

## CHILD LABOR: ABUSES AND REFORMS

Long before the Industrial Revolution, children were expected to work. Under the direction of their parents, young children worked in the fields, in the house, and in cottage industries. By doing this they added to the family income and acquired the skills necessary to support themselves when they got older. Many children, upon reaching the age of 12 or 13, were apprenticed to craftsmen and learned the skills of a blacksmith, carpenter, bricklayer, or some other trade.

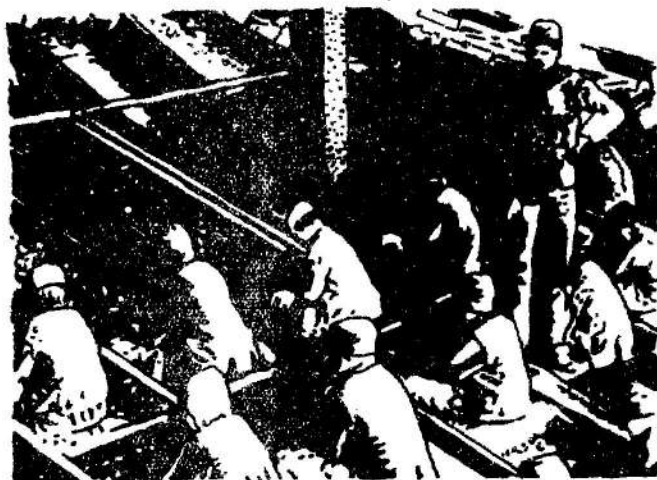
The Industrial Revolution changed this system. As children entered the factories and mines, parental supervision was replaced by the discipline of the foremen, and instead of learning skills through an apprenticeship, children learned only the tedious tasks of operating factory machines.

The demand for unskilled factory workers was high, and child labor met the factories' needs. Children could work for a smaller salary. They were preferred for some jobs in textile mills because their small fingers could better manipulate the cotton threads. In the early days of the factory system, children often worked alongside their parents in the textile mills, because mill owners hired entire families. As the factory evolved, families were routinely broken up, and children worked under the direction of a company overseer. Factory owners often "apprenticed" large numbers of children from orphanages, turning them into virtual slaves who lived only to work at the machines. Impoverished parents were often forced to send their children to work in the factories and mines.

The lives of the child workers were very difficult. Often as young as six years old, they started work as early as five in the morning and worked late into the night. Many of the jobs they performed were dangerous, especially those in coal mines. Their health was poor due to their working conditions and inadequate diet. Foremen often beat them if they worked too slowly. They received no education and learned no skills that gave them hope of employment beyond the factory.

Abolishing the abuses of child labor proved to be difficult. England particularly struggled with the issue. The textile industry used vast numbers of child laborers and was an important part of the English economy. Many political leaders did not believe that it was the job of government to regulate industry. The English Parliament examined child labor in the 1830s and finally passed a number of acts to eliminate the worst abuses over the next decades. The laws limited the working hours and raised the wages of children, as well as prohibited them from performing the most dangerous jobs.

The United States industrialized later than England, but also came to depend on child labor. The 1870 census reported 750,000 workers under the age of 15; that number increased dramatically over the next 30 years. Individual states had passed laws regulating child labor early in the 1800s, but it was clear that national laws were needed. Ministers, doctors, and educators pushed for its abolition. Finally in 1938 the Fair Labor Standards Act prohibited the employment of children under 14 years old and limited the types of jobs that they could perform. This act effectively ended the worst abuses of child labor in the United States.



"Breaker boys" worked in coal mines sorting coal for very little pay.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### POINTS TO CONSIDER

1. Children who spent their time working in factories were unable to receive an education. What long-term effects would there be on a country that used a large portion of its children to perform factory work? *(3 sentences)*

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2. In the preindustrial world, children were often apprenticed to a craftsman to learn job skills. This was the most common form of education at the time. By working under the craftsman's instruction, children were trained at an early age to perform a specific job. What advantages do you see in an apprenticeship education? What disadvantages are there? Would such a system work today? Why or why not? *(4 sentences)*

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3. Even before the Industrial Revolution children were expected to work hard for the family at an early age. They were also subject to harsh discipline, both at home and at work. Compared to today's standards, life during the Industrial Revolution was quite brutal. What do parents and society require children to do now? Why do you think that attitudes toward children have changed? Do we value children more today? *(4 sentences)*

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