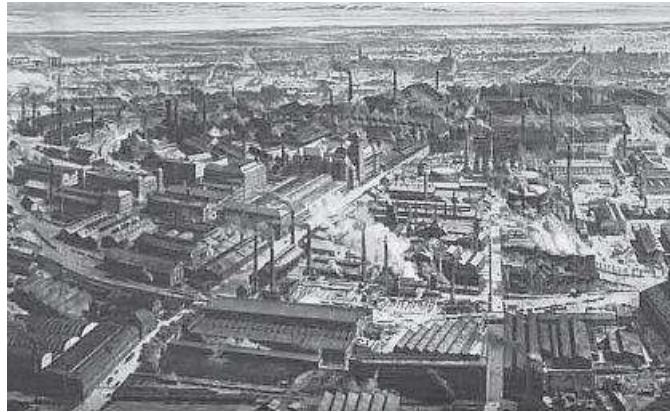


THE BEGINNING OF A NEW SOCIAL CYCLE AND REVOLUTION:

An Industrial Revolution

1783



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An "Industrial" Revolution

In 1783 George III had lost a bitter struggle against a vital section of his subjects on each side of the Atlantic. The American colonists, helped by the skill of George Washington and the complete incompetence of Lord North had finally gained their independence, which would never be lost.



(Pictures Above - King George III, Lord North, and George Washington)

Additionally, in Britain, the King's system of personal rule through subservient ministers and bribed majorities had been swept away in the general debacle regarding the American Colonies.

Thus it was that from this time forward, genuine parliamentary government - democratic in America and at first far from democratic in Britain - was established in two strongholds in the world.

This was the prominent political and social movement and reality in 1783, and this heralded in a revolution comprising of both social and industrial forces.

At this time there was also a significant economic movement that would impact on the future things would never be the same again.

And thus it is that we date the "Industrial Revolution" from this date.

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The Beginning

The Industrial Revolution is a long train of changes starting about 1760. It is not alone: it forms one of a triad or revolutions, of which the other two were the American Revolution that started in 1775, and the French Revolution that started in 1789. It may seem strange to put into the same packet an industrial revolution and two political revolutions. But the fact is that they were all social revolutions. The Industrial Revolution is simply the English way of making those social changes. I think of it as the English Revolution.

What makes it especially English? Obviously, it began in England. England was already the leading manufacturing nation. But the manufacture was cottage industry, and the Industrial Revolution begins in the villages. The men who make it are craftsmen: the millwright, the watchmaker, the canal builder, the blacksmith. What makes the Industrial Revolution so peculiarly English is that it is rooted in the countryside.

During the first half of the eighteenth century, in the old age of Newton and the decline of the Royal Society, England basked in a last Indian summer of village industry and overseas trade of merchant adventurers. The summer faded. Trade grew more competitive. By the end of the century the needs of industry were harsher and more pressing. The organization of work in the cottage was no longer productive enough. Within two generations, roughly between 1760 and 1820, the customary way of running industry changed. Before 1760, it was standard to take work to villagers in their own homes. By 1820, it was standard to bring workers into a factory and have them overseen.

We dream that the country was idyllic in the eighteenth century, a lost paradise like the Deserted Village that Oliver Goldsmith described in 1770.

*Sweet Auburn, loveliest village of the plain,
Where health and plenty cheered the labouring swain.*

*How blessed is he who crowns in shades like these,
A youth of labour with an age of ease.*

That is a fable, and George Crabbe, who was a country parson and knew the villager's life at first hand, was so enraged by it that he wrote an acid, realistic poem in reply.

*Yes, thus the Muses sing of happy swains,
Because the Muses never knew their pains.*

*O'ercome by labour and bow'd down by time,
Feel you the barren flattery of a rhyme?*

The country was a place where most men worked from dawn to dark, and the labourer lived not in the sun, but in poverty and darkness. What aids there were to lighten labour were immemorial, like the

mill, which was already ancient in Chaucer's time. The Industrial Revolution began with such machines; the millwrights were the engineers of the coming age. James Brindley of Staffordshire started his self-made career in 1733 by working at mill wheels, at the age of seventeen, having been born poor in a village.

("The Ascent of Man", J Bronowski, pp. 163-165, Futura, 1981)

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