which this trade created for the various materials requisite to forward its multiplied operations, caused an extraordinary demand for almost all the manufactures previously established, and, of course, for human labour. The numerous fanciful and useful fabrics manufactured from cotton soon became objects of desire in Europe and America; and the consequent extension of the British foreign trade was such as to astonish and confound the most enlightened statesmen both at home and abroad.

The immediate effects of this manufacturing phenomenon were a rapid increase of the wealth, industry, population and political influence of the British empire; and by the aid of which it has been enabled to contend for five-and-twenty years against the most formidable military and immoral power that the world perhaps ever contained.¹

These important results, however, great as they really are, have not been obtained without accompanying evils of such a magnitude as to raise a doubt whether the latter do not preponderate over the former.

Hitherto, legislators have appeared to regard manufactures only in one point of view, as a source of national wealth. The other mighty consequences, which proceed from extended manufactures, when left to their natural progress, have never yet engaged the attention of any legislature. Yet the political and moral effects to which we allude, will deserve to occupy the best faculties of the greatest and wisest statesmen.

The general diffusion of manufactures throughout a country generates a new character in its inhabitants; and as this character is formed upon a principle quite unfavourable to individual or general happiness, it will produce the most lamentable and permanent evils, unless its tendency be counteracted by legislative interference and direction.

The manufacturing system has already so far extended its influence over the British empire, as to effect an essential change in the general character of the mass of the people. This alteration is still in rapid progress, and ere long, the comparatively happy simplicity of the agricultural peasant will be wholly lost amongst us. It is even now scarcely any where to be found, without a mixture of those habits, which are the offspring of trade, manufactures, and commerce.

The acquisition of wealth, and the desire which it naturally creates for a continued increase, have introduced a fondness for essentially injurious luxuries among a numerous class of individuals, who formerly never thought of them, and they have also generated a disposition which strongly impels its possessors to sacrifice the best feelings of human nature to this love of accumulation. To succeed in this career, the industry of the more industrious classes of this wealth is now drawn, has been carried by new competitors striving against those of a longer standing, to a point of real oppression, reducing them by successive changes, as the spirit of competition increased, and the ease of acquiring wealth diminished, to a state more wretched than can be imagined by those who have not attentively observed the changes as they have gradually occurred. In consequence, they are at present in a situation infinitely more degraded and miserable than they were before the introduction of these manufactories, upon the success of which their bare subsistence now depends.

**READING AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What is the principal product that characterizes industry for Owen?
2. How does Owen situate British industry in the larger context of international relations?
3. What, in Owen's view, has been the attitude of government toward industry? What is government's implicit responsibility?

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**SADLER COMMITTEE AND ASHLEY COMMISSION**

*Testimonies Before Parliamentary Committees on Working Conditions in England*  
1832, 1842

*The Industrial Revolution depended on men, women, and children working under harsh and often deadly conditions. Troubled by the social changes wrought by Britain's rapid industrialization, politician Michael Sadler*  

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¹ the most formidable ... contained: Owen is referring to Revolutionary and Napoleonic France.
(1789-1835) formed the Committee on the Labour of Children in the Mills and Factories of the United Kingdom. The committee’s 1832 report shocked the public and mobilized support for labor reform. In 1840, another labor reform advocate, Lord Ashley (1801-1885), established the Children’s Employment Commission. Its 1842 report shed light on the practice of child labor in coal mines, or “collieries.” Both of these reports prompted legislation and raised public awareness of the human cost of the Industrial Revolution.

Testimony Before the Sadler Committee, 1832

Elizabeth Bentley, Called in; and Examined

What age are you? — Twenty-three.
What time did you begin to work at a factory? — When I was six years old.
What kind of mill is it? — Plain mill.
What was your business in that mill? — I was a little duffer.¹
What were your hours of labor in that mill? — From 5 in the morning till 9 at night, when they were thronged [busy].
For how long a time together have you worked that excessive length of time? — For about half a year.
What were your usual hours of labor when you were not so thronged? — From 6 in the morning till 7 at night.
What time was allowed for your meals? — Forty minutes at noon.
Had you any time to get your breakfast or drinking? — No, we got it as we could.
And when your work was bad, you had hardly any time to eat it at all? — No; we were obliged to leave it or take it home, and when we did not take it, the overlooker took it, and gave it to his pigs.
Do you consider doffing a laborious employment? — Yes.
Explain what it is you had to do. — When the frames are full, they have to stop the frames, and take the flyers off, and take the full bobbins off, and carry them to the roller; and then put empty ones on, and set the frames on again.

¹ Testimony... 1832: Michael Sadler first proposed a ten-hour workday in 1831; his bill was rejected by Parliament but prompted the formation of this investigative committee.

Testimony Before the Ashley Commission on the Conditions in Mines, 1842

Edward Potter

I am a coal viewer, and the manager of the South Hetton colliery. We have about 400 bound people (contract laborers), and in addition our

¹ Testimony... 1842: This testimony led to the Mines Act of 1842, which prohibited boys under the age of ten and women from working in the mines.
bank people (foremen), men and boys about 700. in the pits 427 men and boys; of these, 290 men. . . .

Of the children in the pits we have none under eight, and only three so young. We are constantly beset by parents coming making application to take children under the age, and they are very anxious and very dissatisfied if we do not take the children; and there have been cases in times of brisk trade, when the parents have threatened to leave the colliery, and go elsewhere if we did not comply. At every successive binding, which takes place yearly, constant attempts are made to get the boys engaged to work to which they are not competent from their years. In point of fact, we would rather not have boys until nine years of age complete. If younger than that, they are apt to fall asleep and get hurt; some get killed. It is no interest to the company to take any boys under nine. . . .

Hannah Richardson

I've one child that works in the pit; he's going on ten. He is down from 6 to 8. . . . He's not much tired with the work, it's only the confinement that tires him. He likes it pretty well, for he'd rather be in the pit than go to school. There is not much difference in his health since he went into the pit. He was at school before, and can read pretty well, but can't write. He is used pretty well; I never hear him complain. I've another son in the pit, 17 years old. . . . He went into the pit at eight years old. It's not hurt his health nor his appetite, for he's a good size. It would hurt us if children were prevented from working till 11 or 12 years old, because we've not jobs enough to live now as it is. . . .

Mr. George Armitage

I am now a teacher at Hoyland school; I was a collier at Silkstone until I was 22 years old and worked in the pit above 10 years. . . . I hardly know how to reprobate the practice sufficiently of girls working in pits; nothing can be worse. I have no doubt that debauchery is carried on, for which there is every opportunity, for the girls go constantly, when hurrying, to the men, who work often alone in the bank-faces apart from everyone. I think it scarcely possible for girls to remain modest who are in pits, regularly mixing with such company and hearing such language as they do — it is next to impossible. I dare venture to say that many of the wives who come from pits know nothing of sewing or any household duty, such as women ought to know — they lose all disposition to learn such things; they are rendered unfit for learning them also by being overworked and not being trained to the habit of it. I have worked in pits for above 10 years, where girls were constantly employed, and I can safely say it is an abominable system, indecent language is quite common. I think, if girls were trained properly, as girls ought to be, that there would be no more difficulty in finding suitable employment for them than in other places. Many a collier spends in drink what he has shut up a young child the whole week to earn in a dark cold corner as a trapster. The education of the children is universally bad. They are generally ignorant of common facts in Christian history and principles, and, indeed, in almost everything else. Little can be learned merely on Sundays, and they are too tired as well as indisposed to go to night schools. . . .

The Rev. Robert Willan, Curate of St. Mary's, Barnsley

I have been resident here as chief minister for 22 years. I think the morals of the working classes here are in an appalling state. . . . The ill manners and conduct of the weavers are daily presented to view in the streets, but the colliers work under ground and are less seen, and we have less means of knowing. . . . The master-sins among the youths is that of gambling; the boys may be seen playing at pitch-and-toss on the Sabbath and on weekdays; they are seen doing this in all directions. The next besetting sin is promiscuous sexual intercourse; this may be much induced by the manner in which they sleep — men, women, and children often sleeping in one bed-room. I have known a family of father and mother and 12 children, some of them up-grown, sleeping on a kind of sacking and straw bed, reaching from one side of the room to the other, along the floor; they were an English family. Sexual intercourse begins very young. This and gambling pave the way; then drinking ensues, and this is the vortex which draws in every other sin.

Thomas Wilson, Esq., Owner of Three Collieries

I object on general principles to government interference in the conduct of any trade, and I am satisfied that in the mines it would be productive of the greatest injury and injustice. The art of mining is not so perfectly understood as to admit of the way in which a colliery shall be conducted being dictated by any person, however experienced, with such certainty as would warrant an interference with the management of private business. I should also most decidedly object to placing collieries under the present
provisions of the Factory Act with respect to the education of children employed therein. First, because, if it is contended that coalowners, as employers of children, are bound to attend to their education, this obligation extends equally to all other employers, and therefore it is unjust to single out one class only; secondly, because, if the legislature asserts a right to interfere to secure education, it is bound to make that interference general; and thirdly, because the mining population is in this neighborhood so intermingled with other classes, and is in such small bodies in any one place, that it would be impossible to provide separate schools for them.

READING AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do these testimonies present the realities of child labor? Give specific examples.

2. Both reports make particular note of the gender of workers. What is the effect of calling attention to female labor? Describe the attitudes toward gender differences conveyed in these reports.

3. Summarize the arguments presented in the Ashley Commission report for and against the regulation of female and child labor in mines. How is the issue of education used in each argument?

DOCUMENT 23-4

Chartism: The People’s Petition
1838

In 1837, a group of twelve men — six members of Parliament and six members of the British working class — composed and circulated a list of demands


for electoral reforms including universal male suffrage. Later incorporated into the People’s Charter, from which it took its name. In 1838, the petition excepted be presented to Parliament. Despite garnering more than a million signatures, the petition met with little support from the rest of Parliament or from the public, and it failed to pass on several occasions. Nevertheless, Chartism was an important early milestone in the struggle for voting rights during the Industrial Revolution.

Unto the Honorable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in Parliament assembled, the Petition of their Suffering Fellow Citizens.

HUMBLY SHEWETH,

That we, your petitioners, dwell in a land whose manufactures have made her an example to the world, and are the pride and delight of all that set store by their success.

The land itself is goodly, the soil rich, and the people industrious; yet it is abundantly furnished with the materials of commerce, from the numerous and convenient harbors; in facility of intercourse, it exceeds all others.

For three-and-twenty years we have enjoyed a prosperous position and capacity to take advantage of them, we have been blessed with public and private suffering.

Yet, with all these elements of national prosperity, we find our cities, towns, and villages in a state of decay.

We are bowed down under a load of taxes, which fall greatly short of the wants of our rulers; our trades and commerce are in a state of bankruptcy; our workmen are starving; our children are exposed to the mercy of the public, and labor no remuneration; the home of the artisan, the warehouse of the pawnbroker is full; the workshops of the manufacturers are deserted.

We have looked on every side, we have searched in vain, we have found the causes of a distress so sore and so long continued.

We can discover none in nature, or in Providence. Heaven has dealt graciously by the people; but our rulers have made the goodness of God of none effect.

The energies of a mighty kingdom have been wasted in the power of selfish and ignorant men, and its resources are being aggrandized.