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## TWO MODELS OF CHILD LABOUR IN THE PAST

**Abstract:** Nowadays we perceive child labour as a shameful torture and a wicked destruction of the natural order of things. After all, childhood is a time for carelessness, fun and schooling, and children are innocent and vulnerable. Nowadays people believe that these are primeval and natural rights, which is not true. There used to be two models of child labour which I present in my paper. Domestic work in the countryside and in cities, characteristic of the feudal economy at the time when a workplace and a place of residence were the same place (this is still the case in the countryside nowadays), and work outside home, for example in a factory, characteristic of the capitalist economy. There were also varied mixed forms. Thus, in the pre-modern period, rural children were already given to work on a lord's farm, to a rich farmer, or to serve in a city. Similarly, in modern times, children worked at home in domestic industries. The extensive use of child labour was first made possible by the lack of compulsory schooling, which in turn later prevented regular child labour. As long as there was an economic need, however, school had to give way to earning a living for one's family.

**Keywords:** child labour, capitalism, feudalism, work in rural and urban areas, factory work

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## INTRODUCTION

Child labour seems to be a wicked destruction of the natural order of things as well as a shameful torture to us, contemporary people. Childhood is, after all, the time for carefree play and schooling, and children are innocent and vulnerable. Modern people believe that these are eternal and natural rights, but this is not true.

The aim of this article is to provide an overview and analysis of the historical models of child labour, focusing on two distinct eras: the pre-mod-

ern era and the capitalist (or modern) era and exploring the determinants of child labour in these different social, economic, and political contexts, with a particular focus on Prussia and Poland. The article seeks to understand the socio-economic and political factors that led to the extensive use of child labour in these historical periods, highlighting the transition from domestic work in the home and household to work outside the home in factories, while acknowledging the existence of cottage industries as well. It also emphasizes the absence of compulsory schooling as a key factor that initially allowed for the widespread use of child labour.

The research hypothesis in the article assumes that extensive use of child labour in historical contexts can be explained by socio-economic and political factors, including the absence of compulsory schooling, which allowed children to be employed in various labour roles in both pre-modern and modern eras. The prevailing perception of child labour as a “shameful torture” and the belief in the natural right to a carefree childhood may not be entirely accurate and it was influenced by the socio-economic and political circumstances of different eras, such as the pre-modern feudal economy and the capitalist economy of modern times. The absence of compulsory schooling is identified as a key factor that facilitated child labour, and the research likely aims to delve deeper into these socio-economic and political entanglements to better understand the historical practices of child labour. These are very coarse categorizations and the text is general in nature, however it can be a starting point for further research and differentiation in the study of child labour throughout history.

The article is based on diverse source material that allows for a better overall understanding of the historical context and social conditions relevant to the article’s topic of child labour during “the long term” of the historical period in question. Among them there are Polish and German-language studies of various aspects of history, such as the history of Prussia, the history of the family, social and economic history, and also historical, autobiographical writings.

In the first part of the article, the socio-economic context of the topic of child labour in the past it was outlined. There are discussed the historical practices of it in the pre-modern era with comparing and contrasting the roles of schooling and child labour. The next section discusses the impact of the Enlightenment on attitudes toward child labour and delving into the transition to factory work and the implications for child labour. The article examines the factors and developments that contributed to the reduction and elimination of child labour, discussing the challenges faced by families

in a laissez-faire capitalist system. In the last part, there is explored the shift in focus to the well-being and rights of children and examined examples of the legislative and political efforts to address child labour.

## PRE-MODERN CHILD LABOUR

Child labour seems to us today a wicked destruction of the natural order of things and a shameful torture. After all, childhood is a time for carefree fun and schooling, and children are innocent and defenceless. It seems to modern man that these are eternal and natural rights, yet nothing of the sort. In the past, children usually did not go to school, and both in the countryside and in the city, at school age, they were apprenticed to work by their parents, using the "do as I do" method. Boys were by their fathers in the fields and girls by their mothers in the farmyard. This was possible because **the family home was also a place of work, and this was true both in the countryside and in the city, where small towns tended to be agricultural.** School, as a childhood experience among the people, was usually non-existent, or lasted only a few months a year, because children had to help their parents, especially during the period of intensified summer work in agriculture. Even if a child went to school, the ability to read and write was practically not needed and was forgotten. In winter, on the other hand, going to a parish nursery several kilometres away was, for a young child, a dangerous drudgery, freezing, and coupled with fear of wild animals, including wolves. Thus, it was better when teaching was on site. **As a result, there was no question, at all, of the choice of profession or life path characteristic of later eras.** Children, from their earliest years, usually continued the professional and social biography of their parents, both sons and daughters. Thus, the child's socialization took place primarily in the family and environment (in the community) as well as through the Church. It was linked to gender roles and to the type of work. This took place, as it were, on the occasion of other activities and was confined to daily tasks. The young man, while growing up in these activities of the family, relatives and environment, was at the same time learning them. This was not some kind of conscious, planned educational process, but a natural ingrowth (Seider, 1977: 126-127; *Historia ojców...*, 1995). Of some importance was probably the later attainment of sexual maturity for women, which in 1850 was at around 17 years of age, and half a century ago at 13-14 years, due to improvements in nutrition, due to improvements

in nutrition and health. In the families of poorer peasants, homesteaders, catchpoles, and shepherds, children tended to be driven out of the house as soon as possible, so that they did not need to be fed and their further work on the farm no longer necessary (Seider, 1977: 131–132). According to historian Reinhard Sieder, in peasant families, emotional structures and family ties were weak and dominated by the hardships of work and competition for inheritance. There was a much closer relationship between the father and the heir to the farm than with the other children destined to, eventually, leave to serve elsewhere. Even the sphere of affection, tenderness and closeness between mother and child was a lot weaker than in modern times. This was influenced by the high mortality rate of children, poor hygienic and nutritional conditions as well as lack of knowledge and sufficient care for the child, not to mention the brutality and hardships of primitive life at the time (Seider, 1977: 132–133).

## SCHOOL VERSUS WORK

The child's working time was encroached by the increased pressure for children to attend school and, finally, attempts to introduce compulsory schooling with the Age of Enlightenment (in Prussia for the first time and unsuccessfully since 1717). However, it was realistically and gradually implemented only a few decades later, in the 19th century. As this complexity of society developed, the socialization of the young intertwined family, church, school, the environment, and other institutions. It was quite different among the elite, where, like today, the model of childhood as a time of learning and play functioned, and child labour was out of the question. Not quite, however, because the nobility began their military service as early as adolescence (13–14 years old) apprenticing in a regiment for an officer's career. For some, this experience has been replaced by cadet schools.

For a long time, child labour was not considered a torment, but normality – a useful and necessary thing. A reporter from the Herrera factory in Sieradz, which is in the Kingdom of Poland, wrote in 1825: "It is pleasant to see how in the morning with sunrise crowds of old, middle-aged, young people and children run crisply into town, and how with sunset cheerfully some return home and others run out of town to the factory" (Kołodziejczyk, 1974: 139). "Commercial and Industrial News" sought boys and girls aged 10–15 for wool sorting. There were large groups of

children working in various factories, and it was estimated that on the scale of the Congressional Republic, they constituted a significant percentage (Kołodziejczyk, 1974: 140).

## SHEPHERDS

Even young children, just a few years old, were employed to help with simple chores. Jan Nepomucen Janowski from the Prussian partition, in his notes from 1803–1853, recalled the times of the early 19th century:

When I was still a little boy four or five years old, my mother spoke to me as far as I can remember in these or so words:

“Johnny! Johnny! If you drove the geese out into the yard like that, you’d be a head boy. You would have had more fun there than here.”

“Very well my mother,” I replied to her.

“Just keep an eye on them,” she added, “so that they don’t do any damage and don’t fly into the rye.”

She didn’t need to encourage me anymore after that, I felt obliged to do it myself, and for a few years in spring, summer, and autumn, as often as the weather was good, I grazed geese (Janowski, 1950: 9).

Also, tending the hens and grazing the cattle and pigs from spring to autumn, practically every day, was the most important duty of the children in the village. It was a torment, because the cattle always got into the potatoes, cabbage or clover, and Mother would get angry and punish them, and the unhappy child would cry. Even worse, when the toddler fell asleep and the cows ran away. Then Father would take to his belt. “What kind of shepherd could I have been”, wrote one early 20th century peasant diarist.

when I was only six years old, I couldn’t keep up with those cows. And they grazed in the cold, rains and autumn chills. Grazing cattle was described as slaving by the cow’s tail.

*I grazed cattle, grazed calves,*

*I never had a holiday with my mother,*

*I had no holiday, I had no Sunday,*

*Because they drove me out with the cattle to the field.*

Herding the cattle was done early in the morning. The children were given a slice of bread, cheese, scones, or a couple of potatoes by their mother and

they put them behind their bosom. And there was also a lot of housework. Sometimes even four-year-olds had to bring wood to burn in the stove, sweep the chamber, or keep an eye on the hens so they would not do damage. The older siblings had to take care of the younger ones, which was burdensome, writes Halina Bittner-Szewczykowa in her book *Rural Child* (Bittner-Szewczykowa, 1984: 63). The diarist from Mazovia recalls that as a five-year-old toddler, she grazed cows and helped her mother take care of her siblings. "The most important thing was when mommy praised me and gave me a roll as a reward," she said. In order to prepare something for the kitchen, the child climbed on a stool. From early childhood, the daughters were skilled at preparing meals, sewing and mending. Beginning at the age of ten, boys began to accompany their fathers in serious work, and girls their mothers. There were a lot of mutilations and even fatal accidents. Ten-year-old girls tended cows and pigs, while boys tended horses. In the summer, the children helped with haying, and in the autumn with digging up potatoes, and harvesting beets and cabbage. In winter, girls took part in feather-ruffling, pea shelling, and spinning, and boys in chopping firewood and threshing. Centuries passed in this way, and even after World War II, scholars were still sounding the alarm that the extent of child labour in the countryside was still enormous in our country, and accidents leading to maiming were frequent. Mechanization was making progress, however, agricultural duties still hindered children's schooling and homework. Compulsory schooling and material progress caused this phenomenon to gradually disappear. I still remember from my school years circa 1970, how the rural children in our class explained not doing their homework by having to help their parents with their work.

## SERVANTHOOD

Another problem was the placing of children in service and at the court, primarily during the period of serfdom (Seider, 1977: 132–133). This happened not only in Poland. 50% of the population on a European scale went into servitude at some point in their youth. This was a significant percentage of children aged 10–14 in various European countries. Here are some approximate and estimated numbers, because the statistics of the time cannot be taken too seriously (Burguière and Lebrun, 1997, 54). What is important, however, is that it was a significant percentage and that the problem was serious:

- 5% of Englishmen in the 17th and 18th centuries
- 10% of Norwegians, 1801
- 20% of Icelanders, 1729
- 30% of Danes, 1787–1801

In Prussia east of the Elbe under similar conditions, to those in Poland, of a manorial-feudal economy, there was a build-up of feudal benefits after the cataclysm of the “Thirty Years’ War”. The devastated villages simply required more serf labour to maintain the lifestyle of the nobility at its former level, with a severely depleted population. This resulted in an increasing burden of duties on peasant families, including women and children. Above all, children were put into service on the manor. In a Protestant environment, confirmation marked the time when a child could go to serve the Lord. Poor was the fate of peasant children, who had to serve their employer for a period of five years at the employer’s request. They worked for poor food, with meat only on the biggest holidays, and a token annual wage, basically pocket money, 6.5 thalers for farmhands and 4 thalers for girls. Normal emoluments at the time were tens or hundreds of thalers (Philipsson, 1880, 17–18; Knapp, 1887: 23–24; Szkurlatowski, 1974: 38–40; Wehler, 1987: 163; Dülmen, 1992: 25; Trossbach, 1993: 7–9; Wachowiak, 1996: 526–527; Brunschwig, 1976: 79).

Children were employed, for example, to graze animals in hog herds, and worked for food and clothing. Poor peasants also gave their children to rich landlords: “The farmer’s children, better dressed, better fed, getting up later and working less, considered me an indigent, at most fit to sleep in a rotten straw hut under a covering consisting of dirty rags.” Jealousy and hatred grew in him. “In the summer, at sunrise, I drove the cattle to the pasture and, regardless of the weather, barefoot and half naked.” And so day after day for two years of service. It was mentioned that the farmer thought he had accepted a farmhand to do the work and completely disregarded the fact that it was a small child.

## WORKING IN THE CITY WITH A FOREMAN

In cities, children were servants and apprentices to foremen, where they lived and were fed. In Germany and Austria, an apprentice could be 10 years old, or at most 18, and the duration of his education was three years at most (Seider, 1977: 138–139). The boy was also forbidden to leave home with-

out the master's permission. Their duties included any household chores that the master pointed out to them. A poem by master painter Franciszek Śniadecki spoke of sending the boys to fetch water from the well, chop wood and clean the master's shoes (Ptaśnik, 1949: 114–115). Before being accepted into the guild, the boy was on a two-week probationary period so that the master could evaluate him. After completing his training, which lasted several years, the apprentice became a journeyman.

In Germany, August Bebel still lived with his foreman much later as a young journeyman:

The foreman and the forewoman were very decent and serious people. I had complete sustenance at home, the food was good, although not very plentiful. Studying at the foreman's was a strict school, and the work took a long time. From 5 in the morning until 7 in the evening without any break. Straight from the lathe I walked to the table, and from the table again to the lathe. In the morning, as soon as I got up, I had to fetch the foreman, four times, two buckets of water from a well five minutes' walk away, for which I was paid four krajcars, or 14 fenigs a week. This was my pocket money during the term. I had outings very rarely on weekdays, and in the evenings almost never, and only with special permission. It was the same on Sundays, which was our main sales day, as villagers came to town then, making purchases of pipes, etc., and giving various things for repair. It was only towards the evening or in the evening that I was allowed to go out for two or three hours (Bebel, 1955: 65).

On Sundays, however, there was time to go to church, and the foreman would ask at dinner if the students and journeymen had fulfilled their religious duties. He would check on his subordinates, asking which pastor had a sermon and which hymn was sung. Power in the family, along with the right to use violence, was still in the hands of the husband and father, who was legally responsible for his subordinates, which included journeymen and servants.

## ENERGY OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The Enlightenment unleashed unfettered creative energy and free competition, and the 19th-century economy was now growing rapidly, while technical innovations that changed people's lives for the better were occurring even faster, including, railroads, electricity, gas, plumbing, toilets and bathrooms, mass factory production etc. Huge changes in urbanization and industrialization accelerated the development, but as usual, the costs of transformation were high and the casualties were numerous.



In Austria, the imperial patent of Joseph II for Galicia had already exempted peasant children from service at the manor by 1782. In Prussia, according to the 1794 General Land Law, a father could not force his son to choose a type of occupation if he was older than 14. He was also not allowed to exploit him at the expense of school on the family farm, and in case of conflict the state stepped in as a mediator between the child and the parents in the form of a guardianship court, and the son could not be forced to marry either. The father, however, retained the right to use "legitimate" violence against children. Prussia's 1810 Chevalier Ordinance abolished the forced service of children of serf peasants and established free contract employment, which had previously been non-existent, but many feudal relationships between landowners and nobles remained permanent. After the abolition of serfdom, children continued to work for the serfs, but already for wages.

Changes occurred with the abolition of the guild system and the abolition of serfdom heralded by the Enlightenment, and hence the introduction of market relations; likewise with urbanization and industrialization, when wage labour became the primary form of employment (Seider, 1977: 141). The family ceased to be a work area and became a place where people lived and rested. Another determinant of the child's new situation in the family was school. The parents' role was to oversee its selection and monitor the child's educational progress (Seider, 1977: 141). Through this separation of workplace and home, hired labour, services and bureaucracy, parents in part lost control over their children's life.

However, the old social relations lasted for a long time when the old form of unity of home and household was preserved. This occurred mostly in the countryside. Besides, the aforementioned cottage weaving in the countryside and in the city, as well as other cottage work, provided employment for entire families. Grandmother, mother, and the grandchildren spun and wove thread, also children were already covered by laws regarding compulsory schooling during their off hours, while father and son worked in the fields and on the farm. An account from 1853 still speaks of this.

## FACTORY

The people's standard of living was still low until the 20th century, and conditions were being created for the employment of children in factories and mines. The Prussian reformers of 1807 naively hoped that a more nu-

merous landlord class would quickly form in Prussia than it did, which would also include enterprising individuals from lower states, including, to some extent, the rural poor – homesteaders, gardeners, builders, day labourers. This was, of course, an over-optimistic calculation, and the peasants had to repay the nobility, which was only feasible for wealthy homesteaders, even though the 1811 edict spoke of “cheap compensation.” Thus, in the countryside, there was a growing population of landless people, often desperate and in poor financial condition, who constituted a reserve army of workers (as Karl Marx called them), flocking to the big cities. Misery and social degradation abounded in the resulting mass of people. There was a lack of resources to meet even the immediate needs of life. Doctors and scholars warned that children in these environments were being raised in conditions that would lead them to total demoralization and then to the path of crime. There are even cases, the official wrote in the report – that a mother, out of despair over the poverty and lack of help for her child, is led to murder her child in the cold winter, without food or shelter (Blasius, 1976: 44–45). In England in 1842, an eight-year-old girl working in a mine says: “Today I started at four in the morning. Sometimes I sing to myself. Only when I have a candle, never at dusk” (Nowak, 2019: 9).

With the huge influx of migrants, rented apartments in the cities were expensive, cramped and in poor sanitary conditions, and the new workers, spinners, servants and seamstresses earned poor wages. Families often lived in single rooms, basements, outbuildings, in multi-story rentals without an elevator due to the price of land, where water had to be carried in a bucket from a well to the fifth floor. Hence the very shameful work of women and children was necessary. In the patriarchal world of values, as soon as a worker earned a better salary, his wife would immediately dismiss herself from her job so as not to compromise her husband. It was better when women and children worked at home, doing cottage industry, sewing, or laundry. The children’s food was poor, with inadequate meal times. Their main ingredient was too often potatoes and did not contain adequate nutrients.

All this meant that women’s and children’s work, whenever possible, was a necessity among this social class, and their earnings accounted for 10–20% of family income. Women’s and children’s wages were significantly lower than men’s. In addition, “being physically weaker,” they earned less in the same jobs as men. On average, a woman’s salary was  $\frac{1}{2}$ – $\frac{2}{3}$  of a man’s.

## ELIMINATION OF CHILD LABOUR

In 1817, Hardenberg circulated a letter to the super-presidents in Prussia authored by prominent ministry official Johann Gottfried Hoffmann, who consulted on measures to counter crisis situations affecting workers en masse. With every crop failure and every weakening of sales, they fall into abject poverty and have to send their, still young, children to work, while technical improvements and new machines only deprive them of work, because its price falls, competition increases, new fashions make goods unnecessary and factories collapse, which brings a state of chaos to the market and leads to the worker being unable to earn a living. The state, Hoffmann argued, should first and foremost protect against the devastation of children's health and carry out policies to counter the risks. In response, most of his opponents invoked liberal maxims, that is, they argued that the state could do nothing to improve the existing situation because it would have to interfere with the market, which spoils the market. Similarly, in England, further reports followed. In 1838, the flooding of the Huskar mine caused the death of 26 children working there.

## NO HELP FOR THE FAMILY UNDER LAISSEZ-FAIRE CAPITALISM

Before enfranchisement, the nobility helped serfs in difficult situations of illness, crop failure, war and house burning or when a farm animal died and grain for sowing ran out. There was also some help from the Church (alms, hospitals and schools) and municipal authorities and brotherhoods. After the abolition of serfdom, the nobility was relieved of these obligations, the Church lost many estates in the process of secularization, and over the course of the 19th century, there was increasing talk of the need for systemic measures for the state to support the population, including limiting child labour. This became a reality in the second half of the 19th century through legal solutions, the creation of a system of pension, disability and health insurance and the beginnings of free education. In Mainz, Prussia, since 1866, there was a Catholic bishop, Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler, who argued in 1869 that the social question was now the most difficult and important problem. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he thought that religion and morality alone would not be enough to solve the

problems of workers. The Church must cooperate with the state and municipal authorities. If the state supports great undertakings, it should not shy away from solving this issue as well. Ketteler spoke out, even before the Reich was founded, in favour of establishing organizations to protect workers and their rights, as well as regulating working hours and workers' wages. In a speech in 1869, *The labour movement in its efforts in relation to religion and morality* upheld the idea of trade unions, which should support the demands of workers and assist in strikes. One of the important issues raised by Ketteler was the elimination of labour for women, young girls and children. "I regard child labour as an appalling cruelty of our time," he said (Iserloh, 1977; Gadille and Mayeur, 1997: 31).

On the Catholic side, strong social impulses came from Catholic Centre Party activist Franz Hitze. The Christian Democrats pushed for a ban on work on Sundays, restrictions on women's and children's labour and **mandatory social insurance**. Pastor Adolf Stoecker represented similar thinking among Prussian Protestants, with him also advocating a progressive income tax and believing that such support for the weak would drive them back to the churches and to the monarchy (Ritter, 1991: 61–63; Born, 2001: 106–107; Eichenhofer, 2007: 32–33).

Also new was the phenomenon of greater care, as well as the discipline of children, who until then were more likely to roam freely in the streets and alleys in the company of friends, because no one took care of them, which was also unfortunately the cause of many accidents. Childhood, just like the later compulsory military service for all, now became the moment of introduction through socialization to being part of a nation and subjects of a dynasty. In Prussia, instilling love for the Hohenzollern dynasty was already an important task of the school in the 18th century. The state also sought to limit child labour, also because it had an adverse impact on their physical development and the health of recruits. The Altenstein Circular of 1827 mandated that children working in factories attend school, and an 1839 regulation mandated at least three years of schooling, but it wasn't until the 1853 law that the situation was to be improved somewhat by **the introduction of factory inspectors** who could verify the situation on the ground and catch the children being hired. However, there were only three of these inspectors for all of Prussia, but by 1876 their number had risen to 16.

## CHILDHOOD AT THE CENTRE OF ATTENTION

As I mentioned earlier, a child in a working-class family was not as bound to his parents by intimate ties as among the bourgeoisie. Their presence in the child's life was small and weakly marked. Child labour was long seen as a natural situation, and it was even thought that implementing it as early as possible was conducive to developing entrepreneurship and industriousness. Among the poorer population, the working father as the breadwinner of the family, at mealtime received the best bites first, while the children waited their turn. Among the wealthier population, on the other hand, the meal was to be eaten in the kitchen with servants, not with adults. The processes of "discipline" occurring in modern times meant relationships based on fear and threats of violence, a child meant something less beloved and more of something subordinate – immature and still stupid. These were the times of the punishing God of the Old Testament, not the God of love of the New Testament. This was also the hue of relations between nobles and peasants, husband and wife, and at school between teacher and student. Physical violence and the threat of it were commonplace, and obedience to rules was mandated by the Church and secular authority. At the same time, the number of children under the age of 15 was much higher than in our time, and in the 19th century amounted to 30–35% of the population. As a result, someone had to earn money for these children and so they had to be sent to work. In Greater Poland, in 1995 it was 23% of the population, whereas in 2020 only 17%, so children have become a cherished rarity.

Modernity with urbanization, industrialization and the dominance of hired labour meant the privatization of the family. The family ceased to be a work area and became a place where people lived and rested (Seider, 1977: 141). The new attitude of the bourgeoisie toward children developed, mainly, from the Age of Enlightenment, and Philippe Ariès called it the reinvention of childhood (Ariès, 2007: 92).

Then, in the 19th century, it manifested itself in the empowerment of the child, greater interest in his differences, the phases of his development and interest in educational problems. Gradually, in our time, the child has become the focus of the family's attention. Greater sensitivity and empathy meant that the exploitation of children from the lower classes increasingly became a scandal and could no longer be accepted. Bourgeois and even socialist critics stigmatized the "savagery" of the lives of workers who were raised on the street. Their children in cramped homes did not

have their own corner or even a bed. Without knowing it, **the scandal of child labour became an agent of egalitarianism, equality and democratization of social relations.** The bourgeoisie was already thinking in terms of developing the talents and individuality of the child. In such environments, "the child grew up among his father's books and the sounds of the piano coming from his mother's room; the family and the home were the strongholds of mental life." Sons from the educated bourgeoisie layer very often took over their fathers' professions, or chose similar professions, and were helped in their careers by their parents' connections and acquaintances. The market for children's furniture, clothes, toys and children's literature was getting richer, and children's rooms appeared in apartments. Then, already in the 19th century, the entire Christmas tree and gift-giving tradition, both commercial and religious, with the figure of the Star and Santa Claus was developed. **The child was entering the focus of capitalism and consumption, as a customer.**

Contraception was also beneficial, and for a long time, it was natural rather than chemical. Women up to that point had been busy giving birth, babysitting and feeding numerous children, and there were usually five and often ten of them. Most of them died, but improvements in nutrition and the quality of medicine eventually resulted in a total decrease in the death rate of new-borns and infants as well as children. Now the better parenting of ten offspring has become too difficult and you could give birth to two, give them food, send them to school and raise them properly. The woman ceased to be a child-bearing machine and the situation of the family improved considerably. Gradually chemical contraception developed, but for a long time it was primarily natural: intermittent sex, petting, oral and anal sex. The Church, living in the rhythm of the previous era, persecuted all this as sin and impurity.

## PARLIAMENTARY BATTLES

In 1837, a major public discussion on child labour took place in the Rhineland Landtag in Prussia. The topic was becoming increasingly loud and resonant. This was influenced by new, much more empathetic perceptions of the child among the bourgeoisie, which considered factory work by children in inhumane conditions an outrageous scandal that could not be condoned. Ruhr industrialist Friedrich Harkort believed that the levels of children's education needed to be improved by democratizing educa-

tion and banning child labour in factories. Economist Robert Mohl wrote about the miserable and uncomfortable shelters of working families. He showed the example of a working child who moved out of home and rented a room for himself, where he had better conditions and food than at his parents' house. In these working families, Mohl argued, there is no education, no common life, and no joys but sorrows. In 1839, a state regulation on the protection of children and young people appeared, prohibiting their premature employment, also motivated by fear of "spoiling" future recruits of the Prussian army. The same news was coming from France, where the army complained that youngsters were unsuitable for recruits, being churlish and skinny. The effect of these efforts was little, both due to resistance from parents, for whom child labour was an important source of income, and from factory owners. However, the law laid the groundwork for later improvements and paved the way for future legislation. It was not until 1853 that an act of the Prussian parliament limited the work of children under 14 to six hours, and above that age to 10 hours. Children under the age of 12 were not allowed to be employed at all. This law was a trailblazer, but was not initially applied, as it took a long time before it could be implemented (Meyer, 1971: 32–33; Weber-Kellermann, 1975: 110–112; 1985: 22; Klöden, 1978: 88–89; Nipperdey, 1983: 126; Frevert, 1986: 8–69; Mitterauer, 1986: 125–142; Beyus, 1988: 404; Koselleck, 1989: 62–65; Becher, 1990: 164–165; Maurer, 1996: 445–447, 560–562; Flandrin, 1998: 240–248; Sdvižkov, 2011: 102–103; Szlendak, 2011: 336).

As Katarzyna Nowak writes in her book *Children of the Industrial Revolution*, in Britain, parliamentary struggles to reduce child labour hours began, although with little success, during the Enlightenment, with compulsory schooling not introduced until 1870 (in Prussia in 1825), delaying the reduction of child labour. It was not until 1874 that the age of labourers was limited to 9 years and the length of their daily work to 10 hours. Later in 1902, the minimum age of factory workers was raised to 12.

In Germany, further changes were brought about by the Wilhelminian era. Kaiser Wilhelm II wrote in 1890 about the necessary improvement in the situation of workers, stating that their work must be limited to eight hours and that it was necessary to **completely exclude women and children under the age of 14**. He was concerned, however, that adults would then spend their free time in various types of pubs. This was justified behaviour, however, as housing conditions did not encourage workers to return to a cluttered stuffy one-room full of children. So further efforts were made to stop the employment of child labour. First, progressive craft laws

were introduced (1890). Sunday work was banned, although trading was exempted. Child labour was banned for children under the age of thirteen and night work for women, and later also for young people under the age of sixteen.

In Westphalia, a factory inspector in 1877 reported that the working hours of school-aged children in the cigar factory he inspected were completely out of control. The youngest, aged 6–14, were employed in cottage industries, trade and other crafts. Almost half of them worked more than three hours a day for 6–7 days a week, often late into the night. “Die Dauer der Arbeitszeit schulpflichtiger Kinder in den Zigarrenfabriken entzieht sich fast gänzlich der Kontrolle” (Gestrich, Krause and Mitterauer, 2003: 591–592; Kuczynski: 1982: 392–393, 395).

Although regular child labour was theoretically completely eliminated by compulsory schooling and a ban on employment, it was estimated that there was yet a sizable group under the age of 14 still working. As late as 1882, there were still 524,000 children under the age of 15 working in the Reich, primarily in Prussia, 140,000 of them in industry and mining; in 1900 – 540 thousand. This, however, was thought to be only the tip of the iceberg. By contrast, there were no restrictions in agriculture, where labour for the youngest was still common. In 1904, an even stricter law than before was introduced, banning child labour in cities. The situation in the countryside was worse than in the cities; there, many went to school and worked at the same time. It was estimated that in industrial cities 30–50% of children worked, and in the countryside up to 80%. However, they were employed not in factories, where the protective law quite effectively eliminated them but drifted away to crafts, where it was more difficult to track them down. An inspection in Potsdam in 1910 detected children working in brickyards, often from four in the morning to seven in the evening, with a two-hour break. In 1911, cottage industry work by children was also declared illegal and efforts were made to curb it, but without success.

The organization of the labour movement and social democracy around labour questions and social problems, including health, caused concern among the elite, especially strike activity, and resulted in restrictions by the authorities. Anyhow, the power of the Social Democrats grew, especially after the unification of the two Social Democratic parties in 1875, when their program became the improvement of wage conditions, and the fight against exploitation and political inequality. In the state apparatus at the beginning of the 1970s, the decision to resolve the insurance issue was still pending. Nonetheless, a decision was then made to repress social



democrats linked to social reforms. The secret counsellor and lawyer from the Ministry of Commerce, Theodor Lohmann (1831–1905), and Hermann Wagner, who were the government's specialists in social issues, had a part in this. There were many conferences, talks and meetings, including international ones. The issue was taken very seriously. The nodal point was to stabilize society in the face of the socialist threat by solving the problem of labour, trade unions, housing, sickness funds, labour protection, etc. Lohmann and Wagner, between 1870 and 1880, worked out new social security solutions. Supporters of statist reforms included many officials and scholars, led by Gustav Schmoller. They formed the *Verein für Sociaplolitik* in 1873 and presented themselves as opposition to the Manchester party. The Social Democrats were banned in 1878, and thus opportunities for them to increase their influence were halted, and dissatisfaction could only be channelled through reforms led by "cathedral socialists," or social conservatives. These, following Jean Charles Leonard Simond de Sismondi, did not accept the "amoral" nature of Adam Smith's economics and wanted to introduce an ethical component to the economy. Sunday work and child labour were to be banned, and working hours limited. The employer was also to pay sick, retirement and unemployment benefits.

The state should counteract the poverty intensifying in the cities and support the lower strata through state interventionism and statism. The very term *Kathedersozialisten* was derisive and came from an opponent of the direction of Heinrich Bernhard Oppenheim (1819–1880), who was a proponent of Manchesterism, but Schmoller and his colleagues accepted the name (Henning, 1996: 787–789; Sismondi, 1955).

The goal of the social conservatives was "to improve the position of the lower classes, to educate and satiate them, so that harmony and peace would prevail in the body of the state and society." Without health funds, Gustav Schmoller believed, workers would only look for a way to strike. It was pointed out that the cash registers could play not only a practical role but also a huge educational role. As Schmoller wanted, a strong state would stand above class interests and work for the benefit of all citizens. He and his organization formed the background for social reforms, including the creation of health insurance funds. The issue of the coffers was addressed as early as 1874, and the topic was started by the Rhineland factory owner Fritz Kalle, who proposed the introduction of compulsory insurance. In the end, the introduction of sickness funds on June 15, 1883, was the defusing of a mine that, as many felt at the time, could blow up capitalism (Hähner-Rombach, 2005: 117).

## CONCLUSION

Under these conditions, the reduction of child labour progressed. In cities, however, it was eliminated only at the beginning of the 20th century, and in the countryside it continued well into the 20th century. This was caused, primarily, by rapidly developing capitalism and technological progress. Without this, injunctions and prohibitions would have accomplished nothing. Its development was supported from the end of the 19th century by the „welfare state”, primarily insurance, pension, health, disability, and free elementary school. From the beginning of the 20th century, improvements in housing, nutrition, and medical care continued. The result was a radical decline in child mortality and, consequently, births, which changed the lives of women who had previously been nothing but birthing machines.

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