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Edited by Mikulas Teich and Roy Porter

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Introduction

MIKULÁŠ TEICH AND ROY PORTER

THE THEME

THIS is the last of the explicitly ‘National Context’ collections of essays in the sequence which Cambridge University Press has been publishing under our editorship since 1981. Its purpose has been to bring together comparative, national and interdisciplinary approaches to the history of great movements in the development of human thought and action. What this book has in common with the preceding volumes is that we perceive in the Industrial Revolution a historical phenomenon of the same order as the Renaissance, Reformation, Scientific Revolution, Enlightenment and Romanticism. That is, movements which were brought about by and formed the development of bourgeois society in Europe since the end of the Middle Ages.

As goes without saying the Industrial Revolution has been, and continues to be, the centre of massive historiographical as well as historical inquiry. Both generally and specifically, the Industrial Revolution is about the changeover from economies based on agriculture (going back to the Neolithic Revolution) to ones based upon industry.¹ Twenty-five years or so ago, discussion of this complex historical process focused largely upon growth – both charting and explaining it. Thus R. M. Hartwell, as editor, introducing the well-known *The Causes of the Industrial Revolution in England* (1967), speaks of ‘the great divide’ between ‘a world of slow economic growth’ and ‘a world of much faster economic growth’.² The titles of two articles (out of six) in that book give an indication of the preoccupation with this aspect of industrialization: ‘The Industrial Revolution and economic growth: the evidence of early British national income estimates’, and ‘England and France in the eighteenth century: a comparative analysis of two economic growths’. How far has the accent changed? We have asked the authors of these two articles – Phyllis Deane and François Crouzet respectively – to re-examine their accounts and to reflect upon transformations in economic historians’ thinking regarding industrialization in Britain and France.

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[More information](#)

This broaches the issue whether the industrializing process where it came later can be understood without taking into account specific national circumstances. How far was a 'knock-on' process at work, whereby industrialization in one national situation expedited economic progress in another next to it? Did the reverse happen, with inverse relationship between different adjoining national economies? What were the drawbacks or advantages of being late? How far was industrialization in any national context essentially a response to the local economic, social, cultural and political state of affairs? How far must we see industrialization, by contrast, as a transnational movement, with a relatively independent impetus of its own? To what degree were there transfers of skills, technologies, capital and outlooks from region to region? To answer these questions, technical skills in economic and econometric analysis are obviously requisite; but equally important is a willingness to grapple with larger questions of national history and international relations.

Matters such as these are variously explored in the essays by Roger Munting and Ljuben Berov on industrializing Russia/the Soviet Union and the Balkans respectively; as likewise in the contributions on Germany by Richard Tilly, Italy by Carlo Poni and Giorgio Mori, Sweden by Bo Gustafsson and Spain by Gabriel Tortella. A feature of this book is the separate treatment of the Industrial Revolution in the Czech Lands by Milan Myška and in Hungary by Ivan Berend, which supplement Herbert Matis's account of the Industrial Revolution in Austria in the framework of the multinational Habsburg Monarchy.³ No less of special value is the separate attention given to the development of industrialization in Belgium by Herman Van der Wee, in The Netherlands by J. L. van Zanden and in Switzerland by Bruno Fritzsche.

It is well to remember that the Industrial Revolution in these parts of Europe, not unlike the Renaissance and the above-mentioned great movements, worked itself out in a sequence of non-simultaneous occurrences over a lengthy time-span. Can the concept of revolution be squared with a long-drawn-out historical event? It is this conceptual question which William N. Parker brings to the forefront in the essay on the USA. By taking into account the relative contribution of the distinct national experiences in Europe and the USA, and assessing them as special cases of a more general phenomenon, the essay by Sidney Pollard adds to the conceptual range and coherence of the volume. We have accepted and put great value on the fact that the articles express the individual view and approach of the authors.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

3

HISTORY OF THE CONCEPT

In Eric Hobsbawm's striking characterization, the Industrial Revolution 'marks the most fundamental transformation of human life in the history of the world recorded in written documents'.⁴ This perspective on the Industrial Revolution has not won universal acclaim. Indeed one critic, also taking a long view, has argued not long ago that the so-called 'Industrial Revolution' should be interpreted as a continuation of the division between town and country, which appeared first in Mesopotamia 5,000 years ago:

Instead of having experienced an 'industrial revolution', England experienced an urban evolution, as part of an age-old process of a shift of population to the towns. This change was accompanied by changes in wealth, skill, commercial practices and transport facilities. It was part of a process which can first be observed to have occurred in the Sumerian cities of 3000 bc, in which some people got much richer, and other people got poorer (slaves in the earlier case, 'wage-slaves' latterly). It is a mistake to take the idea of 'revolution' over from political to economic and social history, in order to describe changes which are best thought of as cultural.⁵

Curiously, the history of the idea, including the variously written term (Industrial Revolution, industrial revolution), has attracted little interest. The *Oxford English Dictionary* registers the term in its *Supplement* of 1933 – under the word 'industrial' – for the first time as follows:

Industrial Revolution, the rapid development of machinery, which took place in England in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

As to the lexicographic source, the reader is referred to Arnold Toynbee's posthumous *Lectures on the Industrial Revolution in England* (1884).⁶

In the 1971 *Supplement* the wording of the entry changes:

industrial revolution, a rapid development in industry; *spec.* (freq. with capital initials) the development which took place in England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, chiefly owing to the introduction of new or improved machinery and large-scale production methods.

Furthermore, J. S. Mill is shown to have employed the term in his *Principles of Political Economy* (1848) earlier than Toynbee.

Toynbee's paternity of the term has been widely accepted in Anglo-Saxon historiography since Paul Mantoux ascribed it to him in a footnote in the 'Introduction' to his classical work *La révolution industrielle au XVIII^e siècle* (1906).⁷ In the English version of the slightly revised French text, first published in 1928, Mantoux expanded the information in the footnote on

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

the authorship of the term. Giving William Rappard's *La révolution industrielle et les origines de la protection légale du travail en Suisse* (1914) as his source Mantoux pointed out that Friedrich Engels employed the term, before Mill, in his famed *Die Lage der arbeitenden Klasse in England* (1845).⁸

In the meantime (1922) a short article appeared, by Anna Bezanson, demonstrating the earlier usage of the term in French literature during the years 1820–40. At the same time, she stressed that the understanding of 'the meaning attached to the term' is more important than the establishment of 'the date of use' and concluded: 'discussion of the real significance of the term must be part of a description of the industry of the period'.⁹

In 1952 the noted Oxford historian G. N. Clark maintained that the idea of the Industrial Revolution, despite being bereft of substance in historical reality, was heuristically valuable.¹⁰

A comprehensive attempt to deal with this topic is to be found in Jaroslav Purš's massive *The Industrial Revolution Development of the Idea and Concept*, published in 1973 in Czech with Russian and English summaries. Specifically, he argues that a historico-semantic analysis of basic categories (revolution, industry, manufacture, manufactory, factory, etc.) can throw light on the origins, uneven development, gradual dominance and social consequences of factory production. Generally, he insists that it was Engels with Marx who between 1844 and 1867 evolved the first serious theory of the Industrial Revolution, and that the positive or negative coming to terms with it underlies the further developments in this area.¹¹

To claim that Marx and Engels elaborated the theory of the Industrial Revolution is to stretch a point. What they did was use their analysis of economic, technical, social and political aspects of the Industrial Revolution in Britain to evolve a general theory of social development. And it has been the latter's message heralding that socialism and communism respectively will follow capitalism, which has influenced in one direction or another the debate regarding the nature and consequences of the Industrial Revolution, and its place in history.

TOYNBEE'S LECTURES REVISITED

It is in this context that Toynbee's *Lectures on the Industrial Revolution* which 'effectively began modern discussion of the subject'¹² deserve to be revisited. All the more so since there has been a tendency to sideline Toynbee's scholarly endeavours and influence by perceiving him primarily as the creator of the 'pessimistic' interpretation of the social costs of the Industrial Revolution. This point was reiterated in a critical appraisal of him as a historical economist not long ago:

Cambridge University Press

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

5

[Toynbee's] catastrophic interpretation of the social consequences of the Industrial Revolution, however, was an original contribution that laid the groundwork for an historiographical tradition in economic history, the impact of which is still felt.¹³

There is more to Toynbee's *Lectures* than the accent on the dark aspects of the Industrial Revolution¹⁴ and statements such as the one quoted do not convey a balanced assessment of the book which, though unfinished, enjoyed a long-lasting reputation. It went through five editions between 1884 and 1908 when a cheaper edition was published which, reprinted many times, served as a textbook of English economic history until it went out of print in 1927.¹⁵ This information is put forward in the new edition, published in 1969, with an Introduction by T. S. Ashton asserting that 'this remarkable pioneer work will be welcomed by economic historians of all shades of thought, in England and elsewhere'.¹⁶ By then and afterwards, however, Toynbee's work has received undeservedly no consideration – or a marginal one – in writings dealing with the Industrial Revolution, including contributions to this volume.¹⁷

We shall not attempt to analyse the reasons for the vanishing interest in Toynbee's *Lectures on the Industrial Revolution*. It is evident that in the process sight was lost of the subject matter, including methodology, Toynbee wished to explore in the first place. That is, the relations between the ideas of Adam Smith, Malthus and Ricardo and the economic and social reality engendered by the Industrial Revolution. Toynbee approached the relations between them from a standpoint that was doubtlessly indebted to Hegelian dialectic. This harmonizes with Toynbee's closeness to the Oxford protagonists of Hegel's philosophy in England, Benjamin Jowett and Thomas H. Green. The following passage from the 'Reminiscence' by Alfred Milner (Lord Milner) (who in the words of Mrs Toynbee 'shared my husband's entire intellectual life')¹⁸ gives an indication of the place of historical and relational dialectic in Toynbee's methodology:

The facts of economic history and the theories of economists should be studied side by side, and thus studied, they would throw light on each other. Adam Smith, Malthus, Ricardo should be interpreted by a knowledge of the industrial and social conditions of their time. This was an essential feature of Toynbee's projected work on the 'Industrial Revolution'.¹⁹

It is in the introductory lecture that we find the relevance of dialectics to Toynbee's solution of contrasting problems and issues, such as nature, value and relation of the historical and deductive method; universality and relativity of economic policies and laws; continuity between the past

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

and the present. These questions are discussed, in general as well as concrete terms, and merit being referred to extensively in order to get close to Toynbee's viewpoint on how history ought to be done:

The subject of these lectures is the Industrial and Agrarian Revolution at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries ... I have chosen the subject because it was in this period that modern Political Economy took its rise. It has been a weakness of the science as pursued in England that it has been too much dissociated from History. Adam Smith and Malthus, indeed, had historical minds; but the form of modern textbooks is due to Ricardo, whose mind was entirely unhistorical. Yet there is double advantage in combining the two studies. In the first place Political Economy is better understood by this means. Abstract propositions are seen in a new light when studied in relation to the facts which were before the writer at the time when he formulated them. So regarded they are at once more vivid and less likely to mislead. Ricardo becomes painfully interesting when we read the history of his time. And, in the second place, History also is better understood when studied in connection with Political Economy. For the latter not only teaches us in reading History to look out for the right kinds of facts, but enables us to explain many phenomena like those attending the introduction of enclosures and machinery, or the effects of different systems of currency, which without its assistance would remain unintelligible. The careful deductive reasoning, too, which Political Economy teaches, is of great importance to the historian, and the habits of mind acquired from it are even more valuable than the knowledge of principles which it gives, especially to students of facts, who might otherwise be overwhelmed by the mass of their materials ...

The historical method pursues a different line of investigation. It examines the actual causes of economic development and considers the influence of institutions such as the mediaeval guilds, our present land-laws, or the political constitution of any given country, in determining the distribution of wealth. Without the aid of the Historical Method it would be impossible, for instance, to understand why one-half of the land in the United Kingdom is owned by 2512 persons.^a

And not only does it investigate the stages of economic development in a given country, but it compares them with those which have obtained in other countries and times, and seeks by such comparison to discover laws of universal application ...

The Historical Method is also of value because it makes us see where economic laws and precepts are relative.^b The old economists were wont to speak as if these laws and precepts were universal. Free trade, for instance, is a sound policy, no doubt, for England, and for all nations at a

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

7

certain stage of development; but it is open to anyone to say that free trade is only good under certain conditions. No English economist, it is true, has dared to say this ... I do not mean to assert, however, that there are not some laws which are universally true, such as the law of diminishing returns.

The discussion about method may seem barren, but it is not really so. Take such a question as the functions of the State ... The proper limits of Government interference are relative to the nature of each particular state and the stage of its civilisation. It is a matter of great importance at the present day for us to discover what these limits are in our own case, for administration bids fair to claim a large share of our attention in the future. It would be well if, in studying the past, we could always bear in mind the problems of the past, and go to that past to seek large views of what is of lasting importance to the human race. It is an old complaint that histories leave out of sight those vital questions which are connected with the condition of the people. The French Revolution has indeed profoundly modified our views of History, but much still remains to be done in that direction. If I could persuade some of those present to study Economic History, to follow out the impulse originally given by Malthus to the study of the history of the mass of the people, I should be indeed glad. Party historians go to the past for party purposes; they seek to read into the past the controversies of the present. You must pursue facts for their own sake, but penetrated with a vivid sense of the problems of your own time. This is not a principle of perversion, but a principle of selection. You must have some principle of selection, and you could not have a better one than to pay special attention to the history of the social problems which are agitating the world now, for you may be sure that they are problems not of temporary but of lasting importance.²⁰

From such an approach arose Toynbee's perception of the Industrial Revolution as a major socio-economic event, with salient intellectual consequences, in England's as well as Europe's transition from medieval feudalism to industrial capitalism:²¹

The essence of the Industrial Revolution is the substitution of competition for the mediaeval regulations which had previously controlled the production and distribution of wealth. On this account it is not only one of the most important facts of English history, but Europe owes to it the growth of two great systems of thought – Economic Science, and its antithesis, Socialism.

It is of more than passing interest that while the first sentence in this passage has often been quoted and critically commented on, the following one has hardly attracted attention. It is in the light of Toynbee's core

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

thesis that his concern with the socio-political and ideological repercussions of the Industrial Revolution in England has to be viewed. Consider the dissolution of the patriarchal relationship between the employer and the employed which he described as follows:²²

Between the individual workman and the capitalist who employed hundreds of 'hands' a wide gulf opened: the workman ceased to be the cherished dependant, he became the living tool of whom the employer knew less than he did of his steam-engine ... The destruction of the old bonds between employers and workmen was not peculiar to manufactures; it came to pass in agriculture also. An agrarian as well as an industrial revolution had taken place.

Toynbee acknowledges that there could be no return to what he depicted 'as a state of feudal dependence', which, 'like all feudalism has its dark and light sides'.²³ But what was the nature of the worker's relationship with the employer in capitalist society? More specifically, was the worker really free to express his point of view (political independence) without jeopardizing his liberty to sell his labour (material independence)? The resolving of this issue is the theme of Toynbee's last lecture, 'The future of the working classes' and of the address 'Are radicals socialists?', which was 'delivered in the earlier part of 1882 to audiences of workmen and employers at Newcastle, Bradford, Bolton and Leicester'.²⁴

At the heart of Toynbee's solution, much in agreement with contemporary liberal radical thinking, was social reform directed towards assimilating working-class political activism to middle-class political perspectives. The fostering of class collaboration was to be underpinned by giving workers adequate material rewards for which Toynbee called. Apart from general class consent, Toynbee admitted rather reluctantly that for setting such reform into motion and for making it function backing by the state was needed. While claiming that this represented English Radical socialism, which he espoused, he rejected what he took to be Tory socialism and continental (German) socialism on diverging grounds:²⁵

We differ from Tory Socialism in so far as we are in favour, not of paternal, but of fraternal government, and we differ from Continental Socialism because we accept the principle of private property, and repudiate confiscation and violence. With Mazzini, the worst feature in Continental Socialism is its materialism. It is this indeed which utterly separated English Radical Socialists from Continental Socialists – our abhorrence and detestation of their materialistic ideal.²⁶

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

9

Toynbee's advocacy of a policy allowing workers in Britain to increase their earnings relates to her status as the leading colonial power. Indeed, the colonialist perspective made use of by Toynbee to strengthen his case for making the English worker in material terms better off comes through clearly:

I repeat, we demand increased material welfare for those who labour with their hands, not that they may seize upon a few more coarse enjoyments, but that they may enter upon a purer and higher life. We demand it also that the English workman may take his part worthily in the government of this country. We demand it in order that he may have the intelligence and the will to administer the great trust which fate has committed to his charge; for it is not only his own home and his own country that he has to govern, but a vast empire – a duty unparalleled in the annals of democracy. We demand it, I say, in order that he, a citizen of this inclement island, washed by dark northern seas, may learn to rule righteously the dim multitudes of peasants who toil under the fierce light of tropical suns, in the distant continent of India. We demand that the material condition of those who labour shall be bettered, in order that, every source of weakness being removed at home, we, this English nation, may bring to the tasks which God has assigned us, the irresistible strength of a prosperous and united people.²⁷

Recently one of the masters of historical scholarship, Keith Thomas, observed critically that: 'For the most part British historians remain a stolidly untheoretical lot ...'²⁸ This is in line with what John Hicks (Nobel Memorial Prize for Economics, 1972) noted a quarter of a century ago. Venturing to develop a theory of history 'nearer to the kind of thing that was attempted by Marx', he stated:

What remains an open question is whether it can only be done on a limited scale, for special purposes, or whether it can be done in a larger way, so that the general course of history, at least in some important aspects can be fitted into place. Most of those who take the latter view would use the Marxian categories or some modified version of them; since there is so little in the way of an alternative version that is available, it is not surprising that they should. It does, nevertheless, remain extraordinary that one hundred years after *Das Kapital*, after a century during which there have been enormous developments in social science, so little else should have emerged. Surely it is possible that Marx was right in his vision of logical processes at work in history, but that we, with much knowledge of fact and social logic which he did not possess, and with another century of experience at our disposal, should conceive of the nature of those processes in a distinctly difference way.²⁹

Cambridge University Press

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Edited by Mikuláš Teich and Roy Porter

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Toynbee's blending of interests in theoretical problems of economics and history with regard for practical social justice is not in doubt. Is it then far-fetched to suggest that his approach, differing as it did from Marxism ideologically and politically, echoed its orientation on the unity of theory and practice? Be that as it may, Toynbee's *Lectures* should rightfully be restored to the historiography of the Industrial Revolution and not merely for reverential purposes.

NOTES

- 1 Regarding the juxtaposition of the Neolithic Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, see C. M. Cipolla, 'Introduction' in C. M. Cipolla (ed.), *The Fontana Economic History of Europe: The Industrial Revolution* (London and Glasgow, 1973), pp. 7–8. See also, by the same author, *The Economic History of World Population* (Harmondsworth, 1962), chap. 1.
- 2 R. M. Hartwell (ed.), *The Causes of the Industrial Revolution in England* (London, 1967), 'Introduction', p. 1.
- 3 What emerged variously from the contributions on Central and Eastern Europe is the socio-economic significance of the feudal system of forced labour, lasting in the Habsburg Monarchy until 1848 and in Russia until 1861. Also the treatment of terms such as 'manufacture' and 'manufactory' is of interest. They are regarded – as by Adam Smith – as large-scale handicraft production based on division and combination of distinct operations, in contrast to production by machines ('machinofecture'). Cf. A. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Cause of the Wealth of Nations* (eds. R. H. Campbell, A. S. Skinner and W. B. Todd), 2 vols. (Oxford, 1976), I, chaps. 1–3.
- 4 E. J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire* (Harmondsworth, 1969), p. 13.
- 5 M. Fores, 'The myth of a British industrial revolution', *History*, 66 (1981), pp. 181–98 (pp. 196–7).
- 6 The book's full title was: *Lectures on the Industrial Revolution in England. Popular Addresses, Notes and Other Fragments Together with a Short Memoir by B. Jowett* (London, 1884). According to Toynbee's wife (Charlotte Maria): 'Of all that is contained in the volume nothing was left by my husband in a form intended for publication; ... though he had industriously collected in note-books a mass of materials, at the time of his death [1883 – eds.] he left nothing ready for publication; a fact which will account for the fragmentary character and unequal merit of the contents of the present volume ... The lectures as they now appear have been prepared for publication by Mr W. J. Ashley, B.A., and Mr. Bolton King, B.A., of Balliol College, from their own excellent notes compared with those of others among his hearers and with such of his own as belonged to the course. They remain notes and notes only, those of the later lectures being much less full than those of the earlier ones; ...' See 'Prefatory Note', pp. xxix–xxxi. Ever since the book was published, it has been assumed that the edited printed text reproduced reasonably accurately Toynbee's thinking.
- 7 P. Mantoux, *La révolution industrielle au XVIII^e siècle. Essai sur les commencements de la grande industrie moderne en Angleterre* (Paris, 1906), p. 1.