

CHILD LABOUR IN THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

In article C the use of language and style indicate its origins as an official document in many ways. In the title it states that it is an 'act', this is a term used for a legislative law that has been passed by parliamentary. Further confirmation of this can be found by the use of the words 'regulation', (control by rule) and 'enacted', (a law), and in the final sentence it states that this is 'law'. The style of writing is Old English and very formal this also indicates that it is an official document. It is addressed to the 'Masters' who were the owners of the cotton mills and factories and informed, them that they would be 'fined' if they broke the 'law'. In 1819, the date of the article, it would only have been the government that would have had the power to enforce such a regulation and punishment for non-compliance, confirming that this document would have originated from an official source.

Each of the sources in A and B provide different views and perspectives on children working in factories. The extracts were taken from evidence given before a Select Committee in 1816 and a debate in the House of Commons on the Factory Bill in 1818. This act was concerned with the health of young people employed in the cotton mills and factories and whether legislation was necessary for the protection of those children. The extracts given confirm that the people concerned all agreed on the necessity of children to work in the factories. They did however disagree on many other issues including whether the young age of the children and the number of hours worked affected their health or if greater importance should be given to the actual industry and free trade.

Robert Owen and Sir Robert Peel Senior agreed that the number of hours young children were working in factories was causing health problems and therefore a reduction in working hours was necessary for the protection of children. The evidence given by Robert Owen, a mill owner, clearly indicates his strong views on the damage being done to young children's physical and mental health, including 'deformed' limbs, stunted growth and being very slow academic learners. Sir Robert Peel Senior based his evidence on well-known opinion, stating that children of '8 or 9 years of age' who were 'confined in the factories' for 'not less than 15 hours' a day could not 'bear that degree of hardship without damaging their health.

The views of Lord Lascelles, Mr. Finlay and GA Lee showed little concern for the children's health their extracts confirm the basic economic need of the children to work and the factories to employ them. They agreed that legislation was not necessary. Lord Lascelles was more concerned with the interference of the principle of free labour and that more legislative measures would follow. Mr.

Finlay's view was that legislation would be detrimental to the vitally important manufacturing industry and that consideration should be given to the fact that it employed 'more people than all of the other manufacturer's in the country put together'.

GA Lee appeared to be more concerned with the effect any change in children's working hours would have on his business and its profitability. He informed the Select Committee that unless there was 'legislative provision' he had no intention of reducing the number of hours worked by children in his cotton-spinning factory. Mr. Phillips agreed that a reduction of hours was not required, as shorter hours-worked in smaller 'often ill-ventilated' factories were more detrimental to children's health than the longer hours worked in the larger factories. In contrast Robert Owen was so concerned with the long hours that he took voluntary measures to reduce the number of working hours for children in his mills.

The Factory Act of 1819 provided a solution to some of the issues and concerns associated with the use of child labour in textile manufacturing. It put into place some legislative measures for the protection of children and introduced fines for those owners who were not prepared to implement them.

The issue of age was partially addressed, it became illegal for children under the age of nine to work 'in any description of work for the spinning of cotton'. Sir Robert Peel Senior and Robert Owen had both expressed concern for the health and well being of children aged eight and nine years who worked in the factories and mills. Robert Owen was so strong in his belief that he did not employ any child until they reached ten years of age. The legislation stopped children aged eight and below from being employed in the industry but did little to help those over nine years of age.

Hours of work in the factories had been up to '15 hours' a day. The new regulation ensured that children between the ages of nine and fifteen worked for no longer twelve hours a day. They were given compulsory meal breaks of not less than $\frac{1}{2}$ hour for breakfast and one hour for lunch, but this time was added to the working day and therefore children still spent up to a maximum of $13\frac{1}{2}$ hours a day at work. Reluctant mill and factory owners, including GA Lee, were forced to reduce the hours children worked in line with the new legislation. Robert Owen had already reduced the hours of work in his mill to $10\frac{3}{4}$ hours, $1\frac{1}{4}$ hours less than the law required. To meet the new regulation requirements working hours had to be contained between the hours of '5 o'clock in the morning and 9 o'clock in the evening'. Children as young as nine years of age could still be

'dragged from their beds some hours before daylight', ready to start work at '5 o'clock ' in the morning and then confined in the factory for 13½ hours. Although legislation brought about improvements on what had previously been accepted, further benefits may have been gained to children's health if the hours had been reduced further.

The act states that 'further provision should be made for the regulation of the mills, manufacturers and buildings'. The measures taken did nothing to alleviate bad or dangerous working conditions in the factories. As Mr. Phillips stated long hours worked in a well-ventilated factory were less detrimental to a child's health than shorter hours in an ill-ventilated factory. This act did not address the 'masters' complaisant and almost slave like attitude towards the children that was evident in the evidence given by GA Lee. When asked by the Select Committee if after hearing all the evidence his view on voluntarily reducing hours worked by children had changed, he told them that only legislation would change his mind.

In the House of Commons debate other issues, other than those concerned with children's welfare were given. Lord Lascelles said that any legislative measures taken would interfere with free labour and Mr. Finlay warned against interfering with the factories who were manufacturers of 'vital importance', employing large quantities of people. This may have forced the Government to make a compromise to ensure that the health and safety of children working in the factories improved whilst minimizing the disruption to the textile industry.

Some improvements were made for the protection of children in textile manufacturing. The reduction in the accepted age of a child worker, the number of hours worked and compulsory food breaks were a step in the right direction. However these improvements did not provide an effective solution to the problem of child labour in the 19th century, as many issues essential to the well being of children were not addressed. These included a safe working environment that protected the children from danger and provided them with necessary sanitary provisions. Time off for holidays, without requiring to pay back this time and proprietors' often dictatorship attitudes and ill treatment of children. Therefore 'The Factory Act of 1819' only provided a starting point for tackling the problems associated with child labour, effective long-term solutions would only be resolved with further extensive legislation.