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Changing Status of Professional Workers: Bangladesh Perspective

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Abstract:

This study is an attempt to explore the changing status of the profewssional workers of Bangladesh. It has also shed light on the welfare systems introduced recently by the Bangladesh Garment industries. But before doing so it has aderssed the industrial evolution with the life style of the labours. The issues related to child labour is also discussed as a critical issue.Then, the pattern of their political right exercises is also analysed. No doubt that Bangladesh is lagging behind in availing the due rights of the professional workers, henceforth some recommendations are placed to realize them in the near future.

Key Words: *Industrial revolution, changing status, economic status, socio-economic status, political union.*

Introduction

The magnitude change in the status of a professional worker in the contemporary society makes it necessary to rethink their economic, social and political conditions from different dimensions. Industrial relations and labor studies encompass a wide ranging activities relating to workers improvement to individual, group or community level welfare. In nineteenth-century, society was profoundly affected by a series of drastic changes which seriously disrupted the lifestyle of most of its members. In the short span of fifty or sixty years, the people were forced to make the transition from a subsistence-level agrarian society to an industrialized one. Government is taking an increasingly larger responsibility for their well-being. Recently, international organizations have also shared to some extent the responsibility for meeting workers necessity. Basically, the Industrial Revolution amplified the material wealth of the Western world. It also ended the dominance of agriculture and initiated significant social change. The everyday work environment also changed

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dramatically, and the West became an urban civilization. Radical new schools of economic and philosophical thought began to replace the traditional ideas of Western civilization. Industrialization increased material wealth, restructured society, and created importance of employment.

For the first time people worked outside of the local environment of their homes. Theywoke up every morning and traveled to their place of employment[1]. This was most often in a workplace known as a factory. The industrial economy had a new set of rules and time schedules for the common. The new machinery of the Industrial Revolution was very large and sometimes required acres of floor space to hold the number of machines needed to keep up with consumer demand. The work environment not only moved indoors, but the pace of the work changed drastically. Instead of driving a horse that pulled a plow or wagon, the machines drove the worker. The seasons of the year were no longer relevant to the time spent at work. Males were now expected to labor twelve to fourteen hours a day, five-and-a-half days a week, round the year. This was a very hard transition to make. A great many people who had once been considered highly productive agricultural workers were unable to hold jobs because of their inability to adjust to this new regime.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, economic thought became very pessimistic because of the inability of society to solve the conditions of the industrial working class. Over time it became widely accepted that the quality of life of the working class would remain forever wretched. The success of the Industrial Revolution and modern economic process in expanding both productivity and jobs eventually changed the economic pessimism of the early nineteenth century. The dismal view of the future of the working class would eventually be replaced by utilitarianism.

Background of Changing Status of Professional Workers

Overall, the social and economic changes that marks the transition from a stable agricultural and commercial society to a modern industrial society relying on complex machinery rather than tools. It helped to create the modern world view that through the proper use of science and technology, a more fruitful quality of life could be achieved. The Industrial Revolution also accelerated the growth of the urban population. One of the more important consequences of urbanization was a rapid increase in crime. This was the result of three factors that dominated the urban landscape. The first two were poverty and unemployment. There was no job security or social security for the factory worker. The few charitable organizations that were available were so over-taxed that their aid hardly matched their good intentions. Industrialization drew thousands of people to the urban areas in search of employment.

The highly religious and land-based society of the medieval world believed that social structure was ordained by God. The deep belief that all souls were equal in His eyes produced a social system where all classes had both rights and responsibilities. With the onset of a profit-oriented market economy, the wealthy landowners began to perceive the peasant as just a source of labor. It was the fruit of their labor that was of the greatest interest

1. Kemp, Tom. 1985. *Industrialization in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. 2nd ed. London: Longman.

and importance in this entrepreneurial economy. This created an expectation of greater profits, which in turn increased the demand for greater material prosperity. This revolution in expectations would both stimulate and focus the drive toward industrialization. The new demand for consumer goods produced the first workshops and factories.

Child labor also changed as a result of the Industrial Revolution and the expansion of modernity. At a time children were expected to help the family in the traditional economy, but usually they had been assigned tasks that were commensurate with their age. Not unlike their mothers, young children began to be exploited by their bosses. The most dangerous assignment for children in the factories was unarming the great textile machines that wove cloth. Since their hands and arms were so small, they could reach into small spaces where the fabric tended to jam. The foreman would not turn the machine off but would insist the child reach in to dislodge the jam. If he were not quick enough, his hand or arm would become caught in the running machine, and this could result in severe damage to the child. All laborers, male, female, and children, were eventually looked upon as interchangeable parts. As technology increased and machines became more sophisticated, the employer began to value machinery more than his work force. This would remain the case until the early 1830s, when legislation was passed to protect the workers.

In many ways women suffered more than men. In both the urban artisan economy and the rural agricultural world, women were traditionally regarded as playing an equally important role as men. They were full partners in the family's quest for economic success. Their status changed substantially as a result of the Industrial Revolution. Their labor became a commodity to be exploited. They were as a rule given the lowest-skilled, lowest-paying jobs. They were regularly bullied by both their bosses and their husbands. In many ways their labor and responsibilities doubled. They were not only responsible for their jobs in industry, but they were also expected to continue their traditional roles at home. They labored for ten hours in the factory and continued for untold hours once they arrived home. It must be remembered that by law men still controlled their families. Women had no political, social, or economic rights outside the home. They were deprived of vote or owning property.

Changing Status of Professional Workers

Now that we have looked at how and why the Industrial Revolution occurred, it’s time to consider its effects on people. We learned that industrial production increased tremendously, bringing wealth and power to Great Britain throughout the 19th century. But we have yet to explore the effects of industrialization on society, on the daily living and the working conditions of common people. What was life like for the average industrial worker? Was living in a new industrial city and working in a factory an improvement over life in the countryside? Did the new factory life change for the better the roles of family members, including women and children? Were people healthier? In general, did the Industrial Revolution improve life for most working class people?

Economic Status of Professional Workers

Since the Industrial Revolution was so new at the end of the 18th century, there were initially no laws to regulate new industries. For example, no laws prevented businesses from hiring seven-year-old children to work full time in coal mines or factories. No laws regulated what factories could do with their biohazard waste. Free-market capitalism meant that the government could not interfere to regulate the new industries or planning services for new towns. And those who controlled the government liked it that way- only a small minority of people, the wealthiest, could vote in England at this time. So during the first phase of the Industrial Revolution, between 1790 and 1850, British society became the first example of what happens in a country when free-market capitalism has no constraints. We need to learn about the effects of the Industrial Revolution on living and working conditions, urbanization (the growth of cities), child labor, public health, working class family life, the role of women, the emerging middle class, and economic growth and income. The working class who made up 80% of the society had little or no bargaining power with their new employers.

The new owners could set the terms of work because there were far more unskilled laborers, who had few skills and would take any job. And since the textile industries were so new at the end of the 18th century, there were initially no laws to regulate them. Desperate for work, the migrants to the new industrial towns had no bargaining power to demand higher wages, fairer work hours, or better working conditions .For the first generation of workers-from the 1790s to the 1840s-working conditions were very tough, and sometimes tragic. Most of the laborers worked 10 to 14 hours a day, six days a week, with no paid vacation or holidays. Each industry had safety hazards too; the process of purifying iron, for example, demanded that workers toiled amidst temperatures as high as 130 degrees in the coolest part of the iron works[2]. Few of the economic changes has marked out, like as economic activities in many communities moved from agriculture to manufacturing, production shifted from its traditional locations in the home and the small workshop to factories. Large portions of the population relocated from the countryside to the towns and cities where manufacturing centers were found. The overall amount of goods and services produced expanded dramatically, and the proportion of capital invested per worker grew. New groups of investors, businesspeople, and managers took financial risks and reaped great rewards.

Professional Workers Economic Status: Bangladesh Perspectives

For example in garment industry, the salary of the garment workers are not much in Bangladesh compared to other similar countries of the world. Moreover, the salary is usually given at the middle of the month by the employers. As a result, there is continuous labor unrest in this sector. Recently, this unrest has been increased and it became very important dilemma of Bangladesh. In addition, very often, there are serious accidents in the sector because of the violation of occupational safety and health codes that are flagrant.

Although, the employers of RMG sector claim that the socio-economic conditions of the workers have already been improved substantially through their engagement but the reality is different. Observation shows that the socio-economic statuses of the workers are not much

[2]Deane, Phyllis. 1979. *The First Industrial Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

improved by their involvement with these companies. It is popularly perceived by the workers of this sector that the socio-economic status is not even at the subsistence level. Moreover, the wage discrimination between male and female workers of readymade garment companies is very high that also creates frustration among the workers. Industrial working-class families, though not working together, did serve an economic purpose of raising money to support each other. As we have seen, children often worked to earn some income for the family. In difficult circumstances, mothers struggled to make ends meet and keep the family out of the poorhouses.

Social Status of Professional Workers

Working in new industrial cities had an effect on people's lives outside of the factories as well. As workers migrated from the country to the city, their lives and the lives of their families were utterly and permanently transformed. For many skilled workers, the quality of life decreased a great deal in the first sixty years of the Industrial Revolution. Skilled weavers, for example, lived well in pre-industrial society as a kind of middle class. They tended their own gardens, worked on textiles in their homes or small shops, and raised farm animals. But, after the Industrial Revolution, the living conditions for skilled weavers significantly deteriorated. They could no longer live at their own pace or supplement their income with gardening, spinning, or communal harvesting. For skilled workers, quality of life took a sharp downturn. After the Industrial Revolution, working-class had little time or opportunity for recreation. Workers spent all the light of day at work and came home with little energy, space, or light to play sports or games. The new industrial pace and factory system were at odds with the old traditional festivals which dotted the village holiday calendar. In addition to that local governments actively sought to ban traditional festivals in the cities. In the new working-class neighborhoods, people did not share the same traditional sense of a village community. Owners fined workers who left their jobs to return to their villages for festivals because they interrupted the efficient flow of work at the factories.

One of the defining and most lasting features of the Industrial Revolution was the rise of cities. In pre-industrial society, over 80% of people lived in rural areas. As migrants moved from the countryside, small towns became large cities. By 1850, for the first time in world history, more people in a country, Great Britain lived in cities than in rural areas. This process of urbanization stimulated the booming new industries by concentrating workers and factories together. And the new industrial cities became, as we mentioned earlier, sources of wealth for the nation. Despite the growth in wealth and industry urbanization also had some negative effects. On the whole, working-class neighborhoods were bleak, crowded, dirty, and polluted. The densely packed and poorly constructed working-class neighborhoods contributed to the fast spread of disease. Poor nutrition, disease, lack of sanitation, and harmful medical care in these urban areas had a devastating effect on the average life expectancy of industrial people in the first half of the 19th century.

In Bangladesh, more than eighty percent of people are workers and they are living miserable conditions in society. Government does not pay proper attention for the working class of people. Child labor has increased drastically in every corner of Bangladesh. Sudden

unemployment is very common for workers. Most of the workers are living unhealthy environment. They are losing their jobs through labor movements. They are always facing acute housing problem or passing their life in a slum. For example, people who are working in garments industry, they don't have options to live their life at a standard life because of law standard salary. Even their children are living in miserable conditions and ultimately the generations are not getting better than previous. Overall the social status of Bangladeshi workers is miserable.

Political Status of Professional Workers

The rapid rate of urbanization and population growth is closely linked with industrialization and has been a source of considerable anxiety for the political status of worker all over the world. Adopting the male chauvinistic belief that women are traditionally better suited for carrying out monotonous, repetitive manual work; corporations chose to integrate mostly female workers because owners want to no disturbance conditions in industry. For example, factory owners see women as more docile and obedient than men, and consequently easier to exploit. In order to establish an effective system of exploitation, the owners of export companies set up a hierarchical structure in which women are given the lowest positions, the most poorly paid jobs, while the upper echelons- management, line supervisors, security personnel- are being dominated by men.

Factory owners are firmly convinced that trade unions will destroy their businesses. They are convinced they will lose all their profits if they allow workers to organize. And that's why they do all they can to prevent the establishment of trade unions. In Bangladesh, For example, the 2006 labor law, as it is called by labor activists, stipulates that the ministry of labor has to send the list of workers who want to form a trade union to the workers' employer who is supposed to verify the names on the list. It is in that period of time, just before the official formation of the trade union, that employers start putting pressure on their workers. When the employers find out the names, they start threatening workers who want to organize. Sometimes they dismiss them. Sometimes they hire thugs who threaten workers' leaders. In EPZs the situation is even worse. When the legislative body established the first zones, they decided that the national labor law would not apply to them. Instead of implementing the labor law in the zones, legislators invented new rules which prohibited the establishment of trade unions within the zones' boundaries. As it is practically impossible to formally establish a trade union inside or outside the zones, workers secretly join informal labor rights organizations.

In Bangladesh, the transnational corporations' production system regressed into one of its most brutal manifestations. Most safeguards that could prevent or at least mitigate the exploitation of workers have been eliminated. In factories located on the outskirts of all Bangladeshi bigger cities the capitalist mode of production returned to its roots to the 19th Century. Most safeguards which could prevent the capitalist elite from brutally exploiting the labor force have been eliminated. The State, or what is left of it, has been reduced to a compliant servant whose only mission is to provide the factory owners with the means needed for exploiting the working class.

It is in countries like Bangladesh that the transnational capitalist elite reveal its true colors. After they eliminate, with the assistance of their local collaborators, all obstacles which could hinder the exploitation of workers, they establish, in accordance with their most intimate plans, a highly oppressive production system. It is interesting to see that in the past decades the power relations established in the garment factories by the capitalist elite endured through different regimes and political systems.

Conclusion

The Progressive Era was a difficult time to be a professional worker. While Progressives did try to make working conditions better for laborers, their efforts only yielded mixed results. Furthermore, workers' own actions sometimes proved more effective than the Progressive reforms enacted in their names. Many kind of policy responded to industrial working conditions by trying to make life better for workers, particularly the women and children. In a country like Bangladesh, due to the absence of effective legislation or union support, workers set out on their own to assert their collective power over the production process. To the extent that reforms actually succeeded, it may have been that employers and the government welcomed legislative regulations as an alternative to strikes, which could disrupt large sectors of society. In this sense, workers bolstered the Progressives' cause and played a direct role in the attempt to better their lives for themselves and their children. In developing countries like Bangladesh, this poses a different problem. We still have something to do for the better life and status of our worker in Bangladesh. Government need to fully implement of2006 labor right. Finally, it is evident that still workers conditions in all over the world are not well apposite.

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