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Eric V. Snow October 20, 1992 HST 815 Dr. LoRomer Review of Chambers

The economic history of the industrial revolution contains many of the greatest controversies of historiography. Whether the dispute be over ^{whether} if the standard of living for the working classes rose or fell in England during this time, whether population increased due to rising fertility or declining mortality, or the reasons why the industrial revolution occurred first in England; ~~Over all these subjects~~, much contention still exists. J.D. Chambers' The Workshop of the World British Economic History from 1820 to 1880 gives a fairly evenhanded, brief overview of some of the main social and economic issues facing Britain in the later stages of its industrialization.

Chambers focuses a significant amount of attention ^{on} ~~to~~ those who organized the means of production: entrepreneurs (p. 7, 35, 62-63, 225). For organizing any large business frequently requires a level of education, management skills, access to raising large amounts of capital (or the careful reinvestment of the same), and the willingness to take risks with the latter that most ordinary workers lack. This emphasis does not by any means ignore the role of the working class, for ^{he} he devotes a lengthy chapter to their conditions and struggles, and makes other scattered references to it, but his work shows how both capitalists and workers were needed to build Britain's industrial base. *ALM*

Chambers also deals with exactly how and in what ways industry and agriculture were radically changed during the industrial revolution, without losing sight of how late and gradual some of these changes were. For instance, roughly 210-230,000 people worked in the cotton mills in 1834, which was only one in every eighty English people, was also less than one third of the total number of women servants, and maybe an eighth of the agricultural workforce (p. 20). He also notes how many still worked as artisans in small shops using the old tools (p. 21). As for the industrialization process itself, he notes such interesting phenomena as the heavy involvement of English aristocrats in industry and ⁱⁿ modernizing transportation (p. 14-15), how the division of

labor and standardization of parts actually increased the variety available for consumers (p. 28), how employers often did not hire many of those working in their business, but delegated this process to somebody else such as a piece master who paid those he hired out of his own pay (p. 18-19), and some of the reasons why ^{East} Anglia lost out to Yorkshire in worsted production (p. 34). Hence, even as he notes various changes and phenomena of industrializing England, these do not blind him to the continuities that also existed at the same time.

Interestingly, despite he pays a good amount of attention to industrialists, businessmen, entrepreneurs, and so forth, he seems to be something of a "pessimist" (one who believes the average standard of living fell during the industrial revolution). He definitely takes a darker view of England's overall process of industrialization than T.S. Ashton did in his short study, The Industrial Revolution, 1760-1830. For instance, Chambers doubts any major rise in the standard of living occurred before the middle of the century (p. 219-220). Even though he notes some early factory communities were housed well by their masters (p. 182), he still says many factory owners could not be expected to willingly obey the Factory Act of 1833: "Only the very large and very public spirited factory masters could be expected to give it a fair trial . . ." (p. 200). Other examples of such evenhandedness can be found in his work.

Chambers covers many other financial and economic developments during this period. The financial system's groans and strains are a good example, with the Bank of England, its linchpin, caught between its roles of being a profit-making entity and a central bank with governmental functions, causing various problems (p. 134).

Chambers book, written in a textbook style with rather flat prose, may not be the best brief work on this period in English history. But it does do a good job of covering many of the basic issues and controversies in a clear, straightforward style, for which it should be commended.