

Waged Child Labour

Margarethe Faas-Hardegger

1908

Exploited children cannot know nor defend their interests. Other people then, for reasons of solidarity, must defend the real interests of the working children.

The only things which prevent the abolition of waged child labour are the bosses' greed on the one hand and economic poverty on the other. Against the first adversary, only strength can work. The best argument against economic poverty would be to prove with numbers that a man who starts working at the age of 15 until he is 40 effectively produces more than another, forced to start working at the age of 10.

What we would have to prove there is contested by no-one if we observe how we raise cattle. The person who would advise a peasant to hitch up a plough to a young fawn would be, for the peasant, a terrible adviser.

Do we really not know that premature work is just as much of a disaster for the human organism as for the animal's?

Yes! We do! But we don't want to acknowledge it. And this is how an enlightened bourgeois reasons, in the Bund of April 15–16 1908: "As far as my horse is concerned, I have an economic interest in his well-being; but I don't have this economic incentive when my fellow human being who works for me is concerned.

The latter is linked to me by a free work contract; I only pay for his labour, not his education, and I give him his leave as soon as his work is no longer profitable for me.

It is not my money which the economic value of the man represents; if, through extenuating work, the lack of necessary rest or food, this economic value is ruined, my money does not lose any value.

...Apparently, we have freed man, so that the boss no longer has, towards free men, the personal interest he had towards slaves. But we have kept the old Roman law, and we didn't learn that society now has, towards individuals, the same economic interest that slave-owners had towards slaves in the past."

What this clear-sighted bourgeois critique might not yet see, is that a single class – not his – supports on its own all the charges of society, while bosses profit from it.

The proletarian class is the only one whose direct interests are not opposed to the demands of morals and health. Therefore, in practice, unionised workers are the only ones who are working with perseverance to abolish child labour.

And only them will want and be able to win the fight against the two powers which stand against any human culture: the bosses' greed and ignorant poverty.

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