



Stop Child Labour: ITALIANATS' position

Child labour is the effect of a series of causes: poverty and economic and political models that concentrate wealth into the hands of the privileged few, the absence of social policies, as well as emergency situations and war.

To cite an example outside the Asian context (most often cited when speaking of child labour), we must recall that in Argentina, before 2001, the streets of Buenos Aires were not invaded (as they currently are) by hundreds of children and adolescents who – at least until last year – were living off of petty crime and recycling garbage. In a country that is 8 times the size of Italy and that produces food goods for over 300 million people, it still has not been able to prevent 38 million Argentinians from suffering from hunger. It therefore comes to no surprise that for the past few years Argentinians have organised the “Hunger Is a Crime” March, with hundreds of social organizations marching thousands of kilometres in protest, (see www.pelotadetrapo.ar).

Through international initiatives aimed at creating a more just world for children and adolescents, governments and agencies run the risk of repeatedly proposing contradictory solutions to global problems. These solutions are often unviable and inadequate in efficiently combating the injustices, suffering and poverty that children face.

The many worldwide campaigns that have been promoted until now have not been able to effectively influence the actions of Governments that maintain inadequate social policies, or those that seek to eliminate them altogether. In this context, it seems that the [Stop Child Labour Campaign](#) tries to separate itself from the fierce exploitation imposed by the Neoliberal system by focusing its attention on the business world, asking corporations to take responsibility for monitoring compliance with policies on childhood, or in some cases for actively intervening in their implementation. This can be inferred by the 15 recommendations made by the Campaign for businesses.

This initiative, however, does not take into account the fact that almost all child labour (according to available data) takes place in the informal sector, far away from the big businesses.

By demonizing child work and failing to make a distinction between child labour and dignified forms of child work (work in the family, in the community, and whose duration and tasks are adapted to allot necessary time for studies and play), this campaign risks contributing to the failure of possible political alternatives to child labour. Despite its good intentions, through time it would continue to hit hardest the millions of children it seeks to protect.

Slogans like "Children Should Not Work" are aimed more at imposing a universal ideal of childhood, than at addressing children's concrete need for survival and emancipation; nor do they fully take into account the different cultures and contexts in which they live.

It seems that the continuous failure of initiatives aimed at saving children from exploitative situations has taught us nothing; as a result, thousands of children, instead of going to school, have been pushed to even more indecent forms of labour (see Indian NGOs' declarations upon the

passing of the law prohibiting children from working in restaurants and kiosks of the 10th-11th-12th of October, 2006). One is led to ask why existing successful initiatives for creating work alternatives for children in dignified conditions are still not taken into consideration.

But the most alarming factor is the glaring absence of working children and adolescents in this Campaign, since it is about them, and since they would be those most affected by the process of change. They themselves should be the protagonists, and should be involved in defining ways to escape from exploitative environments. Their rights to education, training and to a future should be discussed with them, because (according to the Working Children's Movements from Africa, Latin America and Asia), *they are not the problem, but part of the solution*.

Child and adolescent workers are nowhere to be found. They are the **object** of the Campaign, and not the **subject**. This is yet another aspect that blatantly contradicts all that many, even in the UN, tirelessly seek to promote: children's participation in decisions that affect their lives.

Is one to conclude that child protagonism should not be taken seriously, or that it is something to be afraid of? If so, why?

Perhaps it's because there would be less of an audience, or because it risks challenging common attitudes and stereotypes, forcing us to adopt new pedagogical, sociological, economic and labour paradigms.

Considering the well-known reality of children and families that have no alternatives beyond those that we see every day (prostitution, delinquency, urban migration and other dangerous survival strategies), the time has come to have the courage to say that the best and truly viable alternative to **exploited child labour** is **non-exploited child work**. A dignified form of work is one that is limited to a few hours a day, and that allows children to go to school and to have a social life. This would be an important first step towards resolving the problem of child exploitation. One must also have the courage to recognise that in places where there is no public schooling, or it is inaccessible to working children, informal education programs can play a useful role in learning, integration and in helping children become conscious of the importance of education for all.

Instead of criminalizing child work, campaigns should be carried out to promote the purchase of products made by children in dignified working conditions. Instead of being merely charitable, it would be a way to help children and adolescents earn enough to study and to help their families.

This kind of policy would stimulate possible alternatives for all other youths who work in exploitative conditions, so that they may find alternatives and start to make a better future for themselves.

This model promotes a responsible and solidarity-based economy, integrating instead of expelling people, uniting instead of marginalising, emancipating instead of alienating. This is not a utopia, many experiences have shown that this effort is spreading. We must believe in it and work for it to become reality.

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October 31st, 2007