World History Notes

3/4/2024

* **Conditions for the Working Class**
* During the Industrial Revolution, a dramatic wealth and power disparity amongst the social classes began to emerge.
* Since the industrialized processes for producing goods required expensive machines, only those with capital could own them.
* These owners still needed human labor to run these machines, but since they owned the only means of production, they held a great amount of control over their workers.
* This led to increasing inequality between people who owned the means of production and those who engaged in wage labor.
* **Working Conditions on the Factory Floor**
* The working class included men, women, and children who provided the skill and the muscle.
* This enabled industrial productivity to reach new heights and make employers exceedingly wealthy.
* Yet, those same employers often treated their workers—their human resources—as if they were merely pieces of the machinery.
* Industrial workers had an exhausting schedule. Workers were expected to show up at the workplace six days a week, on time, and to put in a full day.
* A full day of work typically consisted of 12 hours for much of the 1800s. For their efforts, workers earned approximately $1 a day.
* Furthermore, workers often operated in hazardous environments. A priest once described a steel plant as “the slaughterhouse; they kill them [workers] there every day.”
* Worker safety was not of great concern. Whirling shafts, slippery floors, spinning blades, and molten steel all had the potential to injure or kill.
* Those who were hurt or disabled received little to no financial compensation for their injuries.
* Factory owners believed that simply paying wages fulfilled their obligation to workers.
* Industrial processing often created toxic gases and dust as well. Workers in textile mills, for example, had no choice but to inhale cotton dust all day.
* Worse yet was the situation of coal miners. Mary Harris “Mother” Jones, a labor activist, described the “wretched work” by explaining:
* The miners “breathe coal dust,” which also “grinds itself into the skin, never to be removed.”
* Textile workers and miners often suffered from lung diseases, and workers in cramped, unventilated shops faced the constant threat of contagious diseases such as tuberculosis.
* Laborers tolerated such adversity and hardships because they risked losing their jobs if they protested.
* It was well known that employers would have little trouble replacing a dissenting worker.
* **Industrialization’s Impact on Women and Children**