

TEXT 3 : Child labour in the Industrial revolution 1/2

« However, there is strong evidence to suggest that not all families shared in economic progress and a sufficient number might have fallen behind to contrive the bad equilibrium. Key to economic well-being was the level and regularity of a father's wages, which could easily slip below what was needed to withhold children from the labour market. There were many reasons for such inadequacy. First, men top-sliced their wages, creaming off a share to finance their personal expenditure. Such guerdons were not always frittered away on tobacco, the ale-house, or gambling, and their legitimacy was generally accepted by other family members as a just reward for the breadwinner's efforts, but men's pocket money nonetheless meant that wages did not go in their entirety to support wives and children. Second, the reorganization of work and the introduction of new technology dispensed with many traditionally acquired skills and obliterated the premia associated with them, reducing wages for workers in these ill-fated trades. Third, even outside such hapless occupations, wages did not rise consistently over the period.

(...) Another background factor setting the scene for the boom in child labour was the precocious development of familial dependence on the male head. Britain developed breadwinner-dependent families early in its history, and in advance of sufficient prosperity or social discipline. Men's wages were not sufficiently high or sufficiently stable and men themselves not sufficiently reliable or self-controlled to bear the burden. (...) The death, incapacity, disappearance, or poor performance of a male head of household was catastrophic, plunging the family into poverty and threatening its disintegration. Add to this weakness the growing conditionally of poor relief. Long before the new poor law made explicit demands for self-reliance, industry, and prudence, the overseers of the old poor law had begun to require families to do everything they could to help themselves before *they could be judged* deserving of poor relief. Self-help included the employment of children, even young children, whose duty it was to help support mothers and siblings. In cases where families needed additional breadwinners, their older children were in the firing line. The stage *was set* for the boom in child labour.»

Humphries, J, « Childhood and child labour in the British industrial revolution », The Economic History Review, 2013.

I. Vocabulary : In the text, find an equivalent for... (first paragraph)

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|------------------|---------------------------------|
| A. Salaries = | B. To keep somebody away from = |
| C. Competences = | D. Unlucky = |
| E. Go up = | F. Sector of employment = |

II. True or False ? Justify by quoting the text.

1. During the industrial revolution, men's wages were often sufficient to allow the family not to rely on child labour.
2. Part of the men's wages was very often used for other matters than to support their wives and children.
3. Families generally accepted the fact that men needed money for personal expenses.
4. During the industrial revolution all sectors benefitted from an increase in salaries.

III. Answer the following questions **with your own words**

1. Which characteristic of Victorian families made them particularly vulnerable in cases where men obtained low wages ?
2. Sum up what you understood of the underlined passage (4-5 lines)
3. Sum up the different reasons why child labour increased over the period.

IV. GRAMMAR FOCUS 3 : Observe les phrases underlined/ in bold : What do they have in common?