

# Primary and Secondary Sources Activity

The logo for 'networks' features the word in a bold, lowercase sans-serif font. A stylized graphic of intersecting lines forms a starburst or network pattern behind the letter 'o'.

## Industrialization and Nationalism

### Parliamentary Reports on Child Labor Practices

#### Background

In 1831 Parliament member Michael Sadler introduced a bill designed to regulate labor practices in British textile mills and, in particular, mandate shorter hours and better working conditions for the most powerless of workers: children. The act of Parliament that evolved from Sadler's bill—the Factory Act of 1833—banned the hiring of children younger than 9 years old and created a maximum 8-hour workday for those age 9 to 13 and a maximum 12-hour workday for those aged 13 to 18. But later inspections routinely revealed widespread abuses of the act, and some industries (coal mining and lace making, for example) were able to avoid the act altogether.

In 1842 the Children's Employment Commission was created to report in-depth on child labor practices in mines and other industries employing large numbers of children throughout England, North Wales, and Scotland. Government agencies interviewed hundreds of working children, parents, and employers in dozens of trades and manufacturing jobs from paper making to metalworking to tobacco spinning. These interviews, full of firsthand descriptions of the often-deplorable workplace conditions—inhuman hours, frequent deadly or disabling accidents, and rock-bottom wages—paved the way for future labor reforms and stricter inspection policies throughout the United Kingdom.

Across the Atlantic in the United States, Massachusetts enacted the first U.S. child labor law in 1836, a reform that required child factory workers under the age of 15 to attend school three months out of the year. By 1842, a number of states began adopting reforms to restrict children's workdays to 10 hours.

**Directions:** The following excerpts come from reports of child labor practices submitted to Parliament. The first is from a report by Superintendent of Factory Inspections Robert A. Baker in 1836, three years after the 1833 Factory Act went into effect. The second is a personal narrative from a report compiled by the Children's Employment Commission nearly 30 years later in 1864. Read the excerpts and answer the questions that follow.

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## Activity *Cont.*

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### Industrialization and Nationalism

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My Lord, in the case of Taylor, Ibbotson, and Co., I took the evidence from the mouths of the boys themselves. They stated to me that they commenced working on Friday morning, the 27th of May last, at six, A.M., and that, with the exception of meal hours and one hour at midnight extra, they did not cease working till four o'clock on Saturday evening, having been two days and a night thus engaged. Believing the case scarcely possible, I asked every boy the same questions, and from each received the same answers. I then went into the house to look at the time-book, and, in the presence of one of the masters, referred to the cruelty of the case, and stated that I should certainly punish it with all the severity in my power. . . .

My Lord, by a clause in the factory act, it is enacted, that "not more than one penalty can be obtained from any one person for any one description of offence in any one day." Had I laid the information, therefore, on all the boys for the same offence, the penalty could only have been 20/. [about \$100 in 2010], a sum which appeared to me inadequate to the gross nature of the offence committed; I therefore, my lord, varied the information, so as to enable me to sue for 80/. [about \$400 in 2010], being four full penalties, could I have obtained them, laying the first for working two boys more than twelve hours on the Friday; the second for working a boy before five o'clock on the Saturday morning; the third, for working two boys in the night time, between Friday and Saturday; and the fourth for keeping a false time-book, as to the hours of working. These views, however, my lord, were not responded to, I very much regret to say, by the magistrates before whom the case was heard. The parties were fined only 5/. [about \$50 in 2010] on each information, and with an aggregate of penalties of 20/. [about \$100 in 2010] escaped.

—Robert A. Baker, Superintendent of Factory Inspections, 1836

Fork grinder at Askham's wheel. Began fork grinding when I was 10 years old, and have been at it for 28 years. . . . I know one that began at 8 years old. He was quite fresh up to 17 and died at 19. His lungs were completely gone with the grinders' complaint.

The cast fork grinding is a deal more pernicious than the steel. At the former the average age of grinders is only 28, Dr. Calvert said. I don't think above eight or nine have worked beyond my age. . . .

I have never known any one killed at the work, though I know two or three lamed, i.e., break a leg and so on. Sometimes a stone flies out. This is very dangerous if it is a boy at work, because he has not sense to get out of the way.

—Thomas Roebuck, 1864

# Primary and Secondary Sources Activity *Cont.*



## Industrialization and Nationalism

1. **Analyzing** In the situation described in the first excerpt, what is the inspector's opinion of employer Taylor, Ibbotson, and Co.? What phrases in the report support this?

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2. **Analyzing** Why was the inspector unable to impose the penalty he asked for? What does the court's decision suggest about the importance of factory owners and manufacturing?

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3. **Identifying Central Issues** Why do you think the clause in the Factory Act might have stipulated that an employer could not be penalized more than once for the same infraction? Why does the inspector feel he would be justified in penalizing Taylor, Ibbotson, and Co. more than once?

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# Primary and Secondary Sources Activity *Cont.*



## Industrialization and Nationalism

4. **Making Inferences** In the second excerpt, Thomas Roebuck mentions “grinders’ complaint” as a health problem common to those in his occupation. What type of illness do you think this might have been? How do you know? What could have been some of the contributing occupational factors in this illness?

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5. **Drawing Conclusions** Based on information from both selections, why do you think the employers were able to continue mistreating child employees even after the provisions in the 1833 Factory Act? What do these excerpts suggest about the importance of factories during the Industrial Revolution?

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