Industrialisation and Culture

1830–1914

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Introduction

This book was conceived as a collection of readings to be used in association with the correspondence material and radio and television broadcasts of the last eight units of the foundation course in the Humanities at the Open University. The rationale of this 'extended case study' is best given in the brief introduction which Graham Martin, chairman of the working group, drafted:

The purpose of this block of units is to explore selected aspects of the complex and deep-seated changes in British society that resulted from the process known as 'industrialisation'. This process may seem, at first sight, a simple affair, having principally to do with the appearance of the familiar industrial 'landscape', with its factories, mills, coalmines, and associated ports and railways. But there was much more to it than that. Generally, we can say that industrialisation disrupted traditional patterns of social life. It made available a new richness of individual experience in some directions but in others it imposed new constraints, some of them more tyrannical than any that had existed in the past.

Physically, it liberated man by overcoming the barrier of distance, by cheapening commodities, and by diversifying social experiences. Politically, it helped to release him from the encumbrance of prescriptive privilege and traditional inequality. Philosophically, it was accompanied by a change in man's ways of thinking of himself, a change from the idea of man as a child of God to man as a child of nature, no less an object for scientific investigation than other natural phenomena.

But it also produced widespread misery from the living conditions and economic exploitation suffered, especially by its first victims, the labouring poor, or, as they came to be known, the working class. And there were more subtle effects. Contemporary thinkers maintained that it promoted a commercial spirit which damaged the quality of personal and social relationships, encouraged a competitive self-interest, depreci-

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ated the life of the feelings and the values of art, and seriously disturbed the balance between man and the world of nature. Yet, paradoxically, by stimulating this debate, it also created a keener awareness and a fuller understanding of the values that it threatened.

It is because industrialisation affected human life in these deeper, less obvious ways that we have entitled the block 'Industrialisation and Culture'. In this context, the term 'culture' means 'the intellectual and artistic activities of a society', and the full nature of historical change can only be understood by giving them adequate attention.

The first two units examine the 'industrialising' of an activity — transport in this case — and its implications in social and personal terms. The third unit discusses the debate between the proponents and critics of industrial change. The fourth unit is devoted to some philosophical consequences of the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of man and his mind. The fifth and sixth deal with industry and art: the implications for the artist of new techniques and materials, the relationship of the arts and public taste, and the role of the artist as a critic of society. The last two units concentrate on D. H. Lawrence's novel 'The Rainbow', in its reflection of some social changes brought about by industrialisation, and of Lawrence's critical view of these changes.

In its layout 'Industrialisation and Culture' corresponds roughly to the progression, history—social criticism and philosophy—art—literature. The editors divided their labour appropriately: Christopher Harvie dealt with the first two sections, Aaron Scharf with the third, and Graham Martin with the fourth, although there was a great deal of cross-discipline collaboration in each.

Three factors have, broadly speaking, governed the choice of extracts: possible use within the structure of the correspondence units, as material for exercises and assignments; value as illustrations of aspects of the age; and, especially in the first section, the desire to indicate something of the variety of types of source material available to the historian.

Techniques of presenting the extracts have varied. Where the range of subjects covered is considerable, as in the first section, separate and extended introductions have been written to each extract. Where the

documents relate more closely to one another in subject-matter, the introductions to specific extracts have been abbreviated and lengthier introductions to groups of extracts substituted. Extracts are given a letter and number identification which relates to their position in each section — e.g. D2 refers to the 'Dictionary of National Biography' article on Sir William Fairbairn, the second extract in the 'Enterprise' section — which should provide a simple system of reference. Suggestions for further reading have been given where appropriate.

Finally the editors would like to thank all the members of the foundation course team of the Arts Faculty for their help and encouragement in this project. Particular thanks must go to Godfrey Vesey, who selected the extracts for the philosophy section, to Arthur Marwick for much helpful advice about the arrangement of the first section, and to the Dean, John Ferguson, for his enthusiasm and understanding. Not to speak, of course, of our secretaries, who turned chaos into order.

*Christopher Harvie
Graham Martin
Aaron Scharf*

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