**The** **[Industrial Revolution](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/287086/Industrial-Revolution)**

**Economic effects**

Undergirding the development of modern Europe between the 1780s and 1849 was an unprecedented economic transformation that embraced the first stages of the great Industrial Revolution and a still more general expansion of commercial activity. Articulate Europeans were initially more impressed by the screaming political news generated by the French Revolution and ensuing Napoleonic Wars, but in retrospect the economic upheaval, which related in any event to political and diplomatic trends, has proved more fundamental.

Major economic change was spurred by western Europe’s tremendous population growth during the late 18th century, extending well into the 19th century itself. Between 1750 and 1800, the populations of major countries increased between 50 and 100 percent, chiefly as a result of the use of new food crops (such as the potato) and a temporary decline in epidemic disease. Population growth of this magnitude compelled change. Peasant and artisanal children found their paths to inheritance blocked by sheer numbers and thus had to seek new forms of paying labour. Families of businessmen and landlords also had to innovate to take care of unexpectedly large surviving broods. These pressures occurred in a society already attuned to market transactions, possessed of an active merchant class, and blessed with considerable capital and access to overseas markets as a result of existing dominance in world trade.

Heightened commercialization showed in a number of areas. Vigorous peasants increased their landholdings, often at the expense of their less fortunate neighbours, who swelled the growing ranks of the near-propertyless. These peasants, in turn, produced food for sale in growing urban markets. [Domestic](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/168578/domestic-system) manufacturing soared, as hundreds of thousands of rural producers worked full- or part-time to make thread and cloth, nails and tools under the sponsorship of urban merchants. Craft work in the cities began to shift toward production for distant markets, which encouraged artisan-owners to treat their journeymen less as fellow workers and more as wage labourers. Europe’s social structure changed toward a basic division, both rural and urban, between owners and nonowners. Production expanded, leading by the end of the 18th century to a first wave of consumerism as rural wage earners began to purchase new kinds of commercially produced clothing, while urban middle-class families began to indulge in new tastes, such as uplifting books and educational toys for children.

**Social upheaval**

In western Europe, economic change produced massive social consequences during the first half of the 19th century. Basic aspects of daily life changed, and [work](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/647998/work) was increasingly redefined. The intensity of change varied, of course—with factory workers affected most keenly, labourers on the land least—but some of the pressures were widespread.

The nature of work shifted in the propertied classes as well. Middle-class people, not only factory owners but also merchants and professionals, began to trumpet a new [work ethic](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/479867/Protestant-ethic). According to this ethic, work was the basic human good. He who worked was meritorious and should prosper, he who suffered did so because he did not work. Idleness and frivolity were officially frowned upon. Middle-class stories, for children and adults alike, were filled with uplifting tales of poor people who, by dint of assiduous work, managed to better themselves. In Britain, Samuel Smiles authored this kind of mobility literature, which was widely popular between the 1830s and 1860s. Between 1780 and 1840, Prussian school reading shifted increasingly toward praise of hard work as a means of social improvement, with corresponding scorn for laziness.

Shifts in work context had important implications for leisure. Businessmen who internalized the new work ethic felt literally uncomfortable when not on the job. Overall, the European middle class strove to redefine leisure tastes toward personal improvement and family cohesion; recreation that did not conduce to these ends was dubious. Family reading was a common pastime. Daughters were encouraged to learn piano playing, for music could draw the family together and demonstrate the refinement of its women. Through piano teaching, in turn, a new class of professional musicians began to emerge in the large cities. Middle-class people, newly wealthy, were willing to join in sponsorship of certain cultural events outside the home, such as symphony concerts. Book buying and newspaper reading also were supported, with a tendency to favour serious newspapers that focused on political and economic issues and books that had a certain classic status. Middle-class people also attended informative public lectures and night courses that might develop new work skills in such areas as applied science or management.

The growth of cities and industry had a vital impact on [family](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/201237/family) life. The family declined as a production unit as work moved away from home settings. This was true not only for workers but also for middle-class people. Many businessmen setting up a new store or factory in the 1820s initially assumed that their wives would assist them, in the time-honoured fashion in which all family members were expected to pitch in. After the first generation, however, this impulse faded, in part because fashionable homes were located at some distance from commercial sections and needed separate attention. In general, most urban groups tended to respond to the separation of home and work by redefining gender roles, so that married men became the family breadwinners (aided, in the working class, by older children) and women were the domestic specialists.

In the typical working-class family, women were expected to work from their early teens through marriage a decade or so later. The majority of women workers in the cities went into domestic service in middle-class households, but an important minority laboured in factories; another minority became prostitutes. Some women continued working outside the home after marriage, but most pulled back to tasks, such as laundering, that could be done domestically. Their other activities concentrated on shopping for the family (an arduous task on limited budgets), caring for children, and maintaining contacts with other relatives who might support the family socially and provide aid during economic hardships.

Few middle-class women worked in paid employment at any point in their lives. Managing a middle-class household was complex, even with a servant present. Standards of child rearing urged increased maternal attention, and women were also supposed to provide a graceful and comfortable tone for family life. Middle-class ideals held the family to be a sacred place and women its chief agents because of their innate morality and domestic devotion. Men owed the family good manners and the provision of economic security, but their daily interactions became increasingly peripheral. Many middle-class families also began, in the early 19th century, to limit their birth rate, mainly through increasing sexual abstinence. Having too many children could complicate the family’s economic well-being and prevent the necessary attention and support for the children who were desired. The middle class thus pioneered a new definition of family size that would ultimately become more widespread in European society.

New family arrangements, both for workers and for middle-class people, suggested new [courtship](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/140848/courtship) patterns. As wage earners having no access to property, urban workers were increasingly able to form liaisons early in life without waiting for inheritance and without close supervision by a watchful community.  Marriage did not necessarily follow, for many workers moved from job to job and some unquestionably exploited female partners who were eager for more durable arrangements. They were, however, increasingly drawn to beliefs in a romantic [marriage](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/366152/marriage), which became part of the new family ideal. Marriage age for middle-class women also dropped, creating an age disparity between men and women in the families of this class. Economic criteria for family formation remained important in many social sectors, but young people enjoyed more freedom in courtship.

Along with its impact on daily patterns of life and family institutions, economic change began to shift Europe’s social structure and create new antagonisms among urban [social classes](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/550940/social-class). The key division lay between the members of the middle class, who owned businesses or acquired professional education, and those of the working class, who depended on the sale of labour for a wage. Neither group was homogeneous. Many middle-class people criticized the profit-seeking behaviour of the new factory owners. Artisans often shunned factory workers and drew distinctions based on their traditional prestige and (usually) greater literacy. Some skilled workers, earning good wages, emulated middle-class people, seeking education and acquiring domestic trappings such as pianos.

Class divisions manifested themselves in protest movements. Middle-class people joined political protests hoping to win new rights against aristocratic monopoly. Workers increasingly organized on their own despite the fact that new laws banned craft organizations and outlawed unions and strikes. Some workers attacked the reliance on machinery in the name of older, more humane traditions of work. Luddite protests of this sort began in Britain during the decade 1810–20. More numerous were groups of craft workers, and some factory hands, who formed incipient trade unions to demand better conditions as well as to provide mutual aid in cases of sickness or other setbacks. National union movements arose in Britain during the 1820s, though they ultimately failed. Huge strikes in the silk industry around Lyon, France, in 1831 and 1834 sought a living minimum wage for all workers. The most ambitious worker movements tended to emphasize a desire to turn back the clock to older work systems where there was greater equality and a greater commitment to craft skill, but most failed. Smaller, local unions did achieve some success in preserving the conditions of the traditional systems. Social protest was largely intermittent because many workers were too poor or too disoriented to mount a larger effort, but it clearly signaled important tensions in the new economic order.

http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/195896/history-of-Europe/58392/Sources-of-Enlightenment-thought