

# WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

One of the main features of the [Industrial Revolution](#) was the horrendous working conditions that people faced. At the time, industrial cities and towns grew dramatically due to the migration of farmers and their families who were looking for work in the newly developed factories and mines. These factories and mines were dangerous and unforgiving places to work in. The working conditions that working-class people faced were known to include: long hours of work (12-16 hour shifts), low wages that barely covered the cost of living, dangerous and dirty conditions and workplaces with little or no worker rights. To better understand the situation, it's first important to understand the political ideology of the time, which historians refer to as classical liberalism. Classical liberalism is an ideology characterized by [laissez-faire capitalism](#), which means that the government played as little a role in the economy as possible. As a result, there were little to no rules in place for workers in the Industrial Revolution, and the wealthy owners could act in any manner that they wanted. For example, the factories and mines were incredibly dangerous places with very few safeguards.

The first main feature of industrial workplaces was the long hours of work. It was not uncommon for workers to be expected to work shifts of 16 hours per day in grueling conditions. The work was labor intensive and required the workers to complete repetitive and tiring actions. As such, many of the workers were physically 'burned out' after a day of work. What made the situation worse was the lack of breaks during the long shifts. Often workers were denied their breaks or were deducted pay for taking a break. As well, they were also sometimes required to clean the machines during their meals.



The next aspect of the working conditions that industrial workers were forced to endure was the low wages of pay. In general, industrial workers were paid very small amounts and struggled to survive. For example, adult men were paid around 10 shillings per week, while women were paid 5 shillings for the same work, and children were paid just 1 shilling. In comparison, families were usually charged 5 shillings per month for rent. This did not usually leave much left over for food, clothes and luxury items. As a result, they often struggled to cover their cost of living and had to also endure difficult living conditions. As well, workers often had their pay deducted for being late or for taking a break during their shift. The level of pay was so poor that many working-class families needed their children to work as well, in order to help cover the costs of the family. For their part, factory and mine owners were eager to hire children since they cost less to employ, and they could often be used for certain work due to their size. As a result, [child labor](#) was common during the Industrial Revolution.



The third feature of workplaces in the Industrial Revolution was the dirty and dangerous conditions that workers were expected to endure during their shifts. For example factories of the Industrial Revolution were notorious for being dangerous, especially [textile mills](#). Spinning machines in textile mills were often left unguarded and posed a serious risk. For instance, a report from the British House of Commons in 1832 commented that *“There are factories, no means few in number, nor confined to the smaller mills, in which serious accidents are continually occurring, and in which, notwithstanding, dangerous parts of the machinery are allowed to remain unfenced.”* This situation caused industrial workers to become injured, as they were working dangerously close to spinning belts and shafts that powered the machines. Any loose fitting clothing could easily become clogged and pull the worker violently into the workings of the machine. Furthermore, the factories of the Industrial Revolution were known for the excruciating heat. Factories in the Industrial Revolution were cramped and contained spaces. Often times, they were built without windows or proper ventilation and as a result the machines would quickly cause the inside temperature of the factory to increase dramatically. All of this combined to create a horrendous situation for the workers.

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The final aspect of the working conditions that people faced in the Industrial Revolution was the lack of rights. As previously stated, the political ideology of the time was classical liberalism. This was a highly individualistic ideology that was based on little or no government involvement. As a result, this meant that the government did little to protect workers from being exploited by the wealthy entrepreneurs of the time. For example, child labor was a common feature of life in the Industrial Revolution. Since there were no child labor laws at the start of the Industrial Revolution, factory and mine owners were free to hire children and employ them in incredibly dangerous situations. Furthermore, in modern society, governments are often responsible for establishing minimum wage laws in order to protect workers from being underpaid. However, during the Industrial Revolution, no such laws existed and as a result, industrial workers barely made enough to cover their cost of living. Another example of how workers lacked rights was in regards to how they were treated if they were injured while at work. As discussed in the previous paragraph, the workplaces of the Industrial Revolution were incredibly dangerous and workers often suffered from horrible injuries that made it impossible for them to keep working. Because the government practised laissez-faire capitalism, this meant that they did not have initiatives in place to force factories to protect workers or to compensate them when they became injured and could no longer work. For example, a report from the British House of Commons in 1832 commented that *“workers are often abandoned from the moment that an accident occurs; their wages are stopped, no medical attendance is provided, and whatever the extent of the injury, no compensation is afforded.”* Therefore, workers lacked basic rights in regards to protecting themselves from harm and in regards to receiving assistance after they were injured.

In conclusion, the lives of industrial workers in the Industrial Revolution was difficult. They were expected to endure long hours of work for very little pay and were often placed in incredibly dirty and dangerous situations. As well, they lacked the basic rights necessary to fight for better conditions.