

# Child Labour

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Block \_\_\_\_\_

Probably the worst evil investigated by Parliament was child labour. Employers had discovered that many of the jobs in the factories and coal mines could be performed by young children. They hired five-and-six year old orphans as apprentices, paying them only room and board. Poverty-stricken parents also sent their children to work in the factories and mines—usually for only a few cents a week.

Child labor proved harmful not only to the children, but to the whole working class. It created a surplus of labor [more than was needed to do the work]. This allowed employers to lay off many adult workers and to cut the wages of those they kept.

## WHAT DID PARLIAMENT LEARN ABOUT CHILD LABOUR?

### a. The Evidence of Samuel Coulson

*In the next passage, the parliamentary investigator is questioning an unemployed father about the way his children have been treated in the textile mills [factories]. Is their treatment what you would expect?*

**Question.** At what time in the morning during the brisk time [busy period] did your daughters go to the mills?

**Answer.** In the brisk time, which lasted about six weeks, they have gone at three o'clock in the morning. They have ended at ten, or nearly half past ten, at night.

**Question.** What periods were allowed for rest or refreshment during those nineteen hours of labor?

**Answer.** Breakfast was a quarter of an hour, dinner was half an hour, and drinking tea was a quarter of an hour.

**Question.** Didn't you have great difficulty in awakening your children to this excessive labor?

**Answer.** Yes; in the early time we had to take them up asleep. We had to shake them when we got them on the floor to dress them, before we could get them off to work. But this was not so in the common hours [ordinary working hours].

**Question.** Suppose they had been a little late. What would have been the result during the long hours?

**Answer.** They were quartered in the longest hours, the same as in the shortest time.

**Question.** What do you mean by quartering?

**Answer.** A quarter of the day's wage was taken off.

**Question.** If they had been how much too late?

**Answer.** Five minutes.

**Question.** What was the length of time they could be in bed during those long hours?

**Answer.** It was almost eleven o'clock before we could get them into bed, after getting a little food. Me or my missus got up at two o'clock to dress them.

**Question.** They did not have more than four hours of sleep at this time?

**Answer.** No, they did not.

**Question.** The ordinary hours of labor were from six in the morning till half past eight at night?

**Answer.** Yes

**Question.** With the same breaks for food?

**Answer.** Yes, just the same.

**Question.** Were the children made very tired by this labor?

**Answer.** Many times. We have cried often when we have given them the little food we had to give them. We had to shake them. Many a time they have fallen asleep with the food in their mouths.

**Question.** Did any of them have an accident as a result of this labor?

**Answer.** Yes, my eldest daughter. The cog [tooth on a wheel] caught her forefinger nail and screwed it off below the knuckle. She was five weeks in the Leeds hospital.

**Question. Has she lost that finger?**

**Answer.** It is cut off at the second joint.

**Question. Were her wages paid during that time?**

**Answer.** As soon as the accident happened, her wages were totally stopped.

**Question. Did these excessive hours of labor cause much cruelty also?**

**Answer.** Yes. Because the children were so tired, the strap was often used on them.

**Question. Have any of your children been strapped?**

**Answer.** Yes, every one of them. The oldest daughter was badly beaten once. When I saw her shoulders, I said, "Ann, what is the matter?" She said, "The overlooker has strapped me. But do not go to him to complain. If you do, we shall lose our work." Her shoulder was beaten nearly to a jelly.

**Question. What were the wages in the short hours?**

**Answer.** Three shillings [about seventy-five cents] a week.

**Question. When they worked those very long hours, what did they get?**

**Answer.** Three shillings and seven pence halfpenny [ninety cents]

**Question. For all that additional labor they had only seven and a halfpence [fifteen cents] a week additional?**

**Answer.** No more.

*Adapted from "Report of the Committee on Factory Children's Labour" in Parliamentary papers, 1831 - 1832.*

## **b. Lonely Little Trappers**

*The next selection deals with child workers in the coal mine. Do you think they were even worse off than the children in the textile mills?*

Thousands of families were so poor that they had no choice but to send their children out to work too. Any little bit of added income a child could earn helped to feed poverty-stricken families. The smallest children sometimes sent into the mines to work as trappers. The trapper's job was to open and shut the doors in the mine shaft to allow the coal cars to pass. This was a lonely job for a child sitting huddled in the dark for hours on end deep below the ground. For this he received about \$.25 a day.

The lives of the miners depend on the proper ventilation of air. This in turn, depends, depends on the trap doors being kept shut. The youngest children in the mine have this important office! They sit in a little hole scooped out from them in the side of the gates behind each door. They hold string in their hands attached to the door. They pull it the moment they hear a coal car at hand. The moment it has passed, they let the door fall to, which it does of its own weight. They have nothing else to do. But their job must be performed from the passing of the first to the last car during the day. Therefore, they are in the pit the whole time it is worked, often about twelve hours a day. They sit, moreover, in the dark. They often have to stand on a damp floor and are exposed necessarily to drafts.

The ages of these children vary from five and a half to ten years old. Few begin to work before they are nearly seven and few remain longer than nine or ten. There is no hard work for these children to do --- nothing can be easier. But it is a most painful thing to think of the life these little creatures are doomed to spend. It is a life, for the most part, passed alone in the damp and darkness. They are allowed no light. But sometimes a good-natured miner will give them a little bit of candle as a treat.

### **"I Daren't Sing in the Dark"**

Sarah Gooder, age eight, said, "I'm a trapper in the pit. It does not tire me. But I have to trap without a light and I'm scared. Sometimes I sing when I have a light, but not in the dark. I dare not sing then. I do not like being in the pit."

### **"Her Lamp Had Gone Out"**

Mary Davis, almost seven years old, was the keeper of an air-door in a pit in South Wales. She was described as "a very pretty little girl, who was fast asleep under a piece of rock near the air-door below the ground. Her lamp had gone out for want of oil. On waking her, she said the rats or someone had run away with her bread and cheese, so she went to sleep. The foreman, who was with me, thought she was not so old. Still he felt sure she had been going below almost eighteen months."

### **"Little Boy Lost"**

Very recently, a little boy was lost in one of the Welsh pits. His name was William Withers. On a Friday morning he went to work with his father, as usual. On arriving at the pit, he found that he had forgotten his lamp.

He returned for the purpose of getting it, but lost his way and wandered into some old works. From that time till Monday morning he was not seen or heard of. His own account is as follows:

"I found that I was lost and in a strange road. I could hear my father at work all Friday. I knocked on the side and made as much noise as I possibly could. But no one answered me. They all went out that night, leaving me there. I cried very much. I thought I saw the stars two or three times, although I was a hundred yards under ground. I saved my dinner as much as I could, only eating a bit at a time. I did not know whether I should ever be found. There was no work until Monday morning. The whole time I had been wandering about in the dark. When I heard the miners, I made my way to them."

When asked what day it was, the poor little fellow did not know. He thought he had been lost seven or eight days.  
*Adapted from E. Royston Pike (ed.), Hard Times: Human Documents Of the Industrial Revolution.*

### Review Questions "What did Parliament Learn About Child Labour?"

1. These selections describe the bad conditions under which children worked in British factories and coal mines.

A) What are these conditions.

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B. Which do you consider a worse problem, bad working conditions or child labor? Why?

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2. Some parents stayed at home and sent their children to work.

A) Why would they do so when the children had to work under such bad conditions?

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B) What would you have done if you had been a parent in those days? Why?

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### CHILD LABOUR IN CANADA

England was not the only place that children were exploited. Even in Canada there was eventually a call to put an end to the terrible working conditions the children were subject to. Child workers were frequently mistreated and sometimes beaten by their bosses for petty offenses.

#### ROYAL COMMISSION: QUEBEC 1889

- Q. Have you ever seen boys or girls getting whipped? A. Yes.  
Q. What for? A. For playing.  
Q. Would that be the foreman or the manager? A. The foreman.  
Q. Have you seen other children beaten? A. Yes, sir.  
Q. Did you see them beaten worse than yourself? A. No, sir.  
Q. Do you know of a factory where there is a blackhole? A. Yes, sir.  
Q. How old were these children? A. I could not tell the age.  
Q. Younger than yourself? A. No, sir.

- Q. Why were they put into the blackhole? A. Because they lost time.  
 Q. Who put them into the blackhole? A. The man who kept the press.  
 Q. Do the children cry out? A. No, sir.  
 Q. How long did they stop in the hole, as a general thing? A. Some of them stopped there till seven o'clock.  
 Q. When were they put in? A. In the afternoon.  
 Q. Was it seven o'clock in the evening or seven hours of time? A. Seven o'clock in the evening. They put them in during the afternoon until seven in the evening.  
 Q. At what time do the men leave the factory? A. Generally at five o'clock and sometimes at six.  
 Q. Do you mean to say that those children were kept in the blackhole after the men had left the factory? A. Yes, sir.  
 Q. Who let them out? The same that put them in? A. Yes, sir, I think so, but I never saw him.  
 Q. Was this blackhole heated? A. I don't know, sir.  
 Q. In what floor of the factory is this blackhole? A. in the cellar  
 Q. Is there a furnace in the cellar? A. Yes, sir.  
 Q. Is the blackhole near the furnace? A. No, sir.  
 Q. Is there a window therein? A. No.  
 Q. When children were shut in there, you never heard them cry to get some one to let them out? A. No, sir.

Children who worked in factories faced all the perils, adults did. They had to operate dangerous machines that had few safety features. Frequently fingers and hands got caught in the machinery.

**ROYAL COMMISSION: Nova Scotia**  
**JOSEPH LARKINS, biscuit maker, sworn:**

- Q. How old are you? A. I am 11 years.  
 Q. What is the matter with your hand? A. It got hurt in the machinery.  
 Q. How? A. It got caught in the rollers.  
 Q. What rollers? A. The rollers of a cracker machine, a biscuit machine.  
 Q. How long were you working in the biscuit factory? A. About seven weeks.  
 Q. Was it part of your work to look after the machinery? A. No; I was taken in as a packer and was then put to work on the machinery.  
 Q. How much wages did they give you? A. A dollar a week first, and then a dollar and a-quarter.  
 Q. How much do they give you now? A. Nothing at all.  
 Q. How long is it since you were hurt? A. Nine weeks Thursday.  
 Q. And have they not given you anything? No: except for the week when I was hurt.  
 Q. Did you ask for employment? A. My mother asked for a job for me, and they said I could get a job biscuit packing: then they changed me to where the machinery was.  
 Q. How long were you working at the machinery before you were hurt? A. I could not say.  
 Q. What were you doing at the machinery? A. I was brushing the dough off as it came through.  
 Q. Did you lose any fingers? A. I lost one.  
 Q. Did you lose any of the joints of the others? A. I think I will lose a second finger.

**Review Questions: Child Labour in Canada**

1. In what ways was "child labour" in Canada similar to child labour in England.

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2. How do you account for that?

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## **CHILD LABOUR IN THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY IN ENGLAND - DIFFERENT VIEWS**

**INTRODUCTION:** Once the water frame had been invented by Richard Arkwright in 1769 it was only a matter of time before workers were gathered together in a "factory" to produce goods. Water frames required little strength or skill to operate so even a young child could "mind" the machine. Many factories were built in areas where few people lived, areas where water power was available.

Hot, airless factories were built and machines seldom stopped during the day. A working day was usually 12 hours and minding the machines was boring. Since children could crawl under the machines and sweep the fluff from the floor and change the full bobbins for empty ones, they were suitable for working in these mills. Young children's tiny fingers could do this swiftly.

Children were available from distant rural districts. Often, they were orphans, motherless or fatherless, or without relatives to support them. Many were in workhouses or in homes supported by craftsmen; they could expect only work as a servant or a farm labourer when they were older. It was these children who were put into factories. Sometimes they were treated well according to the standards of the day, but sometimes they were treated brutally, resulting in death or serious bodily harm. However, it was believed by many people that the opportunity to be a mill apprentice was better for the child than life in a workhouse.

### **CASE STUDY A**

This factory was built near a river. The closest village was two miles away, so nearly all the labour force would have to be brought in. There was a fairly good road to Manchester.

The owner built a house for the mill manager and a three-storied apprentice house for the mill children. On top of the mill itself, there was a bell which called the children were allowed to play there when not at work. The hours of work were 5:30 a.m. until 8p.m. with 30 minutes for breakfast and supper and one hour for dinner, 12 ½ hours a day for six days a week. On Sunday, the children were taken to church. They had been given an outfit of clothes for Sundays. They had another outfit to wear to work. The food was ample and a doctor was available. As the mill grew larger and more children were brought in, a school was built and teacher paid to teach the children who were allowed time off in the evenings to attend the school.

By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century children were seldom brought from districts more than thirty miles away.

While the owner of this factory was kind to his workers, he saw no reason why the government should pass laws to make employers treat their workers well. He believed this would be an interference with personal liberty. He bitterly resented any suggestion that conditions in mills should be under any kind of public control. He went to London to persuade members of parliament that they should not pass a law restricting the hours of work for apprenticed children. There he met other mill owners who were also kind to their child workers, but they fought long and hard for the passing of laws which would control working hours and working conditions. Two of these were John Fielden and Robert Owen.

### **CASE STUDY B**

This factory was also built on a river. It was so isolated that child workers were brought from London, 300 miles away. Some were only seven years old. All were bound apprentices until 21 years of age. Working hours were 5 a.m. to 8 p.m. with one hour off for dinner, with a six-day week. Other food was eaten at their work. Sunday morning they cleaned the machines. At times there was more work and the hours were from 5 a.m. to 9 p.m. for as much as three continuous weeks. The children slept on the floor with a rough, unwashed blanket for cover. They could not go off the premises.

The owner thought that the loss of freedom was good for the children as it kept them out of mischief.

The atmosphere in the mill was very close. Fluff from the cotton was in the air and the children were given emetics so they would vomit it back.

The owner did not want any government laws restricting child labour, but even if they did pass them he was confident they couldn't enforce them anyway.

**CASE STUDY C**

In addition to apprentice children from poor homes, there were also free-labour children. These children came from homes near factories. By 1830, factories now using steam, were located in populated areas. About 56,000 children under 13 years of age and 108,000 age 13 – 18 were working. Their pay was needed to supplement the family income.

While public opinion was against any control of working conditions for adults, there was a growing concern to protect "free-labour" children.

**Review Questions - Child Labour in the Textile Industry in England – Different Views."**

- Use the chart to show how the child worker's views might differ from that of the owners. In the boxes put a check mark if in the case study, the story told of a cost/or benefit for the worker and if it was a cost/or benefit for the owner.

	Child Workers		Owners	
	Cost	Benefit	Cost	Benefit
Case Study A				
Case Study B				
Case Study C				

- What can we infer about what the child workers valued?

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- The owners valued?

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- What alternatives do you think the child had if he did not wish to work in the mill?

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- Which one of the Case Studies seems to support Child Labour? What reasons did the author give to support their point of view?

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