



Global express

The rapid response information series for schools
on world events in the news

TEACHERS' NOTES
EDITION NO. 8
MAY 1998

Children at work

Putting child labour in focus



What is the real story?



Is all child labour bad?



How are people
campaigning about it?

CHILDREN WORLD-WIDE are currently taking part in a Global March to draw the world's attention to the issue of child labour.

This edition of **Global express** explores the complex questions that surround the issue of 'working children' overseas and in the UK.

What is **Global express**?

Global express helps you teach about topical global issues and events.

Contains

Instant photocopiable classroom activities for 8 to 14 year olds

Key Stage 2

- Talk about what we mean by work
- Compare daily lives of children here and in the South
- Play the Step-up Global March game

Key Stage 3

- Try the Quick Quizzes
- Compare case studies of working children's lives
- Investigate whether child labour should be banned through a role play

Curriculum

- Ideas for literacy hour
- English
- History
- Citizenship

The real story

Child labour has hit the headlines in a big way in recent years.

Working children are news - and for their employers not usually good news. Stories keep appearing about children world-wide who have been hurt working in factories, in unsupervised and unsafe conditions, and multinational companies have been exposed for selling goods made by children under appalling conditions. We see emotive and distressing photographs and footage of children working on carpet looms, stitching footballs, working in mines and sweatshops, fighting as soldiers, and selling flowers car to car on busy roads.

These stories and images have galvanised public opinion and forced international action and campaigning.

A world-wide phenomenon

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines child labour as 'work done by someone under the age of 15' and estimates there are 250 million children currently working for pay world-wide - this ignores the millions more who work unpaid. But estimates are difficult to make as governments are unwilling to admit to and monitor any children's work which is 'officially' illegal.

However, there does seem to be an emerging global consensus to stop children working in the most 'hazardous' industries such as mining, in agriculture, where they are exposed to pesticides, glass-making and firework

manufacture. More and more people are starting to use the term 'child labour' to refer specifically to hazardous and exploitative child work.

Whose childhood is it?

Some would argue that the notion of childhood as being a time of innocence and play is a luxury, when in parts of the world children are needed to contribute to family life as soon as they can walk. And children's expectations of life differ - the average life span of a woman in Sierra Leone in West Africa, for example, is 33, so by the time she is 15 she will may well be half way through her life, be married and have children of her own.

Many poor nations complain that wealthier countries have no right to dictate to them on issues of child labour, stating that rich nations only want to 'protect' their own economies from nations who can produce goods for much less.

Global action

In many Western countries, campaigning groups have turned to the media and consumer power to tackle the problem. Exposés and threatened international boycotts have forced many companies using child labour to address the issue. But it is estimated that only 10% of goods made by children are for export - most goods are produced to service the local economy.

A Global March has been organised by activists around the world to call for the immediate elimination of the most harmful forms of child labour. In the UK, politicians will be lobbied and messages from children presented to Number 10 Downing Street.

At a national level also there are grass-roots campaigners who are protesting against the use and abuse of child labour. Action has included making raids on gold mining estates in Brazil to free children forced to work there, and organising public protests to raise awareness in India. A Nepalese campaigning group, Child Workers in Nepal, visits farms where children and their families work to teach literacy classes at night so children can both learn and work.

Child labour laws have been passed by most countries. These are often ignored by employers and seldom enforced by the authorities due to the expense and because there are many who are unable to look beyond the apparent need for child labour and therefore don't see it as a problem.

Child labour is a complex issue but most people agree that you can't stop it overnight without finding alternative ways for many families and communities to make a living.

Action for Change

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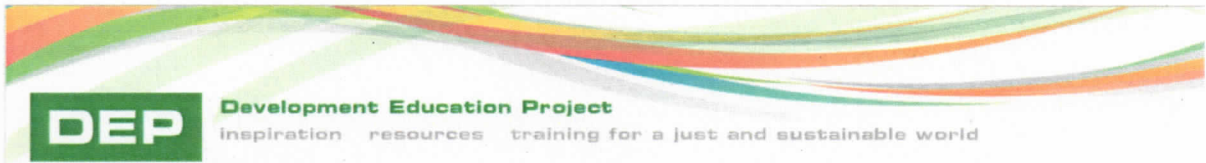
Global March website:

<http://www.globalmarch.org/>

UK working children...

...Estimates indicate that there are about 2 million children of school age working in Britain. This accounts for almost a third of working children throughout the European Union and studies suggest that 75% of this employment is illegal. A survey of 1,000 school pupils in Northeast England found cases of children employed for 33p per hour and working up to 29 hours per week...

BBC Online, 21/4/98



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