



**CIPRIANI COLLEGE**  
OF LABOUR AND CO-OPERATIVE STUDIES

# **WORK MATTERS**

**November 2023**

**COLUMN**

# THE PARADIGM-SHIFTING NATURE OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND ITS IMPACT ON THE USE OF PLASTICS.

The Industrial Revolution marked the most fundamental transformation of human life in the history of the world. It is parallel in its monumental impact in the shift from hunters and gathering societies to agrarian societies in preliterate times. Industrial society was dynamic, encouraging rapid technological innovations and mechanization, leading to economic productivity.

In a relatively short time, industrial society transformed work as artisans giving way to wage labour in the new factory system. The process created a restructuring of the class structure and a new division of labour which, saw an explosion in the size of the working class and the consolidation of economic power in the hands of the capitalist industrial class. The workplace has become the new locus of work, which is increasingly rational and subject to new modes of control and surveillance.

We are experiencing the 'fourth industrial revolution' with its compartmentalized areas such as digitalization and the plastic economy. The issue of plastic waste is one of the main topics on the international societal and political agenda since ever-increasing growth in the number of plastic materials produced has gone beyond the ability to manage them effectively. This author alleges that everything we use today relates to plastic and consumerism.

Plastic is a symbol of society's transition from traditional to modernity, a process that has progressively transformed and characterized human life in the form of our cars, trains, planes, dresses, and sanitary items; and by making packaging easier and helping us to store food for a long time. As an incredibly ductile and versatile material, strong but flexible, light and relatively inert, it has the potential to take any form and be available for any use.

Plastics are ubiquitous and they are found in substantial quantities of accumulations in the natural environment and in landfills in Trinidad and Tobago. Discarded plastics contaminate a wide range of natural terrestrial, freshwater, and marine habitats, for example, the Caroni Sanctuary, and the Caroni River.

The accumulation of plastic debris in the environment and the associated consequences are largely avoidable. From the Challey Litter Slogan in the 1990s, nothing has changed. Today, more plastic waste is deposited in the natural and social environments. Littering is a behavioural problem,

and some researchers believe it has increased in parallel with our use of plastic disposable products and packaging.

The speed of technological change is increasing exponentially such that life in 2030 will be unrecognizable compared with life today; plastics will continue to play a significant role in this change. It is important to note that plastic materials have the potential to bring scientific and medical advances, alleviate suffering and help reduce mankind's environmental footprint on the planet.

It is assumed that plastics are likely to play an increasing role in medical applications, including tissue and organ transplants and lightweight components, such as those in the new Boeing 787 planes. Further, it has been proposed that it can even reduce fuel usage in air transportation, if properly researched and utilized.

In conclusion, the fourth industrial revolution will be with us for a while. Plastics offer considerable benefits for the future, but it is evident that our current approaches to its use and disposal are not sustainable and present concerns for the global ecosystem flora, fauna and human health.

Occupation Health and Safety (OHS) have considerable knowledge about many of the environmental hazards, and information on human health effects is growing, but many concerns and uncertainties remain.

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