



The Social Revolution
History – Junior Cert
Quick Notes

The Social Revolution

There were four separate parts of the social revolution – the population revolution (created a workforce to work on the land), the industrial revolution (new machines), the agricultural revolution (produced goods) and the transport revolution (to link major centres of the population). From 1750 onwards, the population of Britain began to rise rapidly from 7 million to 60 million in 2001. This was due to people marrying at a younger age, vaccinations preventing killer diseases and improvements in food and diet. Consequences to this population revolution were that there was an increased demand for everyday goods, but it also meant that there was an increased amount of people available to work in the newly developing industries. The population increase led to the agricultural revolution. In 1750, most land was cultivated under the open-field system which meant that crops were grown on strips of land in three huge fields and one of the three fields was left fallow each year, to allow the soil to recover.

In the late 1700s, fields were enclosed with hedges and ditches which meant that many labourers lost their jobs so they went to the cities in search of jobs. Charles ‘turnip’ Townshend introduced the Norfolk System (four crop rotation), which used crops of wheat, barley, turnips and grass and this increased food supplies dramatically. Jethro Tull was responsible for developing a seed drill which could plant seeds in rows and cover them with soil. Robert Bakewell performed experiments in selective breeding. There were certain consequences to the agricultural revolution – enclosed improved grazing, the population rose as famine was less common, people moved to live in cities.

Once changes in agriculture took place, industry began to develop. The increase in population meant there was an increased demand for clothes but it also meant that there was a large workforce available to work on the machines. Coal was used to build machines that speeded up the clothes making process and iron was used to build them. The British colonies provided raw materials for clothes and industry. Some new machines were developed at this time e.g. the flying shuttle in 1733 by John Kay. The steam engine was invented by Newcomen and improved by Watt. In 1709, Darby discovered that coke could be used instead of charcoal for the iron and steel industries. The unhealthy working and living conditions at this time, however, led to diseases such as tuberculosis and smallpox.

However, with this also came improvements in medicine e.g. Jenner developed a vaccine against small pox. The Combinations Act of 1799 had banned trade unions, but they were made legal in 1825. Robert Owen set up the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union but it soon collapsed as it had too many members. The Chartists were introduced in 1838, by William Lovett and Francis Place and their aims were to have salaries for MPs, to have a secret ballot to protect the voter, among others. Some legislation was introduced by the Earl of Shaftesbury to improve working conditions e.g. the 1842 Coal Mines Act made it illegal for women and children under ten to work in coal mines. The transport revolution saw changes in roads, canals, railways and sea travel. Improvements on roads were made possible by Turnpike Trusts, which were private companies that charged tolls to travel on specially built roads. From 1750 onwards, canals were built to transport heavy goods. The popularity of canals was short-lived however because they were costly to build and boats travelling on them were too slow. The first railways were horse-drawn over wooden tracks. The first locomotive to run on iron tracks was built in 1804 by Richard Trevithick.

By the 1850s, all of the major cities of Britain were linked by rail. From 1800 on, steam power was used to power new ships. Ireland in the 1840s was still a largely rural country with two types of landlord – absentee and interested. Most tenants were farmers of which there were three types – large tenant farmers, small tenant farmers and landless labourers. Rackrenting (overcharging a tenant) was common in 19th century Ireland, as was eviction leaving an increasing population homeless and landless in Ireland. The potato crop failed in 1845 because of a potato blight which led to the Great Famine between 1845 and 1850. 2 million died from starvation and another 2 million emigrated to America, Australia and Britain. The social revolution led to agricultural, medical and industrial improvements. However, it also caused international revolution which triggered an industrial revolution. Britain became known as the ‘workshop of the world’.

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