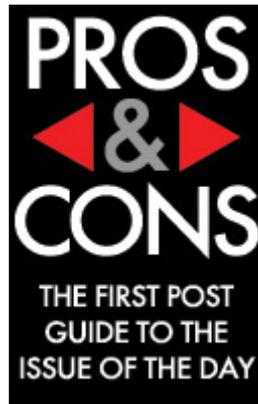


Child labour



Child labour has been part of normal life in almost every society in history

THE ARGUMENTS FOR

Child labour is an absolute necessity for the survival of millions of people in many of the poorest parts of the world. Western ideas of what is acceptable are completely at odds with the grim reality of life in the slums of Asia and Africa.

The notion that child workers are being deprived of a 'normal' childhood is misguided. Except for Europe during the last century, child labour has been part of normal life in almost every society in history.

Child labour need not necessarily mean sweatshops. In developing countries many family-run businesses, such as restaurants, employ their own children to help out and learn practical skills.

Jobs provided by Western clothing companies are relatively safe compared to the alternatives. When US Congress banned imports of cheap clothing from Bangladesh in 1999, 50,000 children were forced to take jobs in brick factories or become prostitutes.

In some parts of the developing world, such as Brazil, the authorities accept that child labour is unavoidable. They can then put in plans to provide special financial support for families of working children, so that they can also attend school.

THE ARGUMENTS AGAINST

Child labour of the kind used by the clothing industry is immoral on the most basic level. For the benefit of Western consumers poor children are being exploited and denied a chance to enjoy their lives.

Businesses which employ children illegally are not bound by any laws. It is not unusual for children to work 16 to 19 hours a day.

Children can more easily be exploited than adults in the workplace.

Cramped, harmful conditions can stunt a child's growth and ruin their health. In some cases toxic fumes result in lung damage and an early death; in others having to focus on tiny intricate work (such as embroidery) can ruin their eyesight.

Low wages paid to children have a detrimental effect on wages paid to adults. Trade unions argue that employers can hold adult workers to ransom if their jobs can be taken by children at any time.

Despite government incentives to keep working children in school, children with jobs will be too exhausted to properly benefit from their classes.

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