

European cities in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries became a place of excitement for the European working class

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Abstract: *In human history, the city has been thought of as a critical factor in social development. In recent years, there has been an increased interest in European cities in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Almost all modern European cities were also formed during this period. Due to the industrial revolution and the rise of imperialism, the expansion of the working class and the middle class had caused tremendous changes in European cities in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. To date, there has been little agreement on the question of whether Europeans working-class perceive the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century city more as a place of excitement or as a place of fear? Wars and revolutions often happen, and Compared with the present, the laws and systems at that time were more developed. However, it cannot be denied that people's lives have been greatly improved by large-scale mechanical production. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to explore the European view of the city at that time.*

Introduction:

This article will pay special attention to the working-class who lived in major European cities from 1870 to 1914. In 1870, the Kingdom of Italy captured Rome, France lost the Franco-Prussian War and established the Third French Republic. Germany became the German Empire in the second year, 1871. The transformation of Paris began in 1852, Vienna in 1857, Barcelona in 1859, and Berlin started in 1862 later than them¹. Thence, Europe, especially Western Europe entered a

1 Ross, A. (2018). Down with the walls! The politics of place in Spanish and German urban extension planning, 1848–1914. *The Journal of Modern History*, 90(2), 292-322.

relatively stable situation until the First World War. Also, beginning in the nineteenth century, this period is often called “the century of mid-class and the bourgeoisie”. But a lot of laborers also came to the city from the countryside in this period. The well-known industrial city of Manchester has a population of 1.483 million in 1990 from a small city of 1800 with 75,000 people.² For the working-class at that time, we often have a very tragic image. And Many previous studies have also discussed the experience of poor working-class. For instance, Friedrich Engels (1993)³ have shown that the tragedy of the British working class in the early and mid-nineteenth century. “It is a disorderly collection of tall, three- or four-storied houses, with narrow, crooked, filthy streets, in which there is quite as much life as in the great thoroughfares of the town, except that, here, people of the working-class only are to be seen. A vegetable market is held in the street, baskets with vegetables and fruits, naturally all bad and hardly fit to use obstruct the sidewalk still further, and from these, as well as from the fish-dealers’ stalls, arises a horrible smell” (p.46).⁴

However, after the mid-nineteenth century, various aspects of working-class’s life changed, making them more excited about the city. And there are several important areas where this study will make an original contribution to the cognition of European in the development of the modern city.

First of all, in daily life, the working class has also undergone great changes. Firstly, the income of working-class increased between 1870 and 1914. Joanna Bourke (1994) has presented that the income of 1850 was regarded as the starting point of 100, and the ‘Normal’ real incomes of workers rosed from 100 in 1850 to 190 in 1913-1914 years. The cost of living increased from 100 in 1850 to 105 (it reached 121 in 1880). It indicates that the income of the working-class increased faster than the cost of living. This is a positive change.⁵

The next thing that needs to be observed is the consumption of food, which is the basic need for a person to survive. According to the research of Ian Gazeley, Andrew Newell (2015)⁶, “Our best guess, taking into account likely beer

2 Mitchell, B. R. (1962). Abstract of British historical statistics. CUP Archive, page 19-25.

3 Engels, F. (1993). The condition of the working class in England. Oxford University Press, USA.

4 Engels, F. (1993). The condition of the working class in England. Oxford University Press, USA, page 46.

5 Bourke, J. (1994). Working class cultures in Britain, 1890-1960: gender, class, and ethnicity. Psychology Press, page 4.

6 Gazeley, I., & Newell, A. (2015). Urban working-class food consumption and nutrition in Britain in 1904. *The Economic History Review*, 68(1), 101-122.

consumption, is an average of around 3,165 kcal for skilled workers and 2,700 kcal per equivalent male adult per day for poor workers” (p.20). It can be said that workers have been able to consume enough energy. In addition, the colonies of European countries have extensively planted precious spices, coffee, sugar cane and various tropical fruits. Although the main consumers are still above the middle class, a small part of the working class has been able to access these commodities. And then there are also some developments in biotechnology, such as the success of Navel Orange grafting in 1870s. Moreover, In Britain, the “Corn Laws” were abolished; likewise, the great improvement of the living standard of the British people caused by various materials in the colonies and the European continent, as well as free trade become to a trend.

Urban construction has also improved the quality of life of the working-class. For example, the appearance of electric lights has reduced many health problems caused by gas lights.⁷ Urban reconstruction started in the middle of the 19th century. Although the purpose may not be for the working class, the working class did benefit from it. For instance, the reconstruction of Paris led by Hausmann was mainly to show the power of the French Second Empire.⁸ However, the reconstruction of the sewers has reduced the incidence of diseases such as cholera and has benefited all Parisians, including the working class.⁹

Secondly, there was an increase in the leisure time of working-class. This can seem from the birth of the British football club. At the time, sports had a strong class character. For the working-class, football is their sports. Because many other sports, such as rugby, are the privilege of the rich. The sports often require space and time, but the workers did not have these conditions. However, in the late nineteenth century, due to the strengthening of union organization, workers’ working hours were restricted, and they had more leisure time than before. Additionally, politicians may find that allowing workers to play football more can reduce strikes. After a hard day’s work, the workers put their remaining energy on football. It is undeniable that workers have gained time and space to participate in sports activities in the city. This is a huge change for the working class. Those early football clubs had a strong working-class color, such as Manchester United, Arsenal, West Ham United, which are now well-known clubs. These clubs are mainly composed of railway workers, arsenal workers and steel factory workers. Also, in Germany, football clubs have a strong socialist color. Even today, German clubs are prohibited from selling more than 49% of their shares. Football which became popular in the late nineteenth

7 Otter, C. (2004). Cleansing and clarifying: Technology and perception in nineteenth-century London. *Journal of British Studies*, 43(1), 40-64.

8 Harvey, D. (2003). *Paris, capital of modernity*. Psychology Press.

9 Gandy, M. (1999). The Paris sewers and the rationalization of urban space. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 24(1), 23-44.

century, also proved that the status of workers in the city had risen somewhat. Sports are finally no longer the privilege of the rich.

Another notable change about the working class is in the legal and political area. In 1870, almost all European countries had abolished the rural serfdom, and even the most conservative and backward Tsarist Russia had abolished the serfdom in 1861. This is an important factor leading to the rapid growth of workers in cities. The dramatic expansion of the working-class has been paralleled by changes in social and political systems. For example, in British, the reorganization of local government led to the election of an elected county council in 1888. The reform of the tax system, especially the implementation of the estate tax in 1889. Urban workers were given universal suffrage, which was extended to rural workers in 1884. Against this backdrop, the demands of proletarian voters became increasingly important considerations for politicians. Although the right to vote at this time is not complete and comprehensive, it is undoubtedly an improvement for the working class. In cities, workers have more opportunities to participate in political activities like workers' marches and show their power. So being able to show political power in big cities can be exciting for workers.

From 1883 to 1889, Germany enacted the Disease Insurance Law, Accidental Injury Insurance Law, and the Disability Old Age Insurance Law. And in January 1890 the Reichstag rejected Bismarck's anti-socialist laws. And even if suppressed by other parties, during this period, the support rate of the Social Democratic Party in Germany grows rapidly.¹⁰ This reflected the political needs of the working-class. Likewise, show that the working class has enough influence. After the Haymarket affair on May 1, 1886, the worker leader August Spies shouted before being executed: "The day will come when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you strangle today!"¹¹ Then at the Second International Congress in Paris in 1889, the Haymarket affair was commemorated, and the International Workers' Day was announced. The workers got their own holiday for the first time through the strike movement in the city. Before that, almost all the holidays were religious.

Finally, working-class women often participate in work in order to subsidize their families, and they also do a lot of unpaid work at home in the nineteenth century. The 19th century was also the century when the feminist movement began. Since the first feminist conference held in Seneca Falls, New York State in 1848, the feminist movement has become more and more intense. The period from 1870 to 1914 was also the period of the first wave of feminism. The Match Girls Strike in 1888 showed that working-class women are also seeking their rights in the city, and they can also know that in the cities during this period, they have the opportunity to

10 Retallack, J. (Ed.). (2008). *Imperial Germany 1871-1918*. Oxford University Press, page 188.

11 Heynen, N. (2008). *Bringing the Body Back to Life through Radical Geography of Hunger: The Haymarket Affair and its Aftermath*. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 7(1), 32-44.

seek change.¹² The reporter Annie Besant, one of the leaders of this movement, bravely exposed the bad situation of Match Company. It is precise because of the existence of such people in cities that cities are a place of excitement for the working class.

Discussion and Conclusion

From the above description, at least during the period from 1870 to 1914, the life of the working class was changing for the better. Also, the match girls' strike and the workers' political movements in the cities all show that for the working class, cities in this period are undoubtedly excitement. However, there were still many problems at that time, such as the education of the working class, especially the education of women. June Purvis (1989) has presented a lot of female education issues at the time.¹³ In addition, Alain Faure (2006) argues that when workers come to cities, they often live in the same area with other workers, and this collective life often causes some trouble. Problems in this area may affect workers' thinking.¹⁴ Moreover, the treatment of domestic workers and workers from abroad is often different. For example, Irish workers in the UK are often discriminated against. Compared to local workers in England, Irish workers may feel less hopeful.¹⁵

Back to the first question, did Europeans working-class perceive the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century city more as a place of excitement or as a place of fear? As a result, Europeans working-class perceive the city as a place of excitement. The keyword here is hope. When a person's life is full of improvement and hope, he will be excited about where he lives. From the perspective of daily life, leisure, law, and politics, cities are undoubtedly exciting for workers. Of course, a big factor for this is that the working class's life before this period was too bad (before the late-nineteenth century). Therefore, a little progress will be regarded as a big hope.

12 Caroline Gibbs. (1980). The National Museum of Labour History. History Workshop, (10), 191-193. Retrieved September 21, 2020, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4288320>.

13 Purvis, J. (1989). Hard lessons: lives and education of working class women in nineteenth century England. Polity Press.

14 Faure, A. (2006). Local life in working-class Paris at the end of the nineteenth century. *Journal of urban history*, 32(5), 761-772.

15 Bourke, J. (1994). Working class cultures in Britain, 1890-1960: gender, class, and ethnicity. Psychology Press.