

Our work has the purpose to illustrate, using a One Act Play, the contradictions of the industrial process. We chose to make a One Act Play because it allowed us to reflect about how "a problem is faced by the different points of view". Giving voice to different characters, you can develop a critical thought, going beyond the binary interpretation of reality in terms of true or false. It reminds to a medieval vision of the world (Manichean principle).

## One - Act Play

### Dramatis personae:

**Judge** (a public officer appointed to decide cases in a law court)

**Henry Hunt:** leader of the riot at St. Peter's field on 16<sup>th</sup> August 1819, a workers' mouth speaker. He plays the defender of workers' rights

**Mr. Jeremy Barker:** factory owner

**Worker** at Jeremy Barker's factory

.....

**Judge:** Good morning, Sirs. The trial today is in matter of Henry Hunt.  
He fed the revolt at St. Peter's field on 16<sup>th</sup> August 1819.

*(Addressing Mr. Hunt)*

You know revolts are illegal, don't you, sir? And, despite that you were one of the speakers there. Does that correspond to the truth?

**Mr. Hunt:** Yes, I was. More than 60 000 people joined the meeting, asking for reform, universal suffrage and fair representation.

**Worker:** To tell the truth, unfortunately that's true! Every day we are compelled to work crammed like sardines! Organized in set of twelve-fifteen people in dirty, dark and wet cellars. And what's more our wages are a shame! Twelve hours never-ending work every day, six days a week.

**Judge:** Keep calm, sir or you will not be allowed to proceed further!

**Worker:** Also we have to bring our children with us in that dusty and noisy factories!

**Mr. Barker:** Dusty? Noisy? What do you mean? My factory is new full with cutting edge machines. It is one of the best working textile-factories in Manchester! And, if you don't like to work in it, there are thousands of people queuing up in line before the gates.

**Worker:** You... How do you dare? Sir, he speaks here but he is never in the factory. Mr. Barker, you are a master who don't even know his workers by name, damned!!

**Judge:** Please, sir, avoid swearing or I will be compelled to send you back to your cell!

**Mr. Barker:** I can't waste my time about you! YOU miserable people working

at looms all day I, always doing the same thing without any mind effort! I really care about my business, facing competition, market conditions, and last but not least, product price! That's what makes the difference in economy. Selling and purchasing that is the real matter!!

**Mr. Hunt:** Sir, I would like to make you consider your role as the one of your workers. Indeed, they are fundamental for YOUR productive system. They are getting weaker and weaker. Day by day they lose their dignity. Hard work and pollution, that is their reality. No profit. Living conditions on the point of starvation!!! Shame!!!

**Worker:** Look around: a river, purple with textile dye, disgusting smell and deafening noise!! That is all you can get around YOUR FIRM. Manchester's air? You can't even imagine to breathe here!!

**Mr. Hunt:** Smoke, ammonia, sulphur and coal clog up our lungs! We lose legs, arms and hands day after day: and what's more most workers are deaf. What about your labour force! How would you cope without them? Let us know, SIR!!

**Mr. Barker:** Well, you aren't compelled to stay here! You perfectly know my conditions! If they are not your taste, go away! Thousands of people would move heaven and earth to get a job here!!

**Worker:** No way, sir!! If we leave our job, we won't provide our families a living. We could eat no longer. Don't you remember the Corn Laws?

**Mr. Hunt:** (*angrily*) The Corn Laws? ... Nothing but capitalists' interests and what about workers? Don't they need to see their rights recognized? Probably that's the reason they gathered at St. Peter's field, don't you think so? Aren't they worth human treatment?

**Judge:** Law does not accept demonstrations. The Hussars and Magistrates crushing the riot received the Prince Regent's congratulations. They were cleared of any wrong-doing by the official inquiry. I Mr. Davies from Lancashire, judge for the present trial see therefore myself obliged to convict Sir Henry Hunt of "assembling with unlawful banners at an unlawful meeting for the purpose of exciting discontent". As a result you will be imprisoned in Ilchester Gaol. That's all. The case is dismissed!

Suppose that two journalists took part to the trial: the first one working for "Manchester Daily", a popular newspaper in the early nineteenth century and the second one working for "The Guardian" a contemporary British daily newspaper... What would their reports of the trial be like?

Probably, they would be quite different: the journalist of the nineteenth century would insist on the illegality of the workers' associations and meetings and he would probably agree with the factory owner's ideas and, last but not least, with the judge's verdict; on the contrary, the contemporary journalist would probably take Mr. Hunt's part and put into focus the worker's denunciation; he would also reflect on the great need for regulations, looking after the workers' rights.