Women and the Working Class

Flora Tristan

As industrialization spread, working-class organizations developed. Opposed by governments and by the middle classes, these organizations faced great difficulties in creating a following and maintaining their existence. For the most part the new labor unions paid little attention to women and were dominated by men. However, there were women like Flora Tristan (1803–1844) who recognized the connections between the emancipation of women and forming working-class unions. In The Workers’ Union (1844), Tristan made the following appeal to French workers.

Consider: The ways this might appeal to workers and particularly to working-class women; how this differs from the attitude of Elizabeth Poole Sandford or Samuel Smiles.

1. To constitute the working class by setting up a compact, solid, and indissoluble union.
2. The workers' union to choose and pay a defender who shall represent the working class before the


Visual Sources

Gare Saint Lazare

Claude Monet

From a visual standpoint, industrial civilization was strikingly different from its predecessor. The 1877 painting (figure 11.1) of a railroad station in the heart of nineteenth-century Paris by the French Impressionist Claude Monet epitomizes the new industrial civilization. Steam, powerful engines, rapid transportation, and structures of iron and glass, all in an expanding urban environment, contrast sharply with the typical rural or urban images of previous eras.

Consider: The associations that a nineteenth-century viewer might have upon viewing this painting.

FIGURE 11.1 (© Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, USA, Bequest from the Collection of Maurice Wertheim, Class of 1906/Bridgeman Art Library)
Iron and Coal
William Bell Scott
In the caption to his 1860 painting of industrial activity in Tyneside, England (figure 11.2), British artist William Bell Scott (1811–1891) proudly proclaims: "In the Nineteenth Century the Northumbrians show the World what can be done with Iron and Coal." He may have painted the picture in response to a plea in a publication complaining that in most paintings "we miss . . . the poetry of the things about us; our railways, factories, mines, roaring cities, steam vessels, and the endless novelties and wonders produced everyday." Certainly this mid-nineteenth century painting celebrates these industrial "things." The foreground setting is an engineering workshop. In the center, three muscular workers hammer out molten iron. On the right is a drawing of a steam engine built by Robert Stephenson and Co., and indeed an example of that steam engine is crossing Stephenson's High Level Bridge in the background to the right. In the left foreground, a girl sits on an Armstrong gun with her father's bench and an arithmetic book in her lap. In the shop are other industrial objects made of iron: an anchor, a marine air pump, and a heavy chain with a pulley. In back of the three workers a boy who works in the mines stands with a Davy safety lamp and looks down on the docks below. On the river a coal barge passes.
CONSIDER: What image of industrial activity this painting presents to the viewer; what other images of industrial activity might an artist present.

Illustration from Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong
The following illustration (figure 11.3) is from a novel, Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong (1840), by the well-known British author, Mrs. Frances Trollope. The illustration depicts several of the main elements of the Industrial Revolution in England. It shows the inside of a textile factory—a factory in the most advanced of the new industries. Thanks to mechanization and artificial power, a few workers can now do the work of many. The workers—men, women, and children—are obviously poor. In the background stands the stern middle-class owner talking with others of his class while in the foreground a child worker embraces his middle-class counterpart for some kindness he has displayed. The scene is reflective of the typical middle-class view of the poor and poverty—as problems of morals, to be treated with pity and philanthropic concern but not yet requiring substantial social or economic change.

CONSIDER: The ways in which this illustration reflects aspects of industrialization touched on by other documents in this chapter; the similarities and differences between this illustration and Figure 18.2 in Chapter 18.

Industrialization and Demographic Change
A comparison of maps 11.1 and 11.2, which show the population density of England in 1801 and 1851, respectively, reveals the relatively rapid increase in population and urbanization in certain areas of England during this period. The third map (map 11.3) shows where industry (mainly textiles, metallurgy, and mining) was concentrated in 1851. A comparison of all three maps reveals the connections among shifting population density, urbanization, and industrialization during this period of early, rapid modernization of England's economy.

CONSIDER: What some of the geopolitical consequences of these connections between demographic and economic changes might be; what some of the social consequences of these same connections might be.
The Making of Economic Society: England, the First to Industrialize
Robert L. Heilbroner

Although it is clear that industrialization occurred first in England, it is not apparent why this should be so. During the eighteenth century France was prosperous and economically advanced. Other countries such as Belgium and the Netherlands possessed certain economic advantages over England and might have industrialized earlier but did not. In the following selection Robert Heilbroner, an economist and economic historian, addresses the question of why England was first and points out the differences between England and most other European nations in the eighteenth century.

**CONSIDER:** Why Heilbroner stresses the role of the “New Men” over the other factors he lists; any disadvantages England had to overcome; whether it was simply the circumstances that gave rise to the “New Men” or whether it was the “New Men” who took advantage of the circumstances when most men in most other nations would not have.

Why did the Industrial Revolution originally take place in England and not on the continent? To answer the question we must look at the background factors which distinguished England from most other European nations in the eighteenth century.

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