Economics 303Y1: the Economic History of Modern Europe to 1914

Topic No. 6 [12]: The Social Consequences of Urban Industrialization in Britain, 1770 - 1850: The Standard of Living Debate during the ‘Industrial Revolution’


QUESTIONS: Did the ‘Industrial Revolution’ c. 1780-c. 1820 depress workers’ living standards?

1. What is the evidence for the course of real wages and living standards for the following periods: (a) 1770-90; (b) 1790-1820; (c) 1820-50?

2. Was the initial stage of modern British industrialization (to ca. the 1840s) financed at the expense of the living standards of the ‘working classes’, as the Marxists contend?
3. What factors had the more or most powerful influences on living standards during the Industrial Revolution: capital investment, industrial organization, monetary inflation, warfare, government taxation, population growth, Enclosures and agrarian changes?

4. Whose real wages fared the best from ca. 1790 to ca. 1840: those in the new industries of the Industrial Revolution or those in traditional industries and crafts?

5. If you believe that real wages of the lower middle and working classes did decline in the period ca. 1780 - 1830, which of the following factors do you think were the more or most responsible?
   a) population growth
   b) warfare and taxation
   c) inflation
   d) ‘capitalist exploitation of labour’: according to the Marxist model?
   e) technological changes

6. Has the Kuznets curve any relevance for the Standard of Living Debate during the Industrial Revolution era? See the introductory lecture notes for a perspective on this issue.