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CHAPTER ONE

The Economy of Work

CARMEN SARASÚA

The eighteenth century was a time of economic prosperity and growth in the western world. European states profited from their colonial empires, developing an intense commercial traffic of slaves, raw materials, and finished goods. Prosperity, however, did not arrive for all, and in fact the majority of the population continued to live at subsistence level, scarcely productive and ignorant of innovations. According to available estimates of gross domestic product, growth during the century was slow and "mainly concentrated in the North Sea area," with England and the Netherlands at the forefront.1 Even in those countries, innovations and wealth coexisted with increasing inequality and desperate poverty for most.

A main pillar of economic growth was the increase in agricultural output, documented throughout most of the western world. In parts of Europe this occurred in an intensive way, that is, with productivity increases. Output per unit of land and labor increased in what scholars have called the "agricultural revolution": "The years from c. 1750 to c. 1850 witnessed unprecedented changes in output and productivity in English agriculture, which warrant the appellation 'revolution'." The Low Countries put the agricultural innovations in practice first during the seventeenth century. A combination of diffusion of new crops of American origin, such as potatoes and corn; of technical innovations in plows, seed drills, and other tools; of institutional changes such as the enclosure of common lands; of new cultivation techniques, such as continuous crop rotation, allowed for an intensification in agricultural production and in livestock farming, which in turn allowed for heavy manuring and more productive lands. Selective breeding programs permitted an increase in the production of meat, wool, and milk, which together with an expansion in demand from the cities made livestock farming increasingly productive.

In other parts of Europe, however, the increase in agricultural output was more limited and occurred in an extensive way. In the Mediterranean countries, environmental conditions prevented any large increase in output, and agriculture continued to center on cereals, vines, and olive trees, with modest increases in crop diversification, including rice, potatoes, flax, hemp, and silk. The Harvest, by Goya, painted in 1787, vividly shows the most important moment of the agricultural year for most peasants in eighteenth-century Europe (Figure. 1.1). Peasants' lives centered around the harvest, which marked the peak season of labor demand, was the main source of families' income, and determined marriages and births.

In connection with the increasing food supply, the eighteenth century was also a period of demographic transformation. The population of Europe grew from around 110 million to about 190 million. This growth has been explained as a result of the combination of
increasing fertility, because women had children earlier, and decreasing mortality. In
different ways both fertility and mortality reflected the improvement in living conditions
because “marriage was sensitive to economic circumstances.” Mortality, on the other
hand, was reduced thanks to famines becoming less frequent and plagues less endemic.
England was at the forefront of this growth. Following the union with Scotland in 1707,
the British population stood at about 6.5 million; a century later it had reached 15.75
million.

Economic prosperity and population growth also occurred in the American colonies,
particularly in the coastal areas where a new middle class of merchants, tax collectors,
ship builders, and bureaucrats developed. Mexico City grew from 70,000 people in 1753
to 113,000 in 1790, most of them Indians and mestizos. The city of New York expanded
from 2,500 in 1740, of which 20 percent were black slaves, to 96,000 in 1810, becoming
the leading US city after independence, ahead of Boston and Philadelphia.

The relationship between population growth and food was a concern of eighteenth-
century society and the subject of Thomas Robert Malthus’s An Essay on the Principle
of Population (1798), one of the first books that can be defined as belonging to the new
subject of economics. Malthus argued that an increase in a nation’s food production in
fact improved people’s well-being, but the improvement was temporary since it also
led to population growth, which in turn restored the original per capita production
level. In other words, mankind had a propensity to utilize abundance for population
growth rather than for maintaining a high standard of living. The Malthusian trap
means that improvements in a society’s standard of living are unsustainable because of
the resultant population growth. Writing before the “agricultural revolution,” Malthus
further predicted diminishing returns to agriculture because of intensive production.
His work was an attempt to justify the British Corn Laws and landlords’ case for an
agricultural tariff. He also opposed policies to help the poor, arguing that any mechanism
to redistribute rent would have negative consequences for the country’s economy as a
whole and for the poorer classes in particular. It shows, in any case, that eighteenth-
century Europeans were aware of the changes in population and agricultural production
taking place.
CHANGES IN THE ORGANIZATION OF WORK

The impact of larger agricultural output on the organization of work was intense; family farming was increasingly replaced by a system of capitalist husbandry, which would eventually mean a reduction in the number of small cottagers. Most of these farm workers, now transformed into landless laborers, would have to hire themselves out as day workers, or migrate to the cities, to eventually form part of the industrial labor force ready to work for wages as the only means to sustain themselves. This was not, however, a definitive development and, in the nineteenth century, in certain regions, a process of reruralization took place, when large estates were disentailed and governments sold small plots to new farmers.

Rural manufacturing was the most characteristic form of productive organization in the century. Coinced as “proto industrialization” by Franklin Mendels in his study on the Flemish linen industry, and later developed by Peter Kriedte, Hans Medick, and Jürgen Schlumbohm to explain the transition to capitalism, it was defined as the huge rise in manufacturers’ output for export markets that took place in the countryside, making it possible for family cottages to complement their income from agricultural labor. Decades of research have concluded that most proto industrial regions did not become industrialized; nor has a clear impact on the demographic behavior of the population—that is, earlier marriages, increased fertility, and population growth—as a result of rural industry been found in all cases. Yet, by focusing on the eighteenth century, proto industrial literature has provided us with new and invaluable insights for understanding how “work before the factory” was organized.

Urban growth was another characteristic feature of the period, connected to population growth and the agricultural revolution that allowed more nonagricultural workers to be fed. Capital cities reflected the expanding powers and functions of the state and its bureaucracies, and became the scenes of urban reforms and costly building programs that included not only palaces, parks, and theaters, but also hospitals, bridges, and factories. Urban growth both reflected and fuelled the new employment opportunities that attracted peasants, particularly young girls and boys. The cities that grew fastest were the port cities, with London, already the largest in the western world at the beginning of the century, reaching a population of one million by 1800, followed by Paris with nearly 600,000 inhabitants. Naples, the largest Italian city, had a population of about 320,000. Bristol and Liverpool, in England, and Amsterdam, in the Low Countries, also grew rapidly owing to colonial trade. In 1703, Peter the Great founded Saint Petersburg, moving the Russian capital there to gain a seaport to expand Russian maritime trade. Bordeaux is a good example of a port city that flourished thanks to overseas trade. By the second half of the eighteenth century, it controlled 40 percent of France’s colonial traffic, exporting textiles, re-exporting slaves, and importing huge quantities of sugar produced in the West Indies. Figure 1.2 belongs to the series Les ports de France, a collection of eighteen paintings commissioned by Louis XV in 1753 to show off France’s maritime and commercial might.

Whether living conditions were worse or better in the cities than in the countryside is debatable. Certainly, in the eighteenth century an urban penalty existed in Europe, given the unsanitary conditions and lack of proper housing, together with the large numbers of people flocking to the cities. Cities became a trap during times of plague and epidemics, as Daniel Defoe vividly described in A Journal of the Plague Year, having survived the devastating pestilence that afflicted London in 1665. City dwellers
were particularly vulnerable during times of famine and war, owing to their dependence on food arriving from the countryside. Yet, as we shall see, the “urban factor” was key to economic and social modernization. It is associated with the rise in literacy, the spread of new ideas, the rise of new institutions, and eventually with the birth of democracy; the development of the market economy, both for commodities and for capital and labor; and with the structural change that paved the way for industrialization.

AN INDUSTRIOUS REVOLUTION?

In recent years, research has focused on the role that the mobilization of labor had on the century’s dynamism. The old paradigms that explained the industrialization and nineteenth-century economic growth as a supply-side phenomenon have been replaced by accounts that focus on demand-side factors. Production, factories, capital, technological innovations, steam, coal, and iron have been replaced by consumption, households, income, tastes, shops, silk, coffee, and tea. Although this interpretation already appeared in Joan Thirsk’s The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England, and is generally inspired by the Keynesian aggregate demand model, Jan de Vries’ model of industrious revolution connected this “consumer revolution” to changes in the supply of labor. His theory has had the effect of granting new relevance to the early modern period, as the industrious revolution would have preceded the Industrial Revolution. “In England, but in fact through much North western Europe and Colonial America, a broad range of households made decisions that increased both the supply of marketed commodities and
labor and the demand for goods offered in the marketplace. This combination of changes in household behavior constituted an 'industrious revolution'. According to de Vries, in the eighteenth-century western world people were working longer, in terms of both more hours per day and more days per year, as well as more years over their life course; this was surely a fundamental factor in accounting for the transformation of western economies and societies.

Although there is now considerable evidence supporting the idea that an intensification of work occurred, at least three important questions remain: whether an increase in aggregate employment actually existed, particularly of women and children, the larger part of the unemployed, or whether those already working simply decided to work longer hours; whether households made decisions based on maximizing their utility function, that is, the consumers’ choice of goods and services that are most preferred; and whether the decision to increase households’ labor supply was driven by the desire to consume more. On the first question, we already have evidence of the central role women and children played in the mobilization of work. In a pioneering work that studied two English localities in the late eighteenth century, Osamu Saito found participation rates of 67.5 percent among married women, and up to 82.1 percent for widowers, all in stocking knitting, lacemaking, strawplaiting, and spinning. “The combined effect of poverty and opportunity provided by the cottage industry,” as well as the preference of merchants for a cheaper labor force that would allow them to maximize their profits, and their desire “to bypass traditional artisan customs and arrangements” account for the huge increase in the employment of women and children in the labor-intensive industries that developed in the eighteenth century, mostly in the countryside but also in urban centers.

Research in recent years has reconstructed women and men’s participation rates, which was previously seen as impossible owing to a lack of sources for the prestatistical period. Sources are being found across Europe that, in fact, allow for a quantification of the women, men, and children in paid work. Women’s participation rates in paid employment were much higher than previously thought, because the sources on which earlier research relied suffered from a huge under-recording of women’s work. For example, in examining the labor market of Torino, Beatrice Zucca compared the number of women declaring they had a job in the 1802 Napoleonic census with the registers of the Ospedale di Carità, the main charitable institution of the city, where around 15,000 people asked for relief in the three decades between 1762 and 1792. Records of charitable institutions are excellent sources for the urban occupational structure, since, because they oversaw charity relief, men’s and women’s work was carefully recorded to evaluate their real needs. According to the Napoleonic census, women’s participation rate in Torino was 33.3 percent, while the hospital’s registers showed 63.2 percent of women had a paid occupation. Even more interestingly, while according to the census married women had a lower participation rate, compared to unmarried women and widows, the hospital’s registers recorded the opposite situation: 73.3 percent of married women had a paid job. Married women’s paid work, in fact, was particularly under-recorded in eighteenth-century sources. Although the notion of the male breadwinner was formally elaborated during the nineteenth century, “comparison between a conventional source (the Napoleonic census) and an alternative source (the registers of the Ospedale di Carità) reveals that the idea of a household economy based on the sole or main breadwinner—male or female—was already well established in the eighteenth century.”
My own work on inland Spain using the householders’ declarations for the Ensenada cadaster, a large-scale census and statistical investigation conducted in the Castilian Kingdom in 1749, shows rates of up to 82.7 percent in small- and medium-size localities specializing in textile manufactures (lace, stockings, ribbons, esparto grass makers, and so on), and whenever men declared their wives’ occupations. In northern Castile, rates were 66 percent for women, mostly dedicated to textile manufactures. For that same period, an average participation rate for women of 45.1 percent has been estimated for several Dutch towns, mostly concentrated in the textile and retailing sectors.

changing consumption and specialization patterns increased opportunities for married women in retailing. For instance, the share of women, and especially married women, in the sale of coffee and tea rose markedly in eighteenth-century Leiden ... women formed 80 per cent of all coffee and tea sellers, and the percentage of married women among them rose from over 60 to almost 80 per cent ... compared to industrial crafts, institutional (corporate) restrictions on women were limited in the retail sector.

To know whether the industrious revolution incentivized an expanding supply of labor, not only with people working longer hours but also with new people, particularly women, becoming wage-workers, we need to understand more about the preindustrial organization of work. Traditional sources obscure women’s work, and erroneous models can be constructed if this is not considered.

Changes in the terms and conditions of women’s work, and in particular the increased visibility of waged labour in factories and workshops, should not be identified with an increase in aggregate employment. Thus, part of de Vries’ “industrious” revolution, in which women abandoned subsistence production for waged employment to boost income and facilitate the purchase of new desirable market commodities, might also be a mirage created by changes in the types of work undertaken.

Work on family farms, the most common type of work done by women and children before the eighteenth century, is also the one that was more easily hidden. The increased opportunities in retailing that Dutch women enjoyed paralleled those in the booming textile manufactures described across Europe. The new visibility of women’s work may thus be reflecting more than an increase in the total supply of labor but rather a structural change in labor in which women, we now know, were at the forefront.

A second issue with the industrious revolution model refers to the decision-making process of households. To what extent did decisions on work/leisure and consumption reflect the shared preferences of the household members? The little work done on this question, such as Nancy Folbre’s on colonial North America, shows that families were not egalitarian working or consumption units. Still little is known about transfers of resources and rents that took place within households. Men’s expenditure on alcoholic beverages, tobacco, prostitution, and gambling, all of which increased during the century alongside mobility and urbanization, could diminish a significant part of the family budget, including income earned by women and children, a practice that questions the income-pooling model with which family economies are usually explained. Unequal income pooling paralleled the unequal intra-household allocation of resources, as reflected not only in the expenditure in goods but also in services such as medical attention, leisure activities, and education.

Finally, there is the question of the reason for working harder. A new culture of work developed during the century but was consuming more, and new goods, what drove
workers to work harder? Was the rise in new consumption a major European phenomenon, involving the working classes as well? Evidence suggests that in most countries, if not all, peasants were unable to choose between leisure and consumption. Income generated by the growing participation in the labor market was used by peasant and urban workers to cover other more pressing needs than exotic consumption goods: not only to pay for food and clothing, at ever-increasing prices, particularly for those who had moved to the cities, but also to pay their debts, taxes, and rising land and housing rents. In any case, it is true that new opportunities for social mobility explain the many initiatives, across Europe, to move up the social ladder; households, for example, borrowed money or saved to buy or rent new plots or cattle or open a shop. Historians have put forward various theories to try to account for the rise in consumption, pointing to the role played by wages as incentives that allowed workers to access and consume goods which previously had been limited to a minority.

Evidence of working time is fragmented. Fixed capital was still a very small part of the productive system, with most trades remaining labor-intensive. Labor-saving machinery and devices started to develop only in the last decades of the century. Together with new patterns of divisions of labor, they would eventually transform how work was done, allowing for clear increases in labor productivity. But, in general, labor productivity remained very low during the century. Figure 1.3, La tormenta de nieve o Invierno (The

FIGURE 1.3 Francisco de Goya, La tormenta de nieve o Invierno (The Snowstorm or Winter), 1786. Madrid, Museo del Prado. Photo: DeAgostini / Getty Images.
Snowstorm or Winter), by Goya, which shows a group of men transporting a slaughtered pig through a snowstorm, illustrates well this low labor productivity, in this case of transportation, done by foot with the help of a donkey. As in the case of cloth washing, "the hardest, most unpleasant profession," as Spanish statesman Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos put it, it reminds us that, in the eighteenth century, labor was still about loading heavy weights; suffering extreme cold, heat, and humidity; contact with all kinds of dirt; breathing polluted air; and having all kinds of accidents and sickness, that in many cases left workers crippled forever, often as girls and boys, unable to work and dependent upon charity. 18

Research on the organization of work suggests that three main developments can be identified. First, there were the new forms of work for the rural population, across Europe and to a large extent in the colonies, combining agriculture, husbandry, dairy production, and commercial activities. The new economic possibilities that became available to peasants through the rise in demand were recreated by enlightened writer Félix María Samaniego (1745–1801) in his version of the classic tale of the milkmaid, told by Jean de La Fontaine (1621–95) in the seventeenth century, who in turn had taken it from Aesop, and which became immensely popular in the eighteenth century.

A milkmaid took the pitcher to the market on her head ... the happy milkmaid marched alone, and said to herself: "Selling this milk will give me so much money, and with this money I want to buy a basket of eggs, to produce one hundred chickens ... With the amount obtained from the sale of so many chicken I will buy a pig; with acorn, bran, cabbage, chestnut it will get fat without limit ... I will make good money out of it without a doubt; I will buy a robust cow and a calf ..." Lost in her thoughts she jumped in such a violent way that the pitcher fell. Poor milkmaid! Goodbye milk, money, eggs, chickens, pig, cow and calf. (See Figure 1.4)

The tale introduces an actor surely well known at the time: the peasant “ambitious of a better or more prosperous fortune.” This perfect example of “Rational Economic Woman” is planning a business consisting of producing for the market, selling goods at market prices, and reinvesting the money earned in additional sources of earnings. The tale is also significant in revealing the growth of local markets. “A commercial revolution did take place in eighteenth-century Europe: not in the glamorous long-distance expeditions to exotic lands, but in the seemingly mundane business of regional exchange and local shop-keeping.” 19

But what was surely the most important feature of the organization of work was the increasingly widespread manufacturing sector, particularly in textile goods. It was important in quantitative terms, most likely involving hundreds of thousands of workers across Europe, and important for its connections with industrialization. The proto industrial theory developed by Mendels and others in the 1970s saw rural industry as a precursor of factory industrialization. Rural industry did not always evolve into industrialization, nor did it have impact on demographics in the way the model predicted. But seeing Europe as a large rural workshop remains a key contribution to our understanding of the economy of this century. As Maxine Berg argued: "It is now apparent that the eighteenth-century economy was much more industrial than once thought." This vision has been obscured until recently because most of this work took place as domestic rural manufacture: “Dramatic changes brought by factory working in some areas obscures the fact that it never was the major occupation and that much industrial organization continued to centre on workshops.” 20

Finally, seasonal and temporary migrations acted as an intermediate mechanism between countryside and cities, and across economic sectors and occupations, allowing people to
move from peak agricultural seasons to mining, rural manufactures, transportation, and service. Mobility became, in fact, a very eighteenth-century phenomenon, as institutional ties preventing or impeding it began to disappear. It was a resource the poor increasingly relied on, and what led Olwen Hufton and others after her to define the economy of the poor as “an economy of makeshifts.” The occupational structure in the cities was different from that in the country. Except for industrial cities such as Lyon, France, which had become the principal urban center of silk production, the main occupation in eighteenth-century cities was domestic service (see Figure 1.5). The sector reached its peak in this century, declining in relative terms from the first decades of the nineteenth
century, when alternative occupations for men in industry, mining, and the building sectors started to increase. It is also the period when domestic service transformed from a mostly male to a mostly female occupation. Supply and demand factors accounted for the importance of this sector: not only in demand, with the middle classes imitating elite lifestyles, but also in supply, as hundreds of thousands of girls and boys were ready to look for a master to work for. Domestic service was an occupation but also a room, food, shoes, legal protection, a social identity, and a site of core social relationships. It is important to consider all the functions performed by domestic service to understand its crucial importance in the eighteenth-century economy.

FIGURE 1.5 Pietro Longhi, Portrait of a Venetian Family with a Manservant Serving Coffee, c. 1752. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.
CHANGING IDEAS OF WORK AND WORKERS

“Economic change in all periods depends, more than most economists think, on what people believe.” Economic changes brought about new ideas. But there is little doubt that economic and demographic changes were also, and perhaps largely, the result of new ideas. Although the importance of ideas has long been recognized as central to modern economic growth, in the form of a scientific or technological revolution prior to the Industrial Revolution, their role has been recently reclaimed by the works of Joel Mokyr, for whom European Enlightenment was pivotal in the propulsion of economic growth in the nineteenth century. Mokyr goes beyond ideas as the origin of new institutions: “What mattered was not only what people believed about social contracts, political pluralism, religious tolerance, human rights and so on, but also what they believed about the relationship about humans and their physical environment and role of what they called ‘useful knowledge’ to improve material wellbeing.”

One of these fundamental cultural changes was the new social attitude towards work and workers. Changes in the organization of work and the increasing economic dynamism brought about a new positive attitude in favor of work not only as a source of income, but, most importantly, and new, as a source of social respectability and identity. Most importantly, because the new social place of workers, their increasing legitimacy as social subjects, would soon decisively contribute to the erosion of the ancien régime.

As the impact of Diderot and D’Alembert’s monumental Encyclopédie (1751–72; see Figure 1.6) has been described:

Although it is doubtful whether the many artisans, technicians, or labourers whose work and presence and interspersed throughout the Encyclopédie actually read it, the recognition of their work as equal to that of intellectuals, clerics, and rulers prepared the terrain for demands for increased representation. Thus the Encyclopédie served to recognize and galvanize a new power base, ultimately contributing to the destruction of old values and the creation of new ones.

One of the sources of this change in the way Europeans perceived work and workers was the experience of overseas colonization. Breaking “virgin” lands became a metaphor of work that granted newcomers political and economic rights through citizenship and land ownership. This is what the first school of economic thought, the Physiocrats, and particularly François Quesnay (1694–1774) and Richard Cantillon (1680–1734) defended from France. Unlike what mercantilist theory claimed in the first half of the century, agricultural labor was the only activity producing a net product; all other economic activities simply transformed it. Crucial to notice here is the difference between land and agricultural work; it was only work put into the land that created wealth, and farmers, in Europe or in the colonies, were the foundation of the social body.

WAGE WORK: MORALLY SUPERIOR, ECONOMICALLY EFFICIENT

The eighteenth century saw the birth of economic thought, primarily centered on the question of labor. “The primacy of labour as a factor of production in the mercantilists’ intellectual schema, together with the pervasive problem of pauperism throughout much of Europe, produced a body of policy-oriented economic literature that because of its dual emphasis on the problems of poverty and unemployment can be considered the beginning
of modern labor economics.” The physiocratic idea of laissez-faire, later developed by Adam Smith as the invisible hand, was an explicit defense of the market, and included a new vision of work as “free work,” as opposed to nonmarket forms of labor. Free labor, that is, labor freely contracted in the market in exchange for a wage, was morally
superior to, and economically more efficient than, servant and slave labor. “Work done by slaves ... is in the end the dearest of any. A person who can acquire no property, can have no other interest but to eat as much, and to labor as little as possible.” This idea of market work as morally superior, socially more convenient, and economically more efficient would be fundamental in establishing new more favorable institutional frameworks that allowed labor markets to develop and the supply of labor to expand, two central requisites for economic growth.

Innovative thinking about work came not only from economists. The two political movements that have largely shaped contemporary societies and economies, antislavery and women’s rights, were both born in the last decades of the eighteenth century, and both defined having a paid occupation as a basic economic and political right and a central component of becoming a citizen. It is in fact remarkable that eighteenth-century defenders of women’s rights drew a parallel between their situation and that of slaves. This was the result of early feminists coming from the abolitionist movement, like the North American Abigail Adams (1744–1818). In fact, denouncing women’s, and particularly married women’s, “slavery” was commonplace in the writings of eighteenth-century feminists. In 1786, Josefa Amar y Borbón published her Discurso en defensa del talento de las mujeres y otros cargos en que se emplean los hombres (Speech in defense of the talent of women and other positions in which men employ themselves): “Not content with having reserved for themselves the employments, the honours, the profits, in a word, everything that could inspire the efforts of their wakeful hours, men have dispossessed women even of the pleasure that results from having an enlightened mind. Women are born and raised in absolute ignorance.” In her 1791 Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne, Olympe de Gouges claimed:

all Female and all Male citizens, being equal in law, must be equally entitled to all public honours, positions and employment according to their capacities and with no other distinctions than those based solely on talent and virtue ... woman shares all the labour, all the hard tasks; she should therefore have an equal share of positions, employment, responsibilities, honours and professions.

Mary Wollstonecraft also paralleled women’s economic and legal situation with slavery in her 1792 A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. But neither slaves nor women had the legal or political capacity to reform institutions. It was through the support of a few white middle-class men, moved by egalitarian ideas, that male and female slaves and “free” women were eventually granted economic and political rights.

Thinking of all individuals (not yet citizens) as holding the right to work for a wage and making work respectable and wages desirable were all elements of the eighteenth-century formation of a large supply of labor. Advocates of middle-class women’s right to have a paid occupation explicitly used the argument of the respectability of paid work to defend this right as moral. As Louis-Sébastien Mercier argued:

Business of various kinds, they might likewise pursue, if they were educated in a more orderly manner, which might save many from common and legal prostitution. Women would not then marry for a support ... The few employments open to women, so far, from being liberal, are menial ... How much more respectable is the woman who earns her own bread by fulfilling any duty, than the most accomplished beauty!

Cultural and institutional factors had as much relevance as economic factors in this process. But the decisive transformation would take place at the factory, as Adam Smith argued:
This great increase of the quantity of work, which, in consequence of the division of labour, the same number of people are capable of performing, is owing to three different circumstances; first, to the increase of dexterity in every particular workman; secondly, to the saving of the time which is commonly lost in passing from one species of work to another; and lastly, to the invention of a great number of machines which facilitate and abridge labour, and enable one man to do the work of many.32

CHANGING POLICIES: THE ENLIGHTENED AGENDA FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH

State intervention in economic activity was widespread and systematic in most of eighteenth-century Europe. Absolutist states became central actors of economic policy. In the context of deep changes in the trade positions of European countries, the expansion of industrial activity became a central goal of the economic agenda, which governments pursued through protectionist legislation and subsidies to private and public institutions. Increase of industrial output was intended to increase fiscal revenues and, as an import-substitution policy, to reduce commercial deficits. State support to industrial modernization took several forms. In Italy, Spain, Sweden, Saxony, Bohemia, and France this encouragement occurred through the establishment of royal factories, mostly devoted to the fabrication of luxury goods such as porcelain, tapestries, silk, and crystal to replace imported goods, but also to meet the internal demand for linen, wool, and cotton textiles. Through royal factories, enlightened states aimed at diffusing foreign innovations and hiring foreign technicians, but they were in general a failed attempt to promote industrialization “from the top,” incurring huge deficits and failing to substitute imports.

Two aspects of state intervention had a special relation with work: the programs of institutional reforms aimed at expanding the supply of labor, and the antipoverty policies. The two were intended as means to achieve economic growth, not in the modern sense, as a means to improve living standards for society as a whole, but with the intention of supporting and financing the military and competition for colonial power. As they embarked upon costly wars, and public deficits grew exponentially, European states needed new taxpayers and new taxable wealth. The two interventions were also closely related, as the policies to deal with the poor were in fact public efforts to transform the populace into “citizens useful to the republic.”

Poverty was not an eighteenth-century novelty; instead, for most of the population, it had been the norm for centuries. What was new was that poor people were more plentiful, more mobile, more visible, and more dangerous. Population growth had increased the numbers of the poor. The loosening of feudal ties had facilitated their migration to the cities in search of a master to serve or begging opportunities. Across Europe, thousands of children were abandoned at the doors of churches or foundling hospitals that became more numerous across the continent.

As poverty and unemployment intensified throughout Europe, they became favorite subjects for reformists.33 An interesting development in the new ideas on work was the criticism expressed by English travellers throughout Catholic countries, where almsgiving was a widespread and respected practice. They were horrified at the long queues of poor at the doors of churches and monasteries, waiting for some food or money. They should be working instead! In fact, a new climate against begging swelled across Europe. The new idea of the poor as idle, and of poverty as the deserved consequence of idleness,
had profound implications in policy terms; a variety of measures to enforce work developed, with varied success, with the English Poor Laws surely as the most developed institutional attempt to solve the problem. Work was promoted by the authorities as the best means to avoid poverty and thus the political risks associated with the increasing number of beggars in the cities. To promote work, states went from presenting work as morally superior to the enforced reclusion of beggars in workhouses. In many countries, antibeggar legislation was enacted. In France, begging was defined as “absolutely opposed to the current order of society ... Begging and indigence have been replaced by this active and working poverty that only makes the true wealth of the peoples, and that deserves all the attention and protection from the wise governments, because what produces is more important than what the epicurean who only consumes.”

EXPANDING THE SUPPLY OF CHEAP LABOR

The central means to expand labor supply, which eventually became a key aspect of the labor agenda of enlightened reformists across Europe, was the increase in women’s participation in the labor force. This occurred for two reasons: because wages paid to women were much lower than those of men’s, thereby employing women would reduce productive costs and make industry more competitive; and because women’s increased participation in manufacturing would permit male workers to be “reallocated” to agriculture, public works, and the army. In fact, the new interest in workers and the goal of promoting a new work organization included as one of its key elements a notion of gender-based division of work, a redefinition of the gender segregation of the labor market. In 1774, Spanish minister Pedro Rodríguez de Campomanes, prime minister under Carlos III and one of the principal ideologists of the enlightened reforms, had advocated rural manufactures in his highly publicized Discurso sobre el fomento de la industria popular. This was a win-win solution, as it permitted an increase in the country’s industrial production while at the same time maintaining the population in the countryside, avoiding the social troubles of proletarization and keeping wages low. Peasant families had no need to put a high price on the manufactures fabricated by their women and children in their “spare time.” Plenty of descriptions show how well women did by combining agriculture and manufactures. In Majorca, the local enlightened society was pleased to claim in 1798: “Women who go out to work in the fields, after they retire themselves at night to their houses, they spin at the spindle until they go to bed.”

The developments that led to the legal dissolution of the guild system were also part of the enlightened labor agenda. In Spain, the goal of recovering the country’s manufactures, the convenience of reducing the trade deficit, and the need to facilitate people’s access to cheap consumption goods led reformists to advocate a reorganization of the labor market that would start by taking men out of textile manufactures. Campomanes had already identified the problem in the 1770s, when discussing the high price of textiles in Madrid. “A weaver of ordinary cloth makes more than 10 reales per day,” which is caused “for two reasons: the short number of weavers, who have their clients imploring them,” and the rise in the price of fabrics, and the fact “that this operation is performed by men,” for which there is no reason, because in northern Spain “women are the ones who weave the cloth.” Men should, then, be replaced by women, because these “will be happy to make five reales per day instead of 10, now paid to the male weavers. I must insist that public administration is obliged to employ women in this and similar works, and the way to achieve it is teaching girls and not men.”
The central battle of this war was to be fought against the institution that had the monopoly of technical knowledge, the guilds, which excluded women from the manufactures of luxury goods. Despite repeated admonitions, the Guild of Silk Cord-makers of the city of Valencia made the government furious in 1779 by its resistance to accepting girls being taught silk-reeling techniques.

My Council, having noticed how harmful it was for the fomentation of industry ... the exclusions of women established by some of their Ordinances from the works which are more proper and suitable to their sex than to men's, who for their robustness and strength seemed more appropriately applicable to agriculture, the armies and navy; and having present the fact that the Guild of Silk Cord-makers, Pasementerie and Button Makers of the City of Valencia has attempted to prevent a School to teach the Girls all the relative to the industry of cord-making be established ... We order: that with no pretext you prevent, obstruct, or by the guilds or other people be prevented or hindered, the teaching to women and girls of all those works and artefacts that are proper for their sex, and that they can freely sell, by themselves or on their own account, the manufactures they make.\textsuperscript{37}

The fact that guilds continued to obstruct the entrance of women into several trades was one of the main reasons for their dissolution, which European governments implemented in the final decades of the eighteenth century (see Figure 1.7).

Preindustrial textile manufactures were labor-intensive. This explains the interest in reducing labor costs, and replacing male workers with women was the simplest and easiest way of doing so. In Spain, the average daily wage for unskilled male workers was 4 or 4.5 reales, while by working at looms at home, women and girls could make 1 or 1.5 reales per day. In the face of increasing foreign competition, manufacturers and merchants in other countries were doing the same. In Bologna's "silk district," while the sector of dyed silks entered crisis, white silks remained competitive "partly through agreements among manufacturers and also by taking on women and children as workers in order to reduce costs."\textsuperscript{38}

The gender re-segregation of the labor market included prohibitions on women occupying certain jobs or entering certain sectors—for instance, proscriptions against women joining gangs of harvesters that departed in late spring from Galicia. Migrations to Andalusia and Castile for harvest every year attracted some 25,000 to 30,000 young women and men, and were the main source of income for the inland areas, without access to fisheries. Women's participation in this flow of migration, which seemingly amounted to a third of it, became a matter of deep concern for authorities during the eighteenth century. In an attempt to put an end to it, prohibitive measures were consecutively reenacted.\textsuperscript{39} In 1736, emigration of women harvesters to Castile was forbidden in Spain. In 1748, jail sentences or the confiscation of property for those contravening the prohibition were announced. In 1754, an order from the administrative authority of Galicia revealed that women were emigrating dressed in men's clothing:

That no gang boss nor other person who goes to the works of Castile takes any woman, under penalty of twenty ducados for each one taken, and of ten years of jail in one of the presidiums of Africa; that no husband, father, brother, or relative or master, permits his wife, daughters, sisters, relatives or servants who are under his custody, to go to such works, under the same penalty; that justices and officials be vigilant in the observance of this and let it immediately be known when any woman from their parish is missing, and take and place an embargo on the properties of the person under whose custody she is
FIGURE 1.7 Joseph Gabriel Rosetti, The Workers' Workshop, Factory of Indian Cotton Fabric Founded by the Wetter Brothers in Orange, 1764. Orange, France, Musée municipal.

... in cases of women being found going to the work dressed in men’s clothes, besides the said penalties, she and the man taking her must be punished by public shaming.⁴⁹

Despite the endless regulations to prevent women from migrating to Castile “in men’s gangs,” they continued to do so, since they needed the money and had few other opportunities in their villages to earn it. Scholars talk of “endless announcements in all the parishes” and a “female exodus.”

As has been seen, women and men’s “proper places,” what we call today the gender segregation of labor, were, in the eighteenth century (like today), concerned with wages. The entire first age of political economy was devoted to justifying the convenience and correctness of low wages, wages sufficient just to allow workers' subsistence. This ideological product was fundamentally useful because at that moment labor-intensive
industries were booming, and industrialists needed to employ thousands of workers. The fact that they could find cheap workers, allowing them to keep production costs low and firms competitive, and the fact that paying workers very little was morally respectable and economically efficient, clearly had much to do with the eighteenth century being the period that paved the way for the success of industrialization.

Nominal wages (in kind or monetary) were low before the eighteenth century owing to several factors: in the first place, the political weakness of urban workers. New workers were no longer part of the guild system, but unions had not yet developed. Competition between workers was growing, owing to population growth and increasing mobility in Europe and between colonies. But increasing mobility was also a chance for workers to escape poor working conditions, even servitude and slavery. Workers, women and men, tried to escape such conditions by embarking for the colonies or moving to cities, although the former came with a cost that many could not afford. Second, technical problems accompanied the production process. Constant interruptions left industrial production poorly organized: demand for agricultural work was still heavily seasonal, at least in Mediterranean countries; but activity was also interrupted for part of the year in industry, mining, building, and transportation. The arrival of raw materials from overseas markets was sporadic, with many arriving in bad condition, shaping the work rhythm and making wages uneven. Finally, the transformation of the internal composition of the labor force affected income. The huge presence of women and children, alongside the transformation in gross domestic product and occupational structure, partially accounts for the fall in labor costs. Children and young women often worked only for food. For instance, in the second part of the century, across most of Europe, the wages of hand spinners appear to have decreased, leaving thousands of women near destitute.

Thus, rather than increasing nominal wages, it was the supplementary income of different family members, particularly children and women, that allowed households and families to cope with rising prices and enabled them to increase their purchasing capacity. In recent years, economic historians have focused on changes in the organization of work as the key factor in accounting for the eighteenth-century increased work effort, paving the way for the intense growth seen in the nineteenth century, with productivity increases in the industrial sector. This thesis revisits the birth of the industrial factory and the role work played in it. According to Robert Allen's "High Wage Economy (HWE)" thesis, the Industrial Revolution first occurred in Britain because the high costs of labor relative to capital and fuel motivated the development and adoption of labor-saving techniques, which included the spinning jenny. Allen's thesis is founded on the work of Craig Muldrew, among other scholars, which expounded increasing wages of hand spinners. More recent work by Jane Humphries, Jacob Weisdorf, and Benjamin Schneider has contested the Allen–Muldrew's HWE thesis, providing new evidence of hand spinning as a low-income, low-productivity occupation, and claiming that "mechanisation, especially the development of the factory, was motivated by the desire to use cheaper child and female labour in a way that ensured discipline and quality control."41

New evidence is needed on eighteenth-century nominal wages from a micro perspective, to better understand labor demand and to what extent low labor costs accounted for the success of the first industrial enterprises. Yet we should always take into account the local and sectoral patterns of gender segregation of labor because women, men, and children were not always easily replaceable, even before institutional barriers to substitution developed, such as unionization. Nominal wages are of course needed, together with prices of basic goods, to better understand people's standard of living.
CONCLUSION: PAVING THE WAY FOR THE MODERN ECONOMY

"The difference in natural talents in different men is, in reality, much less than we are aware of; and the very different genius which appears to distinguish men of different professions, when grown up to maturity, is not upon many occasions so much the cause, as the effect of the division of labour." 42 One of the most attractive and intriguing aspects of the age of Enlightenment are the incredibly modern opinions and ideas that some of the women and men who lived in this period sustained. For people who had been born and raised and were living in ancien régime societies, organized at the level of the legal institution of estates (estatutum), enlightened ideas of equality, freedom, and individual rights were not only progressive but revolutionary. Scholars have already identified the contradictions and limitations of enlightened thinkers. The idea that the differences between individuals are not the cause but the consequence of the division of labor shows an extraordinary modernity, with implications that Adam Smith was surely far from foreseeing. Custom and education form people, not Nature. The division of labor is the result of the social (political) organization, and not divinely ordained. This simple idea had the potential to change everything, as in fact it did.

The eighteenth century came to a close amid an unprecedented rise in the prominence of the poor in Europe. They were not only the majority population but their increasing concentration in the cities lent them a new visibility, converting them into a political risk. The rapid growth in the urban population explains the increasing dependence on the food produced in the countryside. And the poor, increasingly discontent at their position, tolerated poor harvests, food scarcity, and rising prices with difficulty. The growing unrest of workers would eventually be the final impetus for the French Revolution in 1789, which symbolically closed the century in historic terms, having been preceded by countless food riots across Europe in the decades before.

The political and ideological innovations that developed during the eighteenth century were connected to the new institutional framework implemented in the first half of the nineteenth century, intended to pave the way for economic growth and the consolidation of the market economy. In Sweden, like elsewhere in Europe, “each occupation and sector in the economy had been protected against competition and interference. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, reforms and deregulation created property rights in land and forests, loosened old restrictions which had inhibited the free flow of goods and labor both within the country and as far as exports were concerned.” 43 The new ideas diffused during the eighteenth century inspired new institutions and formed the basis of the new “rules of the game,” not, however, without fierce opposition from the privileged classes and from the poor. Labor, transformed into a commodity, was at the center of these changes. The difficult transition to the “free flow of labour” would, to a large extent, define the historical development of the century that followed.

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