

## Efficiency vs. Humanity: The Industrial Revolution

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The International Labour Organization defines child labor as “Work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development.” (International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, 1) Children have been working and assisting their parents throughout history, but due the Industrial Revolution (I.R.), it has escalated to much more than working on farms and doing chores. Families during the I.R. were living in extreme poverty. In the late 1700s, typical wages for an adult, male factory worker working 14-16 hours a day for 6 days a week were only about 10 cents an hour. This meant that to survive in even the lowest level of poverty, parents had to put their entire families to work. Children as young as 5 years old were given jobs in the mines and factories, paying only 1/10th of what their fathers would make, and sometimes for up to **19 hours a day**. Factories welcomed these children because they could pay them less, the children could perform some tasks easier, and there would be no trouble with unionizing. Children put into labor were, and continue, to be overworked, underpaid, and forced by poverty to perform tasks both physically and mentally harmful; this pattern began when capitalists’ drive for efficiency overpowered their respect for humane practices.

Facilities in which children were kept were unhygienic and dangerous due to the large, heavy, and powerful machines. These facilities often times caused general injuries such as cuts and bruises, broken bones, lacerations, infections, illness, and lost limbs as well as occasional accidents leading to death. Medical research has also shown that the repetitive jobs caused significant bone deformation to children under 13 years old. Medical Doctor Samuel Smith provided evidence for this in front of a parliament committee in 1832. He stated that, “[Children] up to twelve or thirteen years of age, [have] bones [that] are so soft that they will bend in any direction.” He then continued to talk about how he often saw child laborers/previous child laborers where the arches in their feet have given way, that the continuous standing of factory work, “has also a very injurious effect upon the ankles,” and how he had seen many cases of knock-knees developing in these children, one case left long enough that the individual lost 12 inches of height (Spartacus Educational). In an interview for the same investigation, Elizabeth Bentley, a previous child factory worker, said that, “It was so dusty, the dust got up in my lungs, and the work was so hard. I got so bad in health that when I pulled the baskets down, I pulled my bones out of their places.” (Spartacus Educational) William Dodd, another child factory worker, talked about how he had to undergo an operation to amputate his hand and part of his forearm. He described the sight of his dissected bone as looking, “something similar to an empty honeycomb, the marrow having totally disappeared.” (Spartacus Educational) Whether it be a long term deformity or an accident that disabled the child immediately, they were almost never given compensation for their injuries.

It is estimated that 1/3 of children working in these factories were orphans forced to work for capitalists in exchange for their basic needs and survival. Although they were clothed, fed, and given shelter, they were given the bare minimum to keep expenses low. Because of their lack of wages, many consider this to be a form of child slavery. However, orphaned and parented children alike were abused by their overseers. Many children would get dizzy from fumes, lack of fresh air, lack of sleep, and/or malnutrition, but if a child took a break or was not working quickly enough for any reason, they would be considered lazy and receive punishment. Elizabeth Bentley also mentioned in her interview that if she worked too slow they would “strap” her, meaning they would beat her with a strip of leather. Other

obscure things such as “weighting” were common forms of punishment. Weighting refers to when a child would have a large weight tied around their neck and be forced to walk through the factory aisles to be an example to their peers. This caused many serious back and neck injuries. Not only did Capitalists have no regard for their safety, but they used the infliction of physical pain as a means for bettering the efficiency of their factories.

Physical development and injuries were not the only aspect of a child’s growth in trouble. Psychological problems played a big part in the consequences of early labor. When a minor was put into work, it sacrificed all of their education, and prevented the development of their necessary cognitive skills, as well as their social development. Without these skills, these kids could not get a better job. They were taken away from all of the things that they needed to progress further than factory work, and were left with psychological problems that kept them working in these conditions because they had no better option. This, as well as trauma, anxiety, depression, and several other mental health issues mean that they ended up experiencing the pain of their childhood throughout the rest of their lives.

Although this may seem like a thing of the past, this still continues to happen every single day. There are still an estimated 168 million child labourers worldwide. Maybe child labor has moved from our view, but others continue to exploit the poverty of third world countries for their own benefit. Our freedom should not be something that we have stolen from other human beings in countries unseen by the common eye. The only way we can ensure this is with education, regulation, and enforcement. In the United States, it took years to get to the point where children and workers were protected by law. We formed unions, led strikes, and came together to give rights to those who had been denied them. Thanks to our 13th amendment, “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.” as well as the Fair Labor Standards Act, the Occupational Safety and Health Act, the limit on a worker’s age, and many more laws like these, labor rights have improved. If the government could redirect some of their spending into creating an organization to regulate the labor of American corporations that operate internationally, we could help to enforce these laws in other countries who do not have the power to enforce them on their own. Some groups such as the Corporate Research Project have already done a lot of work to track these businesses’ labor and would be valuable to this new program. Additionally, we could work with the help of non-profit organizations to create similar laws in countries who may not have them quite yet. People all over the world have already started working on these issues, with the United States government backing and employing them, we could not only create new jobs for those who are passionate about equal rights, but we could also put a stop to many of the injustices committed by its own citizens. Educate2Envision International is a perfect example of one of the organizations we should be supporting. Their mission is to give kids in underserved countries education while still teaching them how to support and grow their own economy, so that they don’t have to resort to child labor yet again. It is one of the few sustainable solutions that has the power to create a massive amount of change with the help of the government. With the extensive knowledge that many of these organizations have already obtained, we can work towards the best possible way of educating and furthering these societies while still allowing families in poverty to have the wages of a fully working household. There is a way to stop child labor for good, we just need to work for it.

NOTES:

<http://www.cnn.com/2013/10/15/world/child-labor-index-2014/>  
[http://www.ilo.org/ipec/Regionsandcountries/Africa/WCMS\\_101161/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/ipec/Regionsandcountries/Africa/WCMS_101161/lang--en/index.htm)  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life\\_in\\_Great\\_Britain\\_during\\_the\\_Industrial\\_Revolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life_in_Great_Britain_during_the_Industrial_Revolution)  
[http://ihscslnews.org/view\\_article.php?id=95](http://ihscslnews.org/view_article.php?id=95)  
<http://www.victorianweb.org/science/health/health4.html>  
<http://spartacus-educational.com/IRdeformities.htm>  
<http://www.eiu.edu/eiutps/childhood.php>  
<http://www.history.com/topics/child-labor>  
<http://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm>  
<http://www.victorianweb.org/history/hist8.html>  
[http://www2.needham.k12.ma.us/nhs/cur/Baker\\_00/2002\\_p7/ak\\_p7/childlabor.html](http://www2.needham.k12.ma.us/nhs/cur/Baker_00/2002_p7/ak_p7/childlabor.html)  
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<http://primohistory.com/Industrial%20Revolution%20Walk%20around%20notes.pdf>  
[http://www.socialstudieshelp.com/lesson\\_47\\_notes.htm](http://www.socialstudieshelp.com/lesson_47_notes.htm)  
<http://firstindustrialrevolution.weebly.com/working-and-living-conditions.html>  
<http://www.uni.edu/schneidj/webquests/adayinthelife/factorysystem.html>  
[http://www2.needham.k12.ma.us/nhs/cur/Baker\\_00/2002\\_p7/ak\\_p7/childlabor.html](http://www2.needham.k12.ma.us/nhs/cur/Baker_00/2002_p7/ak_p7/childlabor.html)  
<http://spartacus-educational.com/IRdeformities.htm>  
<http://wathatcher.iweb.bsu.edu/childlabor/>  
[http://www2.needham.k12.ma.us/nhs/cur/Baker\\_00/2002\\_p7/ak\\_p7/childlabor.html](http://www2.needham.k12.ma.us/nhs/cur/Baker_00/2002_p7/ak_p7/childlabor.html)  
[https://www.continuetolearn.uiowa.edu/laborctr/child\\_labor/about/causes.html](https://www.continuetolearn.uiowa.edu/laborctr/child_labor/about/causes.html)  
<https://industrialrevolution.wordpress.com/tag/punishment/>  
<http://faculty.georgetown.edu/gg58/ChildLabor.PDF>  
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3425238/>  
<http://www.iadb.org/en/news/webstories/2003-07-03/the-effects-of-child-labor-on-learning.2018.html>  
[http://ihscslnews.org/view\\_article.php?id=95](http://ihscslnews.org/view_article.php?id=95)  
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/timworstall/2015/04/30/to-defend-child-labour-in-the-textiles-sweatshops/#3ce9fd5a17f4>  
<http://www.educate2envision.org/about/mission-and-vision/>  
<http://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2012/08/29/a-move-that-could-help-reduce-child-labor/>  
<http://histclo.com/act/work/working.html>  
[https://www.continuetolearn.uiowa.edu/laborctr/child\\_labor/about/ending.html](https://www.continuetolearn.uiowa.edu/laborctr/child_labor/about/ending.html)  
<http://www.archives.gov/historical-docs/document.html?doc=9&title.raw=13th+Amendment+to+the+U.S.+Constitution%3A+Abolition+of+Slavery>  
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<http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/briefingpapers/childlabour/intlconvs.shtml>  
<http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2015/04/03-government-spending-can-cut-deficit-aaron>  
<http://www.wvic.com/content.cfm?PageID=688&Cat=0>  
<http://www.history.com/topics/child-labor>