

RESEARCH METHODS FOR PRIMARY SOURCES

Document Case Study Brief

RMPS\_0147\_Marxist readings of sources

**[Recommended word count: 2,500-4,500]**

**Authors: Please complete only the white fields below.**

Entry Title	Reading of social and educational history documents through the lens of the Marxist Interpretation	
AMD Reference	RMPS_0147	
Authors:		
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Author bio	Dr. Arun Kumar is a historian of modern South Asia and teaches social, economic, labour and colonial history at the Nottingham University.	
Entry Description	The case study demonstrates a Marxist analysis of a primary source and indicates how Marxist historians read primary sources. The primary source explored is a pamphlet by a liberal British politician advocating for the expansion of industrial training for destitute children in England. The source is part of a larger body of the nineteenth century official and non-official literature which discussed the problem of poverty and its articulation as a national shame/burden. The author advocates for the vocational night schooling for the labouring classes.	
Entry Category	Primary Source Case Study	
Entry Category case type	Cases Source Type	
Entry Category case topic	Sound Recordings	
Entry size (approximate word count)	[Author. Fill in once written]	
Copyright year	[Office/AMD use] 2020	
Copyright statement	[Office/AMD use] Text Copyright Adam Matthew Digital	
DOI	[Office/AMD use]	
URL	[Office/AMD use]	
URI	[Office/AMD use]	
<b>SOURCE 1</b>		
SOURCE TITLE	The Industrial training of destitute children	
SOURCE DATE (Display)	1885	
SOURCE DATE (YYYYMMDD)	18850000	
SOURCE CREATOR/AUTHOR	Smith, Samuel, of Liverpool	
SOURCE TYPE	Pamphlet/Article	

SOURCE DESCRIPTION	An article advocating for the industrial training of impoverished children.
SOURCE PLACE CREATED	Unknown, possibly Liverpool or London
SOURCE PLACE OF PUBLICATION	London
SOURCE PUBLISHER	Kegan Paul, Trench & Co.
SOURCE PLACES	United Kingdom
SOURCE REGION	Europe
SOURCE PEOPLE	/
SOURCE ORGANIZATIONS	/
SOURCE KEYWORDS	/
SOURCE DURATION (HH:MM:SS)	
SOURCE ARCHIVE REFERENCE	[F.W.A.] 133
SOURCE COLLECTION (ARCHIVE)	Family Welfare Association Library
SOURCE LIBRARY/ARCHIVE	Senate House Library
SOURCE COPYRIGHT	Images reproduced courtesy of Senate House Library, University of London
SOURCE COLLECTION (AMD)	Poverty, Philanthropy & Social Conditions in Victorian Britain
SOURCE URL (AMD)	<a href="http://www.povertyinvictorianbritain.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/FWA_133_001_b14696058">http://www.povertyinvictorianbritain.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/FWA_133_001_b14696058</a>

### Author Brief

**Document Case studies** in *Research Methods for Primary Sources* are pieces based on primary sources that offer practical guidance to undergraduate students on how to work with a specific document or documents for academic study.

They can be used independently by students or as the basis of a seminar discussion.

Case studies guide students approaching specific **types of source** such as financial documents, legal records, correspondence, etc or **themes** typically studied such as revolution, consumer culture, religion and so forth.

Please remember that the specific source, or sources, that you will be evaluating are to be used as **examples** to illustrate to the student reader how they should approach evaluating and using a specific type of source for research or how to approach evaluating and using primary sources when researching a specific theme. These are pedagogical research methods case studies, to guide the student reader in critically evaluating sources.

**Note:** though these instructions may refer to ‘source’ in the singular, any combination of the corresponding sources may be used. Document case studies which use more than one source may require a higher word count.

It is important that cases engage clearly with the theme or source type, beyond the specific source discussed. For example a case study focused on Sport may consider things like why is it actually important to study sport history, and what can sport tell you about society more widely? It may include additional resources that deal with sport history generally or other sports/events in particular. Similarly, for case studies focused on source type, an explicit focus on why such sources are valuable for historical research should be included.

One approach is to keep the questions you are asking quite general – so that they could be asked of any source of that type / or any source with that theme in mind. You can discuss the specifics of the source in your evaluation.

Entries should refer to appropriate literature and theory given the theme or source type. Please ensure that it is clear when theory is being applied. Reflecting on your theoretical standpoint as a researcher will be useful.

This document case study will look at how a source can be read in different ways by different researchers – in this case how a source can be viewed through a Marxist lens. The case study will aim to encourage undergraduate students to consider how a source ostensibly about the condition of children in Victorian Britain - this source has had a case study about studying childhood written about it - could also have different approaches applied to it.

Things you may want to consider in this document case study:

- What is the Marxist approach to history?
- What impact has the Marxist approach to history had on the discipline?
- What use is Marxist theory when studying the past or primary sources?
- What use is Marxist theory in looking at this source?
- What information is there in this source to support a Marxist reading? Economics? Class? Ideology? Labour? Hegemony?

You may choose to include some of these suggested questions as part of your case study (the brief is for author purposes only).

Referencing. Please format your references according to the Chicago Manual of Style with Notes and Bibliography. All cited works will require an endnote, and must also be added to the bibliography. You may also include discursive endnotes. Please use the Word Endnote function (References > Insert Endnote).

Source document(s)

## [Link to Source Facsimiles](#)

*Images of the document are available through the Google Drive folder, which an editor will share with you.*

Source

**Folder:** RMPS\_0147

**Title:** The Industrial training of destitute children

**Contents:** An article advocating for the industrial training of impoverished children by Samuel Smith of Liverpool.

**Archive Reference:** [F.W.A.] 133

**Date:** 1885

**Source Library/Archive:** Senate House Library, University of London

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### **Abstract**

*[Mandatory section. Insert here an abstract to serve as an overview for this Document Case Study. What source or sources will the case study focus on? What is the source type or theme, and what lessons will the case study impart? The abstract should be a concise summary of your Document Case Study. It should be succinct and enticing, and should incorporate key words and concepts discussed in the body of the text. Please do not cite references within the abstract. Maximum of 250 words]*

This case study will show how Marxist historians analyse archival source material, particularly those dealing with the social, economic, class, and education history. On ~~the the~~ one hand, it will analyse the key categories that Marxist historians have employed to understand the past, on the other ~~hand~~, it will track the development of the Marxist history writing approach itself, from being a study of historical materialism, class struggle, and capitalism to a broader social history of the marginalised social groups and the working-class culture. Beyond this, we will look at a case study of a nineteenth-century pamphlet written by a British parliamentarian on poverty alleviation, labour, and industrial training during the Victorian era. We will study this document from a Marxist perspective, particularly from the social history approach and the social reproduction of class. Through a detailed analysis of

the pamphlet, key themes of Marxist analysis such as class relations, the capitalist mode of production and education, industrialization, poverty and labour, the demand for skilled labour will be touched upon.

Finally, we will critically evaluate the primary source to derive historical insights about the late nineteenth century England. The source reflects upon the emerging

This study will also demonstrate the use of the primary source in understanding class relations and the socio-economic dynamics-conflicts of the nineteenth-century Victorian English society. ~~H-We~~ will discuss the pamphlet to chart out how the upper-class viewed and evaluated the lower class in the nineteenth century, and how poverty and the poor came to be understood through the lens of the privileged classes. In this sense, the source is an invaluable document to discuss the Marxian analytical framework of class contradictions.

Methodologically, ~~w~~We will also discuss the limitations of such elite sources in doing history-writing and knowing about the past. Professional historians, including Marxists, use elite sources with great caution because such sources hide alternative perspectives as much as they reveal any perspectives.

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### **Learning Outcomes**

*[Mandatory section. Insert here a bullet point list of **3-6 learning objectives**. These should reflect what a student will learn from reading this document case study. They should relate to the evaluation and use of primary sources for research. Note: It is vital that you provide objective and measurable learning outcomes. See Bloom's Taxonomy for precise ways to state measurable learning objectives. Guidance on writing effective outcomes can be found at the following links:*

- [Writing learning outcomes](#)
- [Bloom's Taxonomy Action Verbs](#)

By the end of this primary source reading and exercise, you should be able to:

- Identify the major shifts within the Marxist historiography,
- Critically evaluate the contributions of Marxist history writing approach, i.e., historical materialism, class struggle, experience, exploitation, the social reproduction of classes,
- Explain how Marxist scholars study primary sources to reconstruct past and highlight key contradictions of society and economy,
- Summarise and map the nature of ~~the~~ debate on the poor, poverty and its alleviation in the nineteenth century England,
- Critically assess the elite sources of history writing.

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### Initial steps and questions

These are the initial steps one may take and/or questions one may ask prior to an in-depth evaluation of the primary source.

*[Mandatory section. Minimum 3. Maximum 8. Steps may include looking at the physical nature of the source – what can that tell you? Considering what you already know about the source type or its origins. Preparing the document for evaluation. Please describe the initial process you took when approaching evaluating this source, and what students should look out for when dealing with this specific source type or theme.*

*Initial steps/questions should encourage students to critically think about the source(s) and its origins and what may be learned from it as they read.*

*For case studies focused on a source **type**, such as photographs, consider the typical questions you would ask about this type of source: Who created it? When was it created? Are there particular things to look out for with this type of document? What can be learned from this type of source? Why did this source survive?*

*For case studies focused on a particular **theme**, such as childhood, you will likely write similar questions which relate more specifically to the theme: When you are looking at the theme of childhood, what kind of sources should you look for? Who creates documents related to childhood? When was the source created and how was childhood conceptualised at*

*that time? Are there particular things to look out for when using sources to research childhood? What kind of information about childhood could this source reveal?]*

Once the student has read these initial steps and/or questions they should read or view the source with those steps and/or questions in mind.

1. In evaluating a historical document, it is important to locate the authorship, ~~nature~~nature, and type of the document. ~~Is this a state record written by an official or has it been written by non-officials? If it has been penned by a non-official, has it written by an elite member of the society or by a lower class (the subaltern class)? If it has been written by an official, has it been written in a private capacity or for the administrative and legal purpose? Asking such important questions~~Raising these important issues at the beginning of analysis ~~would help you~~helps us in locating the relevance and context of the document. ~~Is the document a state record written by an official or has it been written by non-officials? If it has been penned by a non-official, has it written by an elite member of the society or by a lower class (the subaltern class)? If it has been written by an official, has it been written in a private capacity or for the administrative and legal purpose? Doing so~~Asking these questions would also help us ~~you~~ to identify any conscious and unconscious biases of the author that might have influenced the document. Exploring and recognizing the limits and biases of an archival piece is one of the most important elements of the historical method.

2. Once the source and its context, i.e., ~~the~~ authorship and ~~the~~ motives behind the document have been identified, we can begin analysing the content of the document. Important aspects to keep in mind are the periodisation, subjects, and objects of the source material. Has the document written in the form of a memoir, biography, report, policy paper, self-help, analysis, commentary, correspondence, survey, etc.? It is possible that a document is of a varied nature encapsulating many of the above

forms. To identify this, we ~~have to go through~~ read the document closely which would also give us a sense of what the document is discussing. While reading the document, we will also come to know closely the motives, objectives, and aims of the document/author and look for answers of the above questions.

3. Analysis of the content forms-constitutes the most critical part of studying historical documents. It is also one of the challenging stages of ~~the~~ historical research. We have already read the document ~~s~~ and understood what it says, but the question is how to analyse it, how to decide what is relevant and irrelevant, what is the overall impact of the document, why it should be studied (the significance of the material). One ways historians resolve this is by situating the source material in the larger existing source material. What do other sources on similar topics reveal? Often our analysis depends on the type of questions we pose to the source material.

~~To do this, one need to study related documents, other writings that explore the documents or the themes discussed in the document. A lot depends on research questions being posed to the document. What kind of questions are you raising from the document? How have historians studied the same theme?~~

~~4. It is when we raise our research questions on the archival material that the question of historical approaches becomes critical.~~ Our historical approaches help us to pose specific research questions to the source material. You can analyse a source material from various approaches, i.e., gendered analysis and feminist approach, environmental history, various Marxists approaches (social history, history from below, historical materialism), structuralist approach, post-modern approach, linguistic approach, cultural history, material history, post-colonial approach. The approach or approaches that you will take would also depend on your research



question and design. But one must be very careful as approaches themselves are not neutral. They privilege a specific type of research questions, and sometimes, even decide what historical documents we select from the archive and use for our historical enquiry. Historians, Depending on this, one has to be aware of the biases of your writing. Like the bias of the author of the document, we as interpreters of sources, have our can develop their own biases that come up with our research questions, the approaches we take, and sometimes our with -any preconceived notions on the subject. We should see if we as researchers are privileging any particular aspect and neglecting the other aspect. If we are focussing on one aspect, have we offered any rationale for doing so? A number of questions can be raised here for consideration:

- Are we using the source to build/support an argument?
- Is the source being used and re-read to question existing interpretations and theories?
- Are we using the source to describe a historical period and subject?
- Is the source hiding or neglecting certain aspects?

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**Commented [A1]:** I think this initial step is quite confusing and goes beyond the scope of the case study quite a bit.

**Commented [A2R1]:** Editor – I'll leave this to you, the author to decide. Perhaps reduce the list of approaches to condense the question, according to the reviewer's recommendation. I wouldn't say this is confusing, but it is rather long for this section.

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### Contextual information

This is where contextual information about the source type or theme is provided – information drawn from reading beyond the source may be required.

*[Mandatory section. A brief historiography of the case study theme is recommended. You may want to mention studies that have explored the relevant theme. Address some of the general questions suggested in the author brief. Discuss the types of sources used to research this theme, and why this field holds value for historical research. If your word count permits you may also use this section to briefly situate the specific source(s) in its wider historical context. E.g. the situation in which it was written, the political or social background and so forth. Alternatively this can be included in the critical evaluation section. We recommend around 750 words for this section]*

As we are ~~going to~~ analyse this source material from a Marxist history ~~writing~~ approach, it is important that we understand the methods and aims of this approach. ~~The~~ ~~approach~~ Marxism emerged with the writings of Karl Marx (1818-1883) and his friend Friedrich Engels (1820-95) during the pinnacle of industrial capitalism in England. The approach was a critique of the classical political economists, such as Adam Smith, J.S. Mill, and others, that defended and advocated for capitalism, private property relations, free trade, and maximum commodity production for maximum profit. ~~This approach~~ Marxism remains one of the dominant approaches to explain the past, although the approach itself has evolved over the years to encompass varieties of mini approaches under its umbrella. It was as much as an interpretation of the past as much as a schema for the future. It explained how have human societies evolved with its focus on the economic systems of a given society and societal conflicts. ~~Karl~~ Marx and Engels explained the history and the present through a concept that came to be known as historical materialism.

The concept proposes that the fundamental activity of human life—the material production (the base)—shapes not only the human (social) relationships but also ~~the~~ cultural and political

institutions of that time. Marx argued for a materialist understanding of the history, keeping ~~the~~ economy, ~~the~~ material life, and social relations of the production process at the centre of analysis. ~~He divided~~ Marx divided the history in various stages with distinct modes of economic production and their dominant social relations, i.e., the feudal stage where peasants worked on the fields of the master as serfs, the capitalist stage where wage labourer worked in factories and workshops for employers against a wage. Marx's emphasis was on to show that the history has unfolded a class-based society with a clear exploiter and ~~the-an~~ exploited class. For him and Engels, all the history ~~has been~~ can be read as the history of ~~the~~ class struggle, and this struggle was the most acute in the capitalist mode of production where the capitalist class in collaboration with the state power exploited the working-class.<sup>i</sup>

The prophetic and philosopher Marx saw history moving in a linear fashion and deduced that the conflict between these two classes (or the conflicts between the 'production forces' and the 'relations of the production') would grow so much that a revolutionary proletariat class would emerge out of the class struggle and lead to communist revolutions and the eventual founding of communism, the rule of the proletariat class. While the prophecy led to the formation of trade unions, left parties and working-class revolutions in many countries, it is Marx as a historical explainer who remains an authority in explaining the fundamentals of ~~the~~ capitalist society and the capitalist economic system. In his monumental work, *Capital Vol. I*, Marx ~~employed~~ explained various important Marxian analytical categories ~~important categories of analysis~~, i.e., exchange value, commodity fetishism, labour power, surplus labour value, the working day, exploitation, class relations, that continue to shape history writing ~~class relations, class struggle, exploitation, labour power, surplus value, commodity fetishism that continue to shape history writing~~.<sup>ii</sup> Marx studied contemporary political, economic, social and historical accounts ~~writings~~, records of ~~the~~ factories, government reports and other state documents to explain the capitalism as a mode of production and social

formation. Production for Marx was not a crude economic activity as it was always embedded in social relations. It is this aspect of Marxian analysis that economic activities permeate social relations and vice versa which helps us to understand the main source material of this case study.

On the one hand, Marxist scholars studied the nature and shifts in the modes of production (the slave-based societies, the Asiatic mode of production, transition from feudalism to capitalism). On the other ~~hand~~, they studied labour relations, the histories of trade unions, strikes, and protests. However, Marxism under Stalin Russia was burdened by crude economic determinism, and major interventions were ~~being~~ made by Marxist scholars in Europe during the interwar period to emphasise the role of culture and institutions in explaining political and economic formations. Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) found the concept of historical materialism inadequate to explain ~~the power and reach of capitalism in Europe~~ the rise of fascism as an ideology in Europe. He equally emphasised on ~~studying~~ the role of culture, ideology, intellectuals, educational institutions, symbols in explaining ~~the history~~ and advocating for the communist revolution.<sup>iii</sup> ~~One of his points was that we can not look at and understand class without engaging with the question of culture.~~

A major tectonic shift in the Marxian historical method came with the writings of the British Marxist historian, E.P. Thompson (1924-1993) who re-read Marx to attack the growing economic determinism of Marxian writings in explaining the formation of working-class consciousness. In his canonical text, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), Thompson questioned structuralist and deterministic understanding of class as an abstract category which would present itself if certain conditions were met, namely the class tensions and struggle, an exploitative economic system (industrial capitalism) and a working class. Instead, he argued that it was a historical phenomenon, a cultural and social formation which could be observed if we studied the labouring poor and their culture in a long-durée

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perspective. The class-consciousness can be spotted and studied in its making. Instead of a limited category like class struggle, he deployed the category of experience to track the making of class consciousness. Consciousness is mediated through the experience of class struggles, union politics, work-site experiences, religious practices and beliefs, customary norms, traditions, popular culture, folklores, literature, etc. Thompson opened up the sealed toolbox of Marxist analysis to include culture, experience, and customs as analytical categories and religious sources, workers' writings (petitions, memoirs, autobiographies), literary works, ballads, factory records, newspapers, church records, etc. as important sources of historical analysis.

Thompson revolutionised the field of labour history, and his work along with works of a few others (Christopher Hill, Eric Hobsbawm, Eugene Genovese, etc.) created a new sub-field of history, the 'history from below', the history of non-elites.<sup>iv</sup> However, this social history from below of ~~the~~ experiences and struggles of the non-elites and marginalised was not just an attempt to bring them into the pages of history but also to understand their class positions in socio-economic relations (the relationship between difference and similarity, exploitation and patronage, dominance and subordination). It is this universal scope of Marxists' analytical categories that were found useful to study the socio-economic exploitation of the colonized people by ~~the~~ colonizers, local colonized elites, and the wider Western imperial powers in the subaltern studies school (of India) and post-colonial writings.

This ~~particular pamphlet~~pamphlet by Samuel Smith on industrial training for destitute children is perfect source for Marxist scholars who aim to explore the conditions of working-class in urban centres and work on class-relations and the social reproduction of class.

Friedrich Engels and E.P. Thompson have used similar types of non-official sources to reconstruct the conditions and experiences of the British working class. Engeles in his book *The Conditions of the Working Class in England* (1844) showed the misery, poverty, and

poor health that industrial capitalism in England had unleashed onto the poor workers, including children. He deliberated upon the negative consequences of industrial capitalism and urbanization, i.e., the low wages, unemployment, the exploitation of the child body and women labour, long hours of work, the poor and unhealthy conditions of work and housing.<sup>v</sup> Smith also discusses some of these themes, particularly, the bad living conditions and unemployment among the poor in cities. But unlike Engels who see these phenomena as result of exploitative industrial capitalism, Smith explains them as a failure of workers to make themselves relevant to the economy, their hereditary immoral habits, and above all, their indifference to any improvement. Similarly, while Engels proposes a working-class revolution as a solution to the problem, Smith proposes state reforms and improvement schemes to improve workers' conditions and perpetuate the capitalist system.

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### Source analysis questions

Having taken the initial steps and read/viewed the source(s) with the initial questions in mind – as well as reading the contextual information about the source - a more in-depth critical evaluation will now take place.

*[Mandatory section. Minimum 3. Maximum 8. Insert questions that encourage students to critically think about the source(s) or theme after their initial engagement with the material. This is to build on what a student might have learned about a source after asking the initial general questions, the first reading of the source and finding out more about the historical context.*

*E.g. Why was this source created? Who was the intended audience? What are the potential biases and how does that limit the usefulness of the source? How reliable is this source? What questions does this source raise? What don't we know about this source? What*

*voices/perspectives are missing from this source? What other sources might help understand this source further, or answer our questions about this one? How does evidence from this source alter or fit into existing interpretations of the past?*

*We know that this source was written during a time of revolution; in light of this, what may this suggest about the author's motivation? ] What does this source tell us about the experience of childhood for 18<sup>th</sup> century children? What type of person would have a portrait photograph taken in the 19<sup>th</sup> century? Based on this correspondence, what can you infer about the authors feelings about war? ]*

1. How would a Marxist scholar use this pamphlet to read the history of British industrialization and the conditions of ~~the~~ British working classes?
2. What evidence is there in the pamphlet which shows how poverty was perceived in the British/modern society?
3. What do you know about the class of the poor that the author is discussing?
4. What does this source tell us about the poverty of the nineteenth century England? How are the poor depicted? Is it an elite and detached representation with no voice of the poor?
5. What solutions does the author offer to mitigate poverty in England? Who is he debating with?
6. How is industrial training proposed as a solution to the problem of poverty and poor working-class conditions?
7. What does this source tell us about society, economy, and education of the Victorian England?

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### **Critical evaluation**

Here the critical evaluation of the source(s) is provided, and the questions raised in the preceding sections are addressed.

*[Mandatory section. Insert your evaluation of the source and responses to the questions posed in the preceding sections. Please ensure you have demonstrably fulfilled all the learning outcomes, and addressed all prior questions. If possible, your evaluation should follow the chronology of the questions you have posed. This part of your entry should represent the bulk of the allocated word count.]*

*Note: Use as many paragraphs and headings as you need to develop your topic but please keep the overall length to the agreed word count. Suggested headings may include: Introduction, Introducing the source/theme, paragraph headings potentially based on the questions, Conclusion]*

In this section, we will critically evaluate the source material and go deeper to understand how a historical document can be studied, opened up for investigation, and yield historical insights.

#### **The Source Type and the Author:**

This ~~particular document~~document is a social tract written by Samuel Smith, a member of Parliament. The author does not talk much about himself other than stating that he has written extensively on the theme. On the title page, he mentions his other key writings, *Progress and Poverty*, *Fallacies of Socialism*, *Nationalisation of Land*. A ~~preliminary cursory~~ reading of the source shows that he is debating the ‘curse’ of English poverty with his contemporaries and is writing in a private capacity. He is proposing industrial training of destitute children as a panacea to the problem of poverty in seaport towns. A cursory digital research shows that Smith has been noticed by the historian Donna Loftus. In her work on his life, she tells s-us that Smith rose from a peasant background in Scotland to become a cotton businessman in



Liverpool, and then a parliamentarian and an imperial figure debating alcohol laws in colonial India.<sup>vi</sup> Loftus comments that Smith's life trajectory was a quintessential the rise of a new middle class in an industrialising nation who were articulate and debated the current socio-economic, imperial issues. Smith wrote his autobiography, *My Life Work* where we can see these engagements.<sup>vii</sup> A major part of his writing was devoted to the question of poverty alleviation. This is reflected not in this current pamphlet but also in his other related writings such as *Destitute Children, National Progress and Poverty*.<sup>viii</sup> Smith is writing as a statesman from within the establishment proposing an answer to a national problem.

#### **Context of the Pamphlet:**

To analyse this pamphlet in ~~great detail~~detail, we need to locate it in the historical time. Poverty in the nineteenth century England had begun to be articulated as a national problem, a civilisational concern long before Smith. Engel's<sup>9</sup> writings are case in point, although from an extremely opposite point of view. ~~From~~Since the Elizabethian period in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, we see the laws on poor relief, poor-work houses, apprenticeship laws, and industrial, ~~reformatory~~reformatory, and practical education taking a central stage. This is also defining the state's interaction with the poor and the vice versa. By the nineteenth century, poverty was being debated by people and politicians from all spectrums—government officials, Christian missionaries, religious leaders—and all sorts of material were being produced on the subject such as official reports, parliament papers, newspaper opinion pieces, social tracts, and sociological and economic studies. Some other kind of writings that were being produced on this subject included poor-relief official documents, books such as Haney Mayhew's *London Labour and London Poor* (1840), Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People in London* in two volumes (1889 and 1891). Smith places his tract in this long tradition of debate on the nature of the poverty in England and proposes that the state action is key to success.

Historian Gertrude Himmelfarb in her classic work, *The Idea of Poverty* (1983), has discussed the articulation of poverty as a national problem in England. She argues that the notion of poverty was being secularised by the nineteenth century. Poverty was until then conceptualised within the religious framework of charity. Himmelfarb proposed that the sacred duty of the rich was to help and sustain the poor and of the Church to provide the legitimate framework of salvation and amelioration. But this had begun to change by the seventeenth century with poor relief laws when a more secular, political-economic understanding of the poor was emerging. The poor were framed as a national problem, burden, and shame who chose to live the life of poverty and were victims of urbanization and industrialization. The role of the state was to develop social policies to alleviate them from their conditions and account those who refused to participate improvement for punishment or reform. Smith's works fit into this larger shift where he placed the state at the centre of poverty management. He also critiqued ~~the~~ existing poor laws and ~~the~~ poor workhouses which produced generations of paupers and, according to him, encouraged drunkenness.<sup>ix</sup>

Smith's point was that England was undergoing unprecedented socio-economic and political changes, but it has accumulated a large population of the paupers who are a burden and a national shame. While the nation was becoming rich day-by-day-and-rich, a section of its people were not keeping pace with the progress. His understanding of the poor was sophisticated as he saw the poor as a heterogenous body. The understanding that all the poor were not same was implicit in his arguments as he framed his arguments around those poor who inhabited the lower parts of London and the seaport towns. People from these areas were living in utter poverty, starvation, lacking any morality and breeding in vice and crime. It was for the children of this class that he proposed a scheme of labour education in night schools. Smith proposed that industrial education and labour was the answer to the solution of the poverty. Once skilled in trades such as carpentry, smithery, printing, etc., they would be

productive members of the society. In practical terms, he advocated for night vocational schooling for children above the age of thirteen.

**Source Analysis from a Marxian Point (using the History from Below and Social History approach):**

By 1895—the year of the pamphlet publication, the debate over the poverty in England had matured, especially in the wake of the New Poor Laws in 1834. The poor in the nineteenth century had become the state subject, and the local parishes had taken charge through poor workhouses under the guardianship of the state. They constituted a ready pool of labour for industrial lists-capitalist and the state. Within Marxian political economy analysis, the labour power and the labour market are not a given entity. They are produced through the actions and laws of the state, employers, and the market. Excess labour and trained excess labour secure the foundations of a low-wage labour market from where capitalists could draw their labour. Institutionalisation of the poor and children in a workhouse or a training centre was one such step. In the poor workhouses, poor families were taken in, and the family members were separated and divided on the lines of bodily strength, age, gender, and skills. Charles Dickens visualised the horrible state of such workhouses through the story of an orphan, Oliver Twist in a novel by the same name.<sup>4</sup> In this fictional story, Dickens was able to point out the widespread poverty and effects of the industrial England, exploitative and inhuman conditions of the workhouses under the framework of the Poor Laws, and the legal regime of apprenticing and housing a poor. Smith's pamphlet is nowhere about the debates of the workhouses, but he was very critical of the poor workhouse system. In his autobiography, he narrated that the poor workhouse system had failed to produce moralised, trained, and

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<sup>4</sup> Antonio Gramsci, Quintin Hoare, and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, 2014.

disciplined poor.<sup>x</sup> He was looking for an alternative mechanism to produce a disciplined, trained, and well-behaved labour class.

Smith viewed the poor as lacking morality, self-discipline, and most importantly, occupational skills. Because of his focus on children, his account leaned towards an interpretation of the poverty where drunkenness and proximity to crime are not causes but an effect of ~~the~~ poverty. His concern was the socialisation of the destitute children, the street children. These are not the children of industrial and agrarian workers but of unemployed, drunkard, and immoral parents inhabiting metropolis like London. In characterising these families, Smith writes,

The parents of this class as a rule follow no regular trade: they pick up an uncertain livelihood from the unnumerable precarious employments of a large city; they have no power to apprentice their children to an honest trade; many of them have no ambition; they have never known anything better than the uncertain livings of the streets, they are contented that their children should be as themselves (p. 8).

The cultural portrayal of the poor in a stereotypical and despised language shows what a Thompsonian Marxist would analyse as the social hierarchies between elites and the non-elites. Such sources form the rich material for doing social history. Smith began his pamphlet by alerting to the danger of the 'poor, miserable and degraded proletariat living in close proximity of the wealthiest aristocracy' in urban centres. The poor not only posed a hygiene and health problem for the ~~rich~~, but they also constituted a crisis of morality and civilization. The hierarchies produced and sustained through the industrial economy

permeated into the everyday social world. On page 3, Smith referred to the poor not just as poor, but also as corrupt, hopeless, and indifferent to improvement.

From this source, we also know about the classes of the labouring poor, one of the key themes of Marxian analysis. Smith was discussing the ‘under-class’ or ‘the outcast’ as he called them—the most downtrodden of the British society who ~~even fell~~have fallen out of the class system which inhabited the metropolis. They lived in single rooms as “foul as pigsties” and survived on the unskilled wage work of two or three days for a week, overdrank, beat their children, and worked as sex-workers (“harlots”). He described them as having no family obligations and their children becoming a street nuisance, waste labour, and drunkard and the girls having two or three babies by their twenties. What Smith described was closer to what Karl Marx referred to as the lumpenproletariat who were different from the industrial proletariat. Marx coined the term for vagabonds, people without work and a trade, home who are drawn into the world of criminality and often susceptible to be employed and used by the rich (finance aristocracy) for illicit pickings.<sup>xi</sup> In a way, this underclass constituted a danger to both the extreme opposite side worlds—the bourgeoisie industrial capital world and the proletariat revolutionary world.

The whole pamphlet is written in catastrophic tone imagining a dystopian England where the number of the poor would increase and crime, immorality, and vice would take over. On page 8, Smith wrote,

Parents relieve of all responsibility would neglect their offspring more than ever, and the millions of pauperised wretches would multiply into tens of millions in the not distant future. No wealth could long stand such a drain: the nation would sink into a Serbonian bog, in which all virtue and manliness would perish. No relief is to be found in any remedy which does not aim at

producing individual virtue and independence: the proletariat may strangle us unless we it the same virtues which have elevated the other classes of society (p.8).

Smith did not only spoke as a moralist but also, as we will see later, an advocate of industrialism and above all as an employer. In the above statement, we find an implicit critique of the Poor laws which provide some relief to the poor parents where the state bore the financial burden of taking care the waifs, orphaned and destitute children. As part of the poor workhouses, the poor children were apprenticed either to industries or to employers for certain years against a premium paid to the employer for training children in a trade (as mine workers, mill workers, domestic servants, artisans) and taking care of their lodgings and food. However, the growing number of poor in England meant that the provisions of the existing poor laws and industrial training were limited. It left out the kids of those poor parents in urban centres and seaport towns who worked for few days, earned wages enough to subsist, and neglected their children. The labour of these children was ~~lost~~lost, and their presence added to the poverty of the nation.

The Educational Act of 1870 had made the education compulsory in England, and parents had to send their children up to the age of thirteen-fourteen to the school. Smith criticised this scheme on two counts. First, the destitute children who attended these schools were not well prepared, physically and mentally, to attend five hours of classes per week. The majority of these children only got a piece of dry bread with tea in dinner and attended the school in a hungry state. Education in such a condition was futile. Secondly, this national education did not guarantee any after-school life occupation. They went back to their one-room tenements, spent their times on streets, and inculcated immoral behaviour from their “drunkard father” and “profligate mother” (p. 6).

Smith proposed an alternative education scheme of night schooling which as he writes in his autobiography advocated in the parliament and in important meetings.<sup>xii</sup> Under this scheme, destitute children under the age of sixteen would attend an evening industrial training school where the male children would learn different trades such as tailoring, carpentry, smithery, shoemaking, printing etc., and the female child would learn sewing, cooking, domestic economy (well within the dominant gender norms of the Victorian society). According to him, the ideal situation would be that industrial trades are included as part of compulsory national education. He even went to the extent of advocating manual training in elite schools such as Eaton and Seven Dials as the love for labour, in his eyes, was something that needed to be imparted to the gentry class who despised labour. However, he did not recommend this radical scheme further for its unpractical nature and reserved his comments for the lower classes.

Smith's night industrial training scheme would be an extension of the existing industrial and reformatory schools. Once trained, these destitute children would be productive bodies, an asset for the nation. The annual cost of such a training would be about half a million-sterling. He asked what other option England had. To face an anarchy by the poor in ~~the~~ future or spend fifteen million sterling on tackling crime and pauperism? He pitched his scheme against Lord Brabazon's state-aided emigration scheme where he proposed that the excess population, particularly the destitute people could be sent to colonies. However, this would cost 100 sterling for each family to transport and settle with no promise that they would not be sent back for being unproductive. Smith's scheme was aimed at skilling ~~the~~ destitute children in relevant trades. He wanted to create a class of skilled manual labour which would fuel the national economy. But was he successful in his mission? In his autobiography, he writes that while he introduced the bill on compulsory night schooling in the parliament, it did not succeed, but the role of evening continuation schools was acknowledged.<sup>xiii</sup>

From a Marxist approach, what Smith aimed could be interpreted as the social production and reproduction of capitalist class relations through education.<sup>xiv</sup> His scheme is premised on the separation of mental and manual labour, and for him, the poor could be transformed into a productive being. The lost childhood could be translated into useful years; classrooms could be turned into labour classes. Capitalism as a mode of production require constant production and reproduction of the labour class and the separation of the mental work form the manual labour. Education, in the modern time, played a key role in preparing children to accept their roles in the labour-work hierarchy. In the wake of crumbling conventional apprenticeship systems and changing requirements of technical knowledge in industry and trades, the skills of a traditional artisan and worker needed to be manipulated to be suited for the modern industry.<sup>xv</sup> They were not only to be educated and skilled, but also imbibed with a sense of morality, discipline, and responsibility. It was easy to achieve these goals in classrooms, and with an increasing mass appetite for education made such interventions from the top also seemed as one needed from below. Industrial schooling, including the night schools, were advocated by the elites, officials, and employers to educate the poor, marginalised, and backward social groups and bring them under the industrializing economy as contributing members.<sup>xvi</sup> Different kind of schools emerged to cater different kinds of the poor such as industrial schools for the poor, ragged schools for the ragged class children, reformatory schools for juvenile delinquents, industrial homes for orphans.<sup>xvii</sup> With overlapping student body, these schools aimed at producing a class of trained, skilled, and educated worker. The neat separation that capitalism as a mode of social production requires between manual labourers and non-manual labourers was produced at the site of the schooling. The role of the education of the poor is as if destined. However, one thing that gets missed in the Marxian interpretation is that the role of the education is also to rescue the poor from falling below the class, that is to become an unproductive, criminal being and a burden on the state.



Smith's account is a top-down approach. We do not know how the poor parents viewed the childhood of their children, what they thought of their poverty, and if they desired industrial schooling. We do not hear the voices of the subaltern classes in Smith's accounts. To know what the poor wanted, thought and aspired, we have to look at different kind of sources, such as the autobiography of workers, their songs and family histories, their oral evidence before commissions, their poor relief letters. Marxist scholars influenced by E.P. Thompson's approach of "social history from below" have studied such documents in relation to the accounts of the working classes.<sup>2</sup> In one of his classic articles on time, discipline and industrial work, Thompsons explores how the new industrial time discipline was inculcated by the English working classes, including through industrial schools.<sup>xviii</sup> Two works that take into account the viewpoint of the poor in discussing the theme of labour, education, and childhood are the works of Jean Humphries (*Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution*) and Jonathan Rose (*The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*).<sup>xix</sup>

#### Methodological conclusion

While any primary historical document provides a glimpse into the past, it is an approach or approaches which historians use which gives meaning to the document in scholarly studies. We have looked how Marxist historians have come up with key analytical categories over the years, such as, class struggle, class experience, the mode and forces of production, class relations between elites and non-elites, exploitation and conditions of working classes in urban centres, the social reproduction of labour and class relations to reveal socio-economic and cultural aspects. We used some of the above Marxist categories to analyse Smith's

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<sup>2</sup> You can read some of these fine works on social history in academic journals such as *Past & Present*, *History Workshop*, *The Journal of Social History* which were established in the wake of the social history turn in the discipline of history.

pamphlet. We learned that the late nineteenth century thinker and politician was involved in solving the problem of poverty, reproducing class relations, generating skilled, healthy labour through industrial education, and in the process, creating and sustaining a cultural division between the high class and the lowest classes. You could use above analytical categories to do a Marxist reading of any sources that deals with society, culture, and economy, i.e., how is the economic structure affecting the fabric of the society? What is the relationship among the social, the political and the economic realm? Is economic process creating a new culture or are existing cultures (the way the poor socialise and live) influencing and shaping the economic and social structure and practices (the lack of skilled labour, unemployment, increased crime)?

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#### **Post-evaluation questions**

These are further questions one may ask having critically evaluated the source.

*[Optional section. Please add here any further questions which reflect on the critical evaluation and previous sets of questions.]*

*These should be suitable for both group discussions and individual reflection once the critical evaluation and questions on the source have been addressed. They should encourage people to think about what they've learned. These can follow on from points discussed in your essay or raise further points of interest to be considered by students.*

*Note: Discussion questions should be suitable for classroom use, eliciting debate and critical thinking. Avoid questions which require only a single-word answer of "yes" or "no."*

*E.g. Could the questions that have been asked of this source be used to examine similar sources – and to what extent? How effectively does this source fulfil the creator's intended purpose? How has the meaning of the source changed over time? How might a historian use this source as a piece of evidence? What research questions might it help to answer?*

[Insert here up to 6 discussion questions]

1. Why was poverty seen as a national shame? How do you view the poor of your time?

Are they a national shame or a socio-economic problem of the society?

2. To what extent Samuel Smith's pamphlet demonises the poor and rationalises poverty? Should we explain the poverty through as a cultural phenomenon or an economic phenomenon?
3. In your opinion, which scheme was the best to alleviate the poverty in the late nineteenth century England: the state-aided migration or the industrial labour training scheme?
4. Should schools offer vocational/industrial training? Would you like to learn one trade? If yes, which one and why?
5. What are classes? And, how have been class relations represented in Smith's pamphlet?

#### **Next research steps**

These are questions or discussion points one may ask/raise when thinking about next research steps.

*[Optional section. Please add here any further questions, or discussion points, which encourage the students to think about next research steps, and how they can apply the lessons learned from reading this case study beyond this specific source (or sources). We encourage questions about other uses of this source or other broader issues about studying this topic, as well as suggestions for next steps.*

*E.g. What other uses could this source have for studying the past? Economic, social, cultural? Where could students go next in their research on such a theme or source type? What further research questions does this source(s) raise? What further information would you need to answer those questions?]*

[Insert here up to 6 discussion questions/points]

1. While the source material discusses the poor as a whole category, can we neglect women as a subject of analysis? What do Marxist scholars think of female labour?
2. Think about the role of the state in Smith's scheme of industrial training. Do you think that the state and capitalists share common interests (to produce commodities,

produce a discipline labour force), as Marxist would assert? How can we study tensions between state policies and employers?

3. In analysing this source, we find that the class system, industrialization process, and education were interrelated process. What does current vocational training programmes in the UK tell us about the society and economy? Do you think applying Marxian categories would help now when the notions about who is what class has transformed significantly in the wake of neo-liberal economy, flexible and precarious working condition, and the digital revolution?

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### Further resources

Insert a list of relevant further readings here.

*[Minimum 3, maximum 10. These may relate to evaluating primary sources generally, evaluating specific source types or to exploring the specific theme at hand through primary sources. A balanced combination of such resources would be optimal. We also encourage including resources which will allow the reader to engage with the case study source type or theme through a different primary source, allowing them to apply the lessons they have learnt in an alternative context.]*

*Note: Items in the Further Readings list should be alphabetized by author and follow the Chicago Manual of Style for bibliographies.]*

- To read various writings of Marxist scholars, [Marxists Internet Archive](#)
- On Marxist theory and Marxists interpretations of world events, see, [Marxist University](#)
- To see the posters of the poor workhouses, read this National Archives Guide:

[poor-law.pdf \(nationalarchives.gov.uk\)](#)

- For a variety of source material on the lives of the poor, including the photographs on industrial schooling, see [Hidden Lives Revealed - Ragged Schools, Industrial Schools and Reformatories](#)
- Some of the records of the Children’s Society can be browsed here: [Including the Excluded - Completed Catalogues \(hiddenlives.org.uk\)](#)
- To read Samuel Smith’s autobiography and his other works, browse the catalogue of the archives.org: [My Life Work : Smith, Samuel : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

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### **Practice**

[For office use]

*[This section will be used to link to other primary sources that do not feature guidance questions and evaluations so that students can apply what they have learned to similar sources.]*

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### **References**

[Insert bibliography of references cited in text here]

- Note: SAGE will not accept cases that are incorrectly referenced; please ensure accuracy before submission. For help on reference style [See here for guidance on Chicago Manual of Style.](#)

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## Notes

[Endnotes will automatically appear beneath here when you use the Word Endnote function.  
*References > Insert Endnote*]

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<sup>i</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, pp. 98-137.

<sup>ii</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital. V.1. A Critique of Political Economy*.

<sup>iii</sup> Antonio Gramsci, Quintin Hoare, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, 2014.

<sup>iv</sup> Herbert George Gutman, *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America*; Eugene D Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*.

<sup>v</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*.

<sup>vi</sup> Donna Loftus, 'Time, History and the Making of the Industrial Middle Class', pp. 29–51.

<sup>vii</sup> Samuel Smith, *My Life Work*.

<sup>viii</sup> Samuel Smith, *Destitute Children*; Samuel Smith, ~~Mr. Samuel Smith on~~[On National Progress and Poverty](#).

<sup>ix</sup> Samuel Smith, *My Life Work*.

<sup>x</sup> Samuel Smith, *My Life Work*, p. 140.

<sup>xi</sup> Karl Marx, *The eighteenth brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.

<sup>xii</sup> Smith, p. 158.

<sup>xiii</sup> Smith, p. 140.

<sup>xiv</sup> Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America*; Stanley Aronowitz, Henry A Giroux, and Stanley Aronowitz, *Education Still under Siege*; Ken Browne and Bob Dylan, 'Schooling, Capitalism and the Mental/Manual Division of Labour', pp. 445–73.

<sup>xv</sup> Arun Kumar, 'Skilling and Its Histories'.

<sup>xvi</sup> Arun Kumar, 'Night School and the Dreams of Bombay's Factory Workers'.

<sup>xvii</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty*.

<sup>xviii</sup> Kumar, 'Skilling and Its Histories'.

<sup>xix</sup> Jane Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour*; Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*.