through productive toil that deliverance might be found. Second, however, certain elements of the Greek conception of toil did persist, not least its tendency to affix a stigma on forms of work that were held to be degrading. The Protestant Reformation sought to sanctify all forms of work—both the humblest artisan and the most prosperous merchant—yet the broader tendency in Western conceptions of work has been to regard toil in a twofold manner: not only as an ennobling activity, but also as a curse born of human frailty and sin. Interestingly, the French and English word for work—travail—conveys this very double meaning, referring both to arduous toil and excruciating pain. The word descends from the Latin *tripalium,* which referred to a three-pronged instrument of torture that was used to inflict pain on nonbelievers.

The Rise of the Factory System

Yet, if Christianity defined viewed work as a spiritual activity through which one could draw closer to God, many of its worshippers would have been appalled at the world their beliefs helped bring into being. For, much as Max Weber argued (see Chapter 2), by sanctifying work, Christianity (and especially Protestantism) helped open up a path that led to the Satanic mills, which were rife with cruelty and harsh exploitation. This point can be seen through a brief discussion of the origins of the factory system in Western Europe.

Commercial manufacturing had established a presence throughout England and other Western European nations well before the Industrial Revolution was even conceivable. In Britain especially, agriculture itself had undergone widespread commercialization, since land that had traditionally been used by peasants and tenant farmers was forcibly converted to more profitable use (for example, the grazing of sheep) in conjunction with the woolen trades, giving rise to weaving and textile workshops within many villages in the English countryside. Such enterprises (sometimes called "proto-industrial" settings) were marked by two important features. First, virtually all were of relatively modest scale and were largely dependent on methods and practices employed within artisanal workshops of the medieval period. Second, even into the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the scope of commercial activity was governed by social and cultural norms that established powerful limits on economic exchange. Thus deeply established rules stemming from medieval guilds and trades defined how commerce was to proceed. Indeed, economic historians and anthropologists have agreed that it was only with the momentous changes of the nineteenth century that the unconstrained pursuit of gain through the marketplace managed to break through such traditional constraints (Polanyi 1944).

The process happened gradually at first. As towns grew in size and trade expanded its reach, merchants adopted small-scale production methods as best they could. One such method was the "putting out" system, in which merchants distributed unfinished goods (yarn, cloth, dye) to

artisans and farmers in towns scattered throughout the countryside. In such cottage industries, workers earned piece rates that were paid upon the completion of finished goods for the merchant, who then brought them to market. Under this system, merchants had few means of controlling either the pace or the method of production, as workers were located well beyond their supervision. Understandably, merchants began to concentrate work together under the same roof, thus combining artisans who had previously labored in isolation, either in their own shops or else on farmland. In this case (which Marx called "simple cooperation"), the work process retained its artisanal character even though production was driven more closely by commercial goals. As Piore and Sabel (1984; Sabel and Zeitlin 1997) have pointed out, in many European cities such proto-industrial workshops thrived for a time, supporting local commercial activity even after the Industrial Revolution had begun, especially in trades producing high-quality silks, cutlery, and other fine goods.

Pressed by the spur of market competition, merchants operating outside such luxury niches sought out ways of increasing the productivity that could be secured from their workforce. One important way of doing this was to develop a more specialized division of labor within the workshop. It was this system of finely specialized tasks that Adam Smith memorialized in his account of a pin factory, in *The Wealth of Nations* (1991 [1776]), and which Marx later called termed "manufacturing"—literally, production by hand. The notion here was that even using the same hand-powered tools, laborers could produce far more in a given period, and at lower wages, if the workshop adopted a sharp subdivision of labor that assigned to each worker a highly specialized task (for discussion of the assembly line, see Chapter 5). Because of the dexterity each worker could develop in relation to a detailed task and the efficiency gains that stem from the coordination of tasks, early factories using such manufacturing systems surpassed artisanal methods even though they inherited the same hand-powered instruments of production.

Building on these shifts in the organization of factory labor, the Industrial Revolution in turn dramatically transformed the source of power or energy on which the tools and productive instruments relied. This was a profoundly important change, for it revolutionized the character of the work process and along with it the relation between the worker and the tool.

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, the productive power of a farm, workshop, or mill was dependent on sources of energy that were driven by wind, water, and animals (including human). As noted by the historical sociologist Jack Goldstone (2002), such reliance on existing local resources placed major constraints on the scale and pace of economic activity: Productive power was limited to whatever sources were ready to hand, and these were inevitably scattered about the countryside: a river here, a water mill there. With the chain of scientific discoveries and technical inventions that gathered force in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England, and which eventually led to James Watt's steam engine in the late 1780s, these constraints were suddenly thrown aside. The advent of steam-powered engines made it possible for manufacturers to exploit the power of fossil fuels—especially coal—which could then be used with much greater force than ever before.

One result was a huge multiplication of the nation's productive powers as steam engines were harnessed to cotton spinning (thus supplying

the burgeoning textile industry), iron smelting and molding (to forge rails for transport), grain milling (for the mass production of baked goods and animal feed), brick making (to build yet more factories, offices, and homes), and machines for transport (locomotives and sea-faring vessels). The first to industrialize in this manner, Great Britain quickly became the "workshop of the world," exporting the lion's share of the world's cotton, iron, and steel and accounting for a massively disproportionate share of the world's energy consumption.

A second result was an equally significant transformation in the class structure of English society. As merchants, commercial landowners, financiers, and craftsmen engaged in production for the marketplace, wealth began to accumulate in the hands of the commercial classes that grew rapidly in the industrial towns and cities. A measure of such shifts can be found in the emergence of new terms to capture the new realities. Arguing that "words are witnesses" to historic shifts, Hobsbawm provides a brief catalog of terms that may be familiar to us now, but which were either "invented, or gained their modern meanings" only following the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. On this list he includes the following terms: industrialist, aristocracy, middle class, working class, scientist, engineer, journalism, liberal and conservative [as political terms], ideology, strike, and pauperism. "To imagine the modern world without these words," he concludes, "is to measure the profundity of the revolution which broke out between 1789 and 1848 and forms the greatest transformation in human history" since humans invented agriculture and metal working (1962: 17).

Part and parcel of these shifts was the emergence of a new class of wage laborers. No longer embedded in the customs of artisanal production, and with no hope of attaining the status of either master craftsman (which implied the ownership of one's own shop) or even journeyman (which did not), factory workers grew in number—and, many argued, shame and degradation. For as industrialization proceeded, so too did there occur a deterioration in the working conditions of many workers, a lengthening of the working day, and a growing reliance on child labor; at times, whole families were compelled to work side by side, earning wages that barely enabled them to survive. It was in response to these conditions that Friedrich Engels, colleague and collaborator with Marx, wrote his classic analysis, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1993 [1845]), which chronicled the squalid conditions under which industrial workers often lived.

Historians have long engaged in debate over the consequences of the Industrial Revolution for the workers of the nineteenth century. Some analysts advocate a simple thesis of *absolute* "emiseration" (impoverishment), in which workers experienced an actual decline in living standards and conditions of existence as economic competition led employers to lengthen the working day and drive down workers' wages. Others argue that emiseration did occur, but only in a *relative* sense, in that although living conditions may have improved for workers, their improvements nonetheless failed even remotely to keep pace with the growing affluence enjoyed by the more privileged or propertied classes within British society. Still others argue that what is especially critical, and what cannot be decided by even the most careful analysis of wage levels and caloric intake, was the culturally defined *experience* of the new factory system, which forcibly disrupted or destroyed whole ways of life and

forms of community that had been established in British cities and towns for centuries.

A brilliant example of this last approach can be found in the classic work by E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1964). In a profound and moving analysis, Thompson shows how common it was for members of proud trades in the textile and woolen industries to be wholly and suddenly ruined as mechanization took control of their crafts, compelling them to work ever-longer hours, often alongside their spouses and children, for wages that often fell below subsistence (forcing many onto poor relief). Thompson contends that the impact of industrial capitalism involved much more than simply wages, hours, and living conditions. What needs to be stressed was the *perception* of catastrophic change among factory workers of all strata. Thompson shows how the imposition of a harsh and foreign work discipline on industrial workers, together with the shattering of their customary rounds of social and family life, imbued industrialization with an element of misery that cannot be deduced from their material conditions alone.

Thompson's analysis is instructive in a further way, in that it seeks to show that the effects of the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain did not unfold in a vacuum, but rather were powerfully shaped by the social and political context in which they occurred. Most important, Thompson observes, was that the rise of Britain's factory system occurred in the shadow of the French Revolution of 1789, when artisans and peasants violently overturned the French nobility and aristocracy, seeking to establish a democratic republic but eventually unleashing a reign of terror that provoked widespread fear in the British aristocracy and rising middle classes. The result was that the British elite adamantly resisted every call for the extension of political rights to the English working classes, whose members were denied the rights to vote, to exercise free speech, and to assemble or to organize on their own behalf. England's Industrial Revolution thus tended to erect powerful boundaries that excluded the nation's working class from the mainstream of society, making workers feel like outcasts in their own society (Thompson 1964).

This point is important to any understanding of how English workers responded to their plight. As they encountered a lengthening of their working day, the exploitation of child labor, and chronically insufficient wages, workers had virtually no legitimate means of redressing their situation. When desperate petitions and appeals to Parliament went unheeded, many workers resorted to underground methods of collective mobilization and resistance, the most interesting expression of which was the phenomenon that came to be known as Luddism. Although this phenomenon has come to be viewed in an entirely negative light—the term now widely conjures up images of an irrational opposition to new technology and to progress itself—more recent scholarship suggests that Luddism was a far more complicated and interesting phenomenon than has so often been assumed. As such it warrants a brief consideration in its own right.

Luddism Revisited

Luddism was an explosive and at times a quasi-insurrectionary movement that began to appear in the English Midlands in the first decade of the nineteenth century. The earliest reports begin to appear in 1802, increasing in frequency

during the ensuing decade. The movement took its name from its imaginary leader, General Ned Ludd, whose identity served to unify the members of mill villages throughout much of the English Midlands. The context in which these rebellions arose was one of war-induced hardship (England had been at war against France's Napoleon, with devastating effects on English exports). More than this, employers were fervently uprooting those customary craft arrangements that had secured the livelihood of skilled tradesmen in the woolen and cloth trades. Many of these arrangements were codified in law but were forcibly rescinded by manufacturers eager to increase their profits. To do so, many relied on new mechanical implements (especially wide weaving frames, for example) that undercut the need for skilled tradesmen and sometimes cheapened the value of both the final goods and the workmen's situation.

In response to these challenges to their traditional position, and lacking any rights of assembly, workmen often petitioned Parliament for redress, testifying about the violations of the law that had occurred and about the fraudulent practices they witnessed (in which cheapened goods were sold as first quality). Rather than respond, members of Parliament often accused the workmen of conspiratorial acts. Finding no redress, and faced with the extinction of their way of life, workmen resorted to an underground movement that directly challenged the factory owners' practices. Where owners refused to operate in conformity with traditional practices, Luddites engaged in energetic and highly targeted bouts of machine breaking or—where owners were especially defiant—arson aimed at whole workshops. Here is an example of a letter, written on April 12, 1812, to the owner of a cloth dressing factory that had installed dressing machines which the Luddites regarded as an unacceptable effort to destroy their very livelihood (the spelling and emphasis are in the original document):

> In justice to humanity We think it our Bound Duty to give you this Notice that if you do Not Cause those Dressing Machines to be Remov'd Within the Bounds of Seven Days...your factory and all that it Contains Will and Shall Surely Be Set on fire....it is Not our Desire to do you the Least Injury But we are fully Determin'd to Destroy Both Dressing Machines and Steam Looms, Let *Who Will* be the Owners. (Thompson 1964: 567)

No violence against persons was committed, and no destruction was aimed at machines that conformed to what the Luddites viewed as honorable practices. What the Luddites were doing was protesting against a new social and economic order that seemed sure to destroy not only their trades, but also the very fabric of their lives (See Box 4.1).

References to the Luddites have in the past portrayed them as members of an irrational and spontaneous mob that was driven by a simple-minded view of a market economy. In this view, the Luddites sought merely to turn back the tide of social change and to obstruct the course of industrial development or progress (a peculiarly value-laden word). Yet more recent scholarship has suggested that such characterizations often took police reports at their word and often sympathized with the middle classes' fear of the dangerous classes generally (a good example of the concept of the "hierarchy of credibility," as discussed in Chapter 1). As Thompson emphasizes,

BOX 4.1 *Learning from the Luddites*

We can gain a sense of the Luddites' outlook from the following song, "General Ludd's Triumph," which reveals both the specific target of their protest and the values that underlay their movement as a whole.

The guilty may fear but no vengeance he aims
At the honest man's life or estate,
His wrath is entirely confined to wide frames
And to those that old prices abate.
These Engines of mischief were sentenced to die
By unanimous vote of the Trade
And Ludd who can all opposition defy
Was the Grand executioner made.

* * *

He may censure great Ludd's disrespect for the Laws
Who ne'er for a moment reflects
That *foul imposition* alone was the cause
Which produced these unhappy effects.
Let the haughty no longer the humble oppress
Then shall Ludd sheath his conquering sword,
His grievances instantly meet with redress,
Then peace will be quickly restored.
Let the wise and the great lend their aid and advice
Nor e'er the assistance withdraw
Till full fashioned work at the old fashioned price
Is established by Custom and Law.
Then the Trace when this arduous context is o'er
Shall raise in full splendour its head,
And colting and cutting and squaring no more
Shall deprive honest workmen of bread. (From Thompson 1964: 534)

What can we see from this song? First, that the Luddites were careful to insist that no one need fear their actions except those who have violated the industrial behavior that has been established in "Custom and Law." Only where questionable practices had been used—the "engines of mischief" the workers rejected, involving "wide frames," "colting, cutting, and squaring"—would the workers take aim. Second, the Luddites saw themselves as asserting their right to freedom from industrial despotism, in which "the haughty... the humble oppress." Finally, and in opposition to what they viewed as "foul imposition," the Luddites were insisting on their right to an economic system that respected their position as honest, dignified working men. Although many have objected to their tactics and portrayed them as irrationally opposed to technological change, scholars have increasingly viewed Luddism as harboring an interesting demand from which we might conceivably learn: their insistence that the structure of work correspond to the needs and wishes of the workers themselves.

the Luddites were by no means undiscriminating in their thinking, nor simply backward or reactionary in their outlook:

> Their opposition to new machinery does not appear to have been unthinking or absolute; proposals were in the air for the gradual introduction of the machinery, with alternative employment found for displaced men, or for a tax of 6*d* per yard upon cloth dressed by machinery, to be used as a fund for the unemployed seeking work. (Thompson 1964: 526)

Far from representing simply a blind or reactionary lashing out against modernity, Luddism was often a sophisticated movement, requiring widespread organization, discipline, knowledge of markets, and community support. Moreover,

it was motivated not only by a backward-looking effort to restore communal economic traditions, but also by a forward-looking effort to institute a collective order that respected the workmen's dignity. The nature of the movement was not narrowly framed in terms of craft privilege, then, but rather comprised a broad attack against the *laissez faire* political economy and the factory system it sought to impose (Calhoun 1982).

Although many analysts have objected to the Luddites' tactics (indeed, some would label them terrorists), some scholars have suggested that their actions hold certain positive lessons for us even today. First, theirs was a spirited, humanistic critique of the factory system that sought to affirm a principle that might well warrant consideration even today: the notion that work ought to conform to the workers' own preferences, rather than to the unbridled demands of the marketplace or wealthy factory owners. Second, their actions provide a revealing contrast with the course of industrialization in the United States. Thus, the United States lacks any significant history of machine breaking and had no underground rebellion against the rising factory system. The question naturally emerges as to why. Although some have explained this contrast on cultural grounds (for example, pointing to the greater influence of entrepreneurial values in the United States), we believe that a stronger explanation follows Thompson's lead and points to the timing of economic and political change. The Luddites resorted to industrial violence because they lacked any legitimate means of dissent: When the Industrial Revolution occurred in Great Britain, workers had no voting rights, no rights of assembly, and no real powers of citizenship. Indeed, these rights were not truly won in England until after the beginning of the twentieth century. By contrast, in the United States, industrialization occurred in a context where working men had *already* secured certain elementary political rights: The ballot had already been won by white working men, who also enjoyed the right to free speech. The argument here is that the existence of the ballot box helped to incorporate American working men into the emerging industrial order, providing a heightened sense of citizenship and social incorporation even as economic institutions evolved. In the famous phrase of historian Alan Dawley (1980), in the United States, the "ballot box was the coffin of [oppositional] class consciousness." A fuller discussion of the rise of mass production in the United States, and American workers' response to it, is provided in Chapter 5.

Gender, Family, and the Factory System: The Rise of the Male Breadwinner Norm

The consequences of the Industrial Revolution were by no means limited to the sphere of production. In fact, the very distinctions that took shape between production and consumption, work and home, or public and private life were themselves largely products of the Industrial Revolution. Precisely how these distinctions congealed seems especially significant today, at a time when traditional conceptions of work, gender, and family life have begun to shift in far-reaching ways. For in truth, many of the apparently timeless or "natural" distinctions we have inherited from the past (such as the tradition of the "male breadwinner" norm) first came into being in response to the rise of industrial

capitalism and are thus less than a century and a half old.

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, two interrelated features characterized the laboring household. One was that throughout most of preindustrial Europe households were structured in terms of *patriarchy*, a system that was deeply engrained within political and religious institutions and that compelled wives and daughters to submit to control by men (Hartmann 1975–76; Rose 1992). In practice, the father and the husband represented the household within the community, had control over the family's property, and supervised the family's economic activities. More was involved than sheer economics, however, for patriarchy implied a powerful system of gender symbolism that defined widely held conceptions of masculinity and femininity. Within artisan households for example, the prevailing notions of masculinity were closely bound up with the possession of skill, the independence this provided, and the ability to pass on one's trade to one's son.

The second feature of most laboring households existed alongside such patriarchal norms: the fact that it was the household itself that was the core productive unit. Whether performed in rural settings or in household-based workshops within the towns, work was generally conducted within the home and by members of the family laboring as a joint production unit. A sharp division typically existed between men's and women's tasks, as "men worked at what were considered more skilled tasks, the women processing the raw materials or finishing the end product" (Hartmann 1975–76: 150). Yet even in households affected by the rise of commercial activity, goods were produced within the family, reflecting "a deeply ingrained sense of family members as contributors to a joint production unit" (Seccombe 1986: 63, 65).

With the rise of the Industrial Revolution, both of these characteristics rapidly began to unravel at one and the same time. As the growth of centralized factory employment grew more pronounced, rural laborers and artisans were drawn out of the system of household production, generating a sharp separation between home and work. Although early factories often employed whole families alongside one another (Burawoy 1985), the general tendency was for family members to be employed as individual wage laborers, employed wherever work could be found. This development posed major challenges to family life, not least because the rhythms of factory production imposed great hardships on the care of infant children. But the movement of work from the household into the factory also began to undermine the patriarchal norms that served to define the proper "place" that men and women held within society.

With the growth of factory employment, fathers often lost control over their children, for they could no longer transmit land or skilled trades to their offspring. Moreover, children began to leave home and work independently, rather than being "sent" out to work. Even more important, out of necessity women began to seek out employment, not as members of a family but as individuals beyond direct control of their fathers or their husbands. A double challenge developed that threatened to undercut patriarchal institutions. In economic terms, since women were almost universally paid substantially lower wages than their male counterparts, the specter arose in many towns and industries of labor competition along gender lines, with men being pitted against lower-paid female rivals. Especially

in labor-intensive fields throughout the textile industries, factory owners often sought to hire women workers in place of men, both to reap labor savings and to exert fuller control over their workforce (since women were widely deemed to provide a more pliable workforce). The cultural dislocations that resulted are well described by Seccombe (1986: 67, emphasis added; see also Hartmann 1975–76; Rose 1992):

> Increasingly, factory employment took women away from the protection of their fathers and husbands, fostering extra-familial sex-mixing in anonymous urban settings. Many were offended by the dress and cheeky demeanour of proletarian women, not only at work but getting to and from work, and in their leisure-time as well. What would become of factory girls who used their wages to live away from home in rented accommodation of their own choosing, cohabiting with one another in rough neighborhoods and commercial districts in rooming houses that were not adequately supervised? *Who could say where all this might lead?*

Responding to this twofold (economic and cultural) threat, working class men struggled to maintain some semblance of their traditional privileges, with effects that persisted for more than a century.

Especially in the skilled trades, working class organizations mobilized a far-reaching effort to confront the economic and cultural challenges they faced. Their efforts, which began to gather force in the 1830s and 1840s, generally took three forms. First, petitioning Parliament and their employers, working men sought to define women workers as in need of protective legislation that sharply limited the hours during which they could be employed and required special safety and health regulations. Second, by defining trade union membership as a necessary condition of employment, yet by refusing to admit women to the trade, union leaders either directly or indirectly barred the employment of women in the same occupations as men. Third, to justify these actions, working men invoked a moral conception that borrowed from the cultural constructs of the Victorian middle class family, which had defined women as having no proper place within the labor market. What working men essentially argued was that they, too, deserved a "family wage"—that is, income levels that were high enough so that men could protect their women against the rigors of the labor market. Third, many working men's organizations publicly decried the emasculation which the employment of women imposed on them. Labor historian Sonya Rose (1992) recounts instances in which men walked picket lines while pushing baby carriages, in this way publicizing the symbolic threat they perceived from factories that hired women in their place. The logic that working men often used found culmination in this statement, made by the leader of the British Trades Union Congress in 1875:

> [The goal of the labour movement must be to] bring about a condition... where wives and daughters would be in their proper sphere at home, instead of being dragged into competition for livelihood with the great and strong men of the world. (Seccombe 1986: 55)

The results were generally highly effective. Faced with the disruption of patriarchal structures, both economically and culturally, working class men led a broad historical effort that reaffirmed

their labor market positions, encouraged the segregation of women into sex-segregated jobs, or else denied women access to all but the lowest paid positions in the labor market, thus "sharpening the distinction between the breadwinning capacities of men and the domestic duties of women" (Creighton 1996: 323).

Social scientists, feminist historians, and other scholars have continued to debate the specific features of these developments. Some scholars have questioned whether the working class men had any alternative but to exclude women workers from their trades. From this point of view, efforts to include women within trade unions, and to establish equal wages, were most often doomed to fail, since employers generally responded to these strategies by simply refusing to hire women at such elevated wages. For this reason, many women workers were actually suspicious of "equal pay" policies when union leaders advanced them. Other scholars have argued that the establishment of a "family wage," in which the man serves as breadwinner and the woman as the homemaker, was in fact a triumph not just for men but for working class people generally (Humphries 1977; Horrell and Humphries 1995). The reasoning here is that the family wage actually served the interests of *all* workers—men, women and children—by protecting the most vulnerable groups of workers against market-based exploitation. From this point of view, the family wage began to put working class families—or at least, the more affluent among their ranks—on a more equal footing with the middle class.

Such debates should not obscure the outcome of these historical developments, which had massive consequences for the nature of industrial capitalism, gender relations, and the structure of family life for generations to come. What this broad historical process did was to reaffirm traditional patriarchal notions concerning men's centrality within productive activity. Thus reaffirmed, the male breadwinner norm "detached women from the hub of productive life and relegated them to the rump of economic activities that remained domestic: primarily the administration of consumption and the management of reproduction" (Horrell and Humphries 1995: 89). Although women continued to work, and did so in large numbers, for a century or more their labor market activities were defined as peripheral in importance, as discretionary (even when their earnings were vital to the family's subsistence), or even as signaling a moral failure on the part of the man, who was judged to be an inadequate breadwinner.

The rise of the breadwinner norm had effects that reach from the Industrial Revolution into our own time. As Reskin and Padavic observed (1994: 23), because this norm

> assigned men to the labor force and women to the home, [it] encouraged employers to structure jobs on the assumptions that all permanent workers were men and that all men had stay-at-home wives. These assumptions freed workers (that is, male workers) from domestic responsibilities so they could work 12- to 14-hour days. These assumptions also bolstered the belief that domestic work was women's responsibility, even for women who were employed outside the home.

Formed in the wake of the male breadwinner norm, the structure of work came to be based on what Williams has called a "system of domesticity" that has only recently been challenged (2000, p. 20). This system embodies three elements that hold great significance for the structure of work

generally: first, that employers are entitled to demand an ideal (male) worker who is insulated from domestic demands; second, that it is the right—indeed, even the duty—of male employees to conform to this ideal; and third, that the lives of mothers should be oriented around nurturance rather than paid employment. Women and men will of course debate the choices that seem appropriate in their own lives, but that is indeed the point: What the emergence of the male breadwinner norm did—once it was established as a key part of industrial capitalism—was precisely to narrow the choices that women might be able to make.

Conclusion

The coming of the Industrial Revolution had massive effects on Western societies. It built on cultural developments, to be sure. But in turn, it also reshaped them in far-reaching ways. First and at the broadest level, the Industrial Revolution solidified the West's position of global dominance, setting the stage for the extension of Western colonial and neo-colonial power throughout Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Building on the cultural developments that preceded it, the Industrial Revolution literally fueled the growth of a type of society that celebrated work, originally in religious terms, but eventually in terms that became ends in themselves.

A key point that historians have debated is whether the Industrial Revolution and the era of mass production was in fact inevitable (Piore and Sabel 1984). It is of course tempting to see the past as prelude—that is, to see previous developments as necessarily leading toward the familiar world of mass production, massive corporations, and the dominance of a market economy. But we need to be wary of such deterministic views. Did the era of mass production triumph because of its superior efficiency? Or were there other influences involved, with the course of Western development implicitly shaped by social, cultural, political, and even military institutions quite apart from economic efficiency? Are there in fact multiple paths that led (and, arguably, still lead) toward modernity and beyond? Although such debates are not easily resolved, they do serve the useful function of reminding us that industrialization is at its heart not only an economic but also a human or moral accomplishment—one that is shaped by existing conceptions of virtue and sin, discipline and leisure, masculinity and femininity.

A final point that emerges here concerns the possible "end" point of the Industrial Revolution. As we have seen, industrial capitalism has instituted an era of restless, ongoing expansion via the mass production of goods and services. Initially, it took root in Western societies. But in recent decades it has broadened its reach, bringing the developing world much more directly into its grasp, not only as a supplier of raw materials and labor, but now as a center of industrial activity and heavy manufacturing. As the entire world embraces the Industrial Revolution, questions about its fundamental nature and logic, or about alternative forms of economic organization, will cease to seem like academic abstractions, for the environmental consequences of endlessly expanded mass production must inevitably be faced. Precisely how industrialization can accommodate environmental concerns and what forms of governance at the global level will be needed to foster such accommodations are likely to become increasingly pressing concerns as modern industry spreads into every corner of the globe.