

Condition of the Working Class in England

A) The following information on life expectancy in England was reported by Frederick Engels in his book *Condition of the Working Class in England* (1844).

"In 1840 in Liverpool the average age at death of the 'gentry and professional persons' was 35 years, of 'tradesmen and their families' 22 years and 'labourers, mechanics and servants' was actually only 15 years. The main reason for the high death rate is the heavy mortality among infants and small children. If both parents go to work for their living, or if either parent is dead, the child is so neglected that its health inevitably suffers. In Manchester nearly 54 per cent of the workers' children die before attaining their fifth birthday. Only 20 per cent of the children of the middle class die before they are five. In the rural districts rather less than 32 per cent of all children die before they are five."

B) In the section on infant mortality Engels concluded: "These unfortunate children are simply the victims of our extremely defective social arrangements, which are perpetuated in the interests of the property-owning classes. The middle classes read these things every day in the newspapers, and do nothing at all about it. The middle classes should either put an end to this scandalous state of affairs, or they should hand over to the working classes the power to make regulations for the common good."

C) Engels reported on a conversation with a middle-class gentleman in Manchester.

"I spoke to him about the disgraceful unhealthy slums and drew his attention to the disgusting condition of that part of the town in which the factory workers lived. He listened patiently and at the corner of the street at which he parted company he remarked: 'And yet there is a great deal of money made here.'"

D) Engels included a letter written to the *Manchester Guardian* complaining about the poor. "For sometime past numerous beggars are to be seen on the streets of our town. They attempt - often in a truly brazen and offensive manner - to arouse the pity of the public by their ragged clothes, their wretched appearance, their disgusting wounds, and sores, and by showing stumps of amputated limbs. I should have thought that those of us who not only pay our poor rates (taxes) but also subscribe generously to charitable appeals have done enough to claim the right to be shielded from such disgusting and revolting sights."

E) Engels charged that England's attitude toward working people and the poor was based on a theory by Malthus that England was over-populated and that efforts to help the poor only made the situation worse. "(Malthus) argues that because the world is always over-populated it is inevitable that hunger, distress, poverty and immorality will always be with us. Consequently men must be divided into different classes. Some of these classes will be more or less wealthy, educated and moral and others will be more or less poor, miserable, ignorant and immoral. From these facts Malthus comes to the conclusion that private charity and public provision for the poor are really useless since they merely serve to keep alive -- and even to promote the growth of -- the surplus population."

A Comparison of Life Expectancy by Social Class, 1840

	Urban Upper Class	Urban Middle Class	Urban Lower Class	Rural Population
Average age of Death, Liverpool, England	35	22	15	not available
Percent of child who die before age 5, Manchester, England	not available	20%	54%	32%