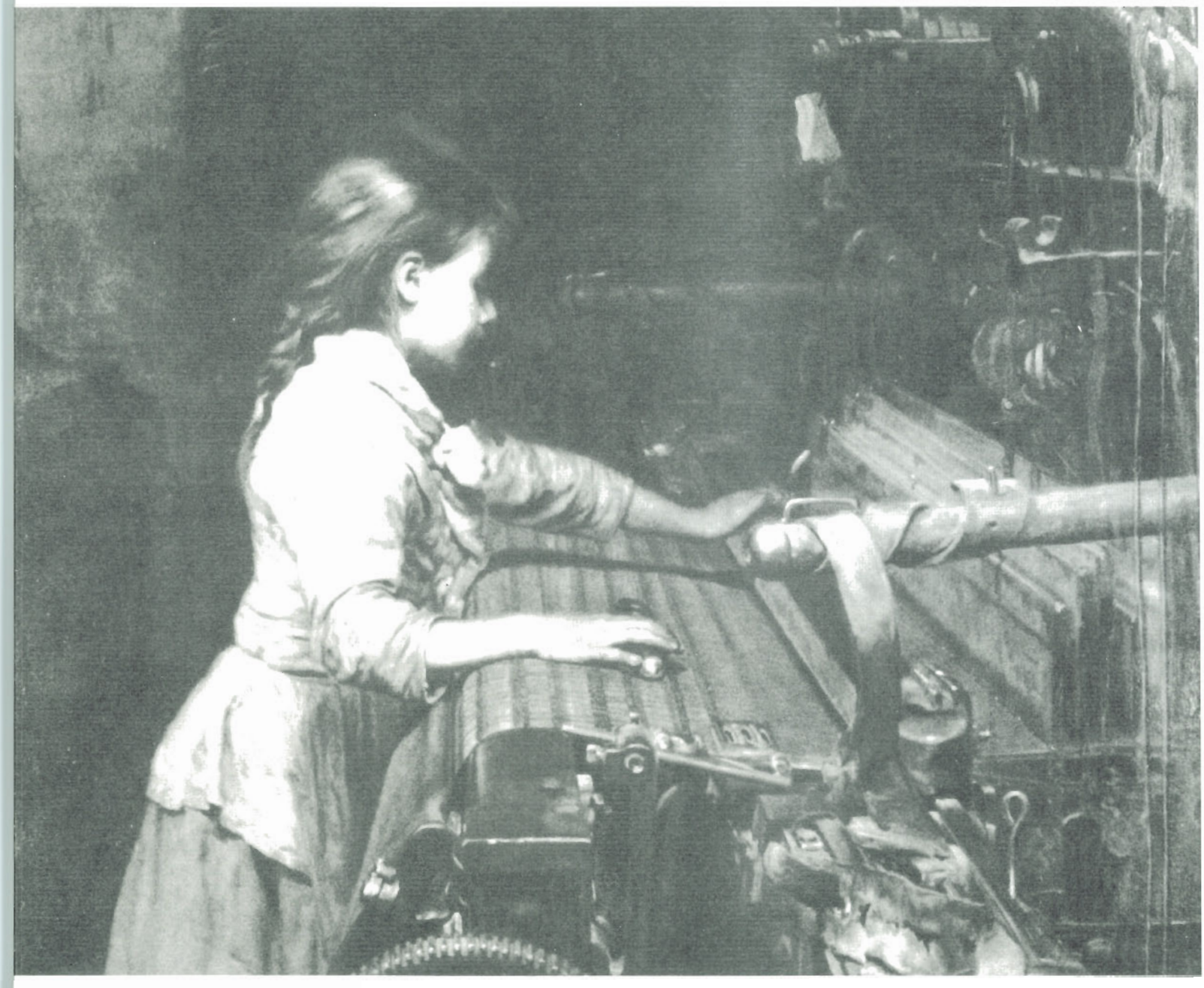
CHILD LABOUR IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

- 1800-1985 -

CASE STUDIES FROM EUROPE, JAPAN AND COLOMBIA

edited by Hugh Cunningham and Pier Paolo Viazzo



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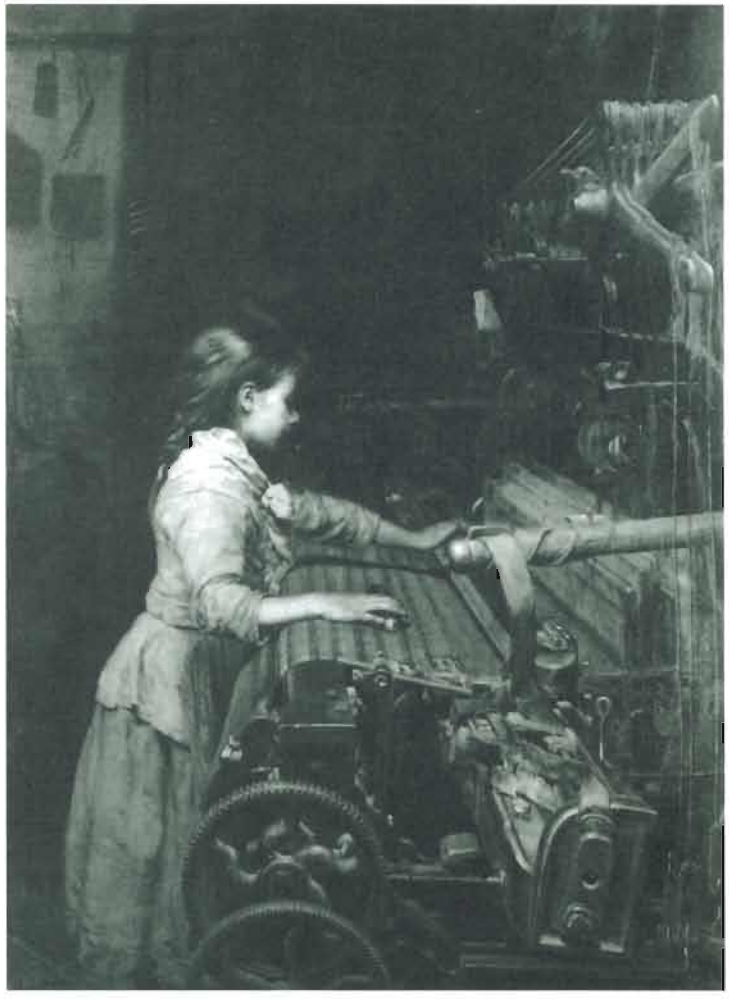

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FOREWORD

This volume is the third in a series of *Historical Perspectives on Childhood* jointly sponsored by the *Istituto degli Innocenti* and the UNICEF International Child Development Centre which is hosted by the *Istituto* in Florence. The first two publications, which have attracted considerable interest, were *Historical Perspectives on Breastfeeding* (1991) and *The Decline of Infant Mortality in Europe* (1993).

The Preface to the first volume in this series expressed the hope that a greater understanding of the history of childhood, especially problems of children and families suffering from various forms of deprivation, might help shed light on the quest for improved policies and programmes for dealing with contemporary child-related social issues. Avoiding the mistakes of the past is also an important though often frustrated aspiration of policy makers and reflective practitioners seeking to learn lessons from history.

As we approach a politically sensitive subject such as child labour, another reason for paying attention to the past comes to mind. UNICEF, the International Labour Organisation and our partners concerned with children's rights are seeking to convince all nations to take more seriously their commitments under national and international law to eliminate clearly illegal forms of child labour, including bonded labour, children's work that interferes with the completion of primary schooling, and hazardous work for children of any age. The existence of practices that are illegal, and especially forms of child labour, such as child prostitution, widely perceived as morally offensive, is not easily recognized by governments. Many states prefer to ignore such unpleasant realities. To counter this tendency, UNICEF has found it useful in its advocacy efforts to emphasize that today's industrialized countries also passed through phases of development that included gross exploitation of children as agricultural, industrial and service-sector workers. Today's Third World did not invent these forms of abuse.

The challenge, however, is not to allow these lessons of history to be used as an excuse for following the slow and tortuous paths towards elimination of child labour illustrated in the studies in this volume, especially by Belgium and Britain. Consequently, our

objective has been to seek better understanding of the social and economic factors and policy measures that have proved instrumental in ending child labour in industrialized countries, "a process never complete" even in post-industrial Britain. In doing so, we hope to direct attention to measures that might be adopted to accelerate substantially the movement towards elimination at least of the most harmful and exploitative forms of child labour in today's developing world.

There have been a number of important changes since the early years of the Industrial Revolution in Europe, which should make dealing with child labour less of a daunting challenge than it was a century and a half ago. In that regard, we should not lose sight of the fact that not only child labour but also slave labour was considered a legal and morally acceptable practice at that time in nearly all circles of the world's most 'advanced' nations. That was also decades before the acceptance of compulsory primary schooling as a legitimate social objective of nations. National and international tolerance of the idea that a majority of any nation's young children should devote their time to work rather than schooling has declined dramatically during the twentieth century.

The global consensus on this point is most vividly evident in the language of two key articles of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention's main provision on education (Article 28) requires that nations that have ratified this instrument of international law shall "recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity... shall, in particular... make primary education compulsory and available free to all...". Article 32 then recognizes "the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development".

Ratifying an international human rights treaty is hardly the same as overcoming the problems or violations of rights that such a convention addresses. But it is significant in this case that the two articles cited above are part of the most universally ratified human rights treaty in the history of such instruments. A remarkable number of 186 nations have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, leaving only six that have not. Two of those that have not yet ratified, the United States and Switzerland, have national or local laws in the areas of child labour and compulsory education that are, in fact, as strict or more so than the requirements of the Convention. In that sense, therefore, one can say there is virtually universal acceptance of the principle of eliminating child labour, as defined by law, and of extending compulsory and free education at least to children of primary school age. For child labour reform movements in countries still facing serious problems of exploitation of working children, however, this change in what might be called a global ethic on this issue represents a powerful advocacy tool which was totally lacking during the earlier reform movements of the European Industrial Revolution.

The *Istituto degli Innocenti*, which has been concerned with children's welfare since the early fifteenth century, and UNICEF are particularly pleased to unite in one volume, perhaps for the first time ever, essays that explore trends in child labour in both European and non-European countries. The Belgian and British experiences, which cover the entire nineteenth century and the period preceding the First World War, can be usefully contrasted, especially because Belgium lagged far behind Britain in its efforts to control child labour either directly through child labour legislation or indirectly through compulsory schooling. The third European case study traces the impact of technological innovation on families in a textile town in Spain from 1850 to 1920. It shows, through an analysis of family budgets in a life-cycle perspective, that child labour was the consequence of a rational family strategy, which, interestingly, took into account the worth of the domestic tasks per-

formed by women. The two non-European studies, Colombia and Japan, are almost diametrically opposed. The Colombian case, which discusses child labour since 1800, shows that child labour has been a constant of Colombian history and has persisted in part thanks to a legislative void: child labour legislation was introduced only in the 1920s and 1930s, and schooling made compulsory for five years only in 1963. In contrast, Japan introduced the first Education Law in 1879. By the time factory legislation was enacted in 1911, 98 per cent of the children between 6 and 13 years of age were in school. The Japanese study, which spans the years 1872 to 1926, concludes that progressive education policies did not result in the total exclusion of children from the workforce, but rather in a pattern of 'late-starting', with relatively few working children under 12. The importance of education in Japanese homes, including literacy training, is especially noteworthy, as is the tendency for Japanese mothers to have entered the workforce more than their pre-adolescent children, in contrast with the European cases cited.

We hope that this volume, particularly because of its unusually wide comparative spectrum, will be useful to the growing number of historians and social scientists who are developing a specialized interest in the history of child labour. No less importantly, we trust that these essays will also prove informative and thought-provoking to the policy maker, as they cast doubt on some powerful and long-held assumptions, particularly the belief that child labour increased with the Industrial Revolution and that legislation alone, whether relating to primary schooling or the minimum working age, can put an end to this ancient form of exploitation of children.

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President
Istituto degli Innocenti

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Director
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SOME ISSUES IN THE HISTORICAL STUDY OF CHILD LABOUR

by Hugh Cunningham and Pier Paolo Viazzo

Attempts in the world today to control child labour are inevitably informed by some sense of its history. In particular, policy makers are likely to have before them the example of countries where industrialization seems initially to have increased the demand for and range of child labour while ultimately enabling its virtual elimination. Without such examples, it might be said, the hope of eliminating child labour, enshrined in the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, could hardly exist. Equally, the cruelties inflicted on children in the early stages of industrialization provide a warning of what can happen in unregulated conditions.

But if, at a level of generality, the historical record provides warnings and hopes, what in more precise terms can it suggest to policy makers? The answer must depend on the adequacy of the historical data and the skill with which they are interpreted. Although there is still considerable work ahead, recent studies have done much to modify and deepen understanding of the history of child labour, and to suggest ways in which that history may or may not hold lessons for those confronting current problems of child labour.

Until a quarter of a century ago, what is often termed the 'traditional view' of the history of child labour reigned almost unchallenged. In this view, the process of industrialization led to unprecedented use and exploitation of child labour, producing working conditions for children comparable to those of slavery. Children were ultimately rescued from their fate by campaigners on their behalf, and above all by the passage of effective child labour laws. [1]

In recent years, every aspect of the traditional view has been challenged. Child labour, it has been claimed, was more widespread and took place in worse conditions under proto-industrialization than in the industrial revolution. Although in industrializing economies there were some working conditions that no one would condone, children

1 Hammond and Hammond, 1917; Hutchins and Harrison, 1926.

were not, in any formal economic sense, 'exploited'. And their removal from the labour market owed little to the passage of child labour laws.

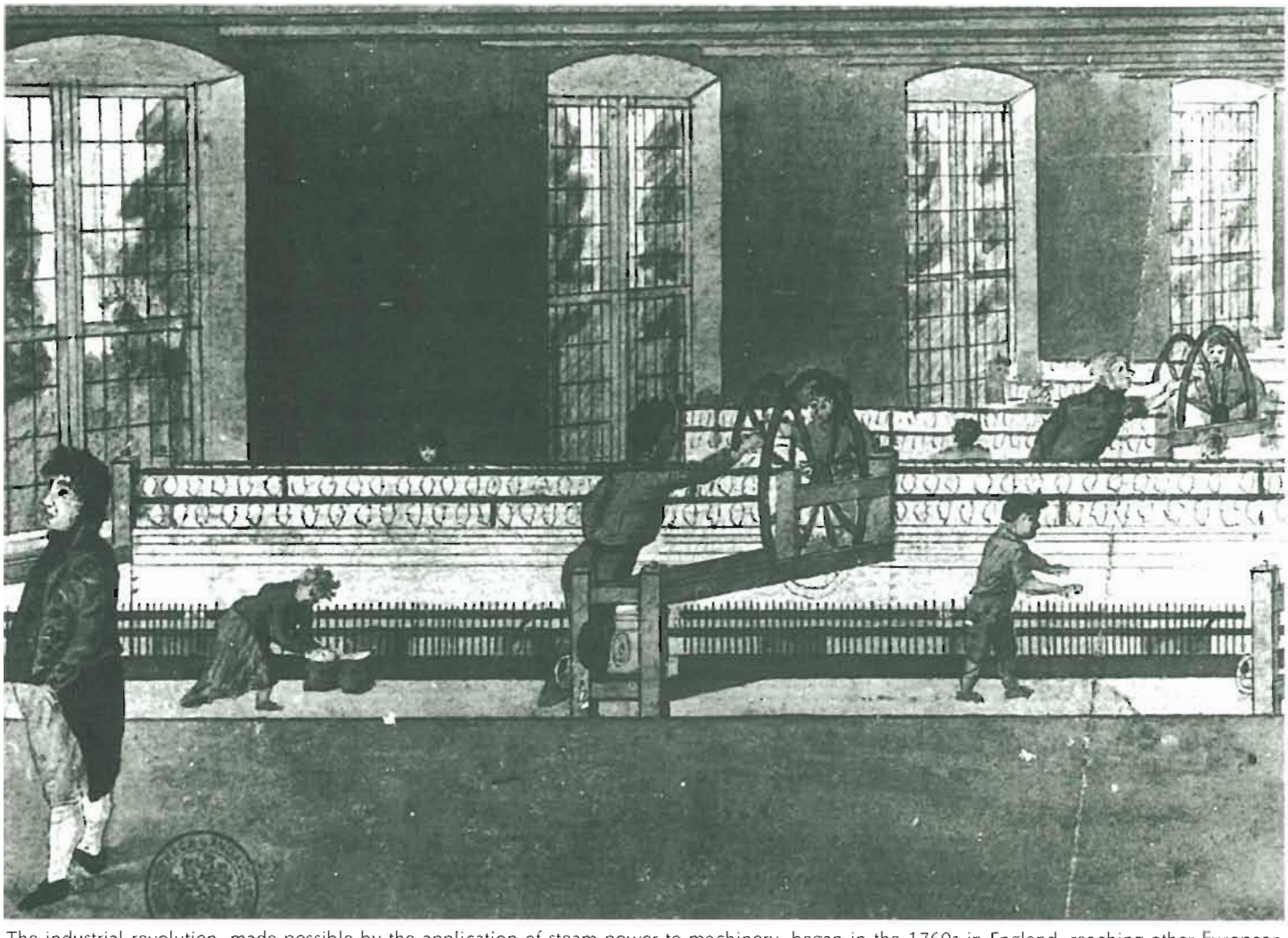
Myron Weiner's study of *The Child and the State in India: Child Labor and Education Policy in Comparative Perspective* has been the most influential (and controversial) of recent interpretations. Weiner seeks an understanding of the contemporary prevalence of child labour in India not only in Indian conditions but also in those in other countries, past and present. His conclusion is that the key to eliminating child labour lies in a firmly enforced policy of compulsory schooling: "compulsory primary education is the policy instrument by which the state effectively removes children from the labor force". [2] He is in no doubt that school attendance laws were more important, because easier to enforce, than child labour laws.

Weiner's emphasis on law as the instrument for ending child labour contrasts with another recent interpretation of the historical evidence, which highlights family strategy as the key to an understanding of the history of child labour. The most influential text to argue this has been Clark Nardinelli's *Child Labor and the Industrial Revolution*, which focuses on the textile industries in Britain, but draws on the experience of other countries to add weight to the contention that individual families made decisions about the workforce participation of their children on the basis of an assessment of what would work to the advantage of the family as a whole. Put bluntly, "children worked in factories because their families were poor; as family income increased, child labor decreased". [3] Other factors (technology, factory laws) might play a part in decisions about child labour participation, but they were essentially secondary.

Weiner and Nardinelli represent opposite poles in the analysis of child labour in the past. It would be unjust to describe either of them as monocausalist in his interpretation of the decline of child labour, but each does highlight one factor above all others, and they differ profoundly as to what that factor is. Their contrasting accounts carry very dissimilar implications for the present. Indeed, it is possible to distinguish three broad policy approaches to child labour. The first is the direct approach which tries to tackle it by means of child labour legislation. The second, the indirect approach, and the one that Weiner advocates, is through legislative action on the educational front, enforcing compulsory schooling. The third, and the one to which Nardinelli's analysis of history leads, is a policy of waiting, on the assumption that economic changes will over time enable individual families to adopt strategies that place more emphasis on investment in children than on the use of their labour.

Other recent accounts have provided more nuanced analyses, and introduced new elements into the interpretative framework. Thus Bolin-Hort's Work, *Family and the State: Child Labour and the Organization of Production in the British Cotton Industry, 1780-1920* points out that, even within Great Britain, laws could differ in their impact by region, and might be better enforced with respect to some of their clauses than others. Further, he demonstrates that entrepreneurs in different cultures (Lancashire, Scotland, Massachusetts and the American South) might use the same technology and yet pursue significantly different employment strategies, these resulting in quite different levels of child labour. One factor differentiating those cultures was the relative power of organized adult male workers, fearful that they might lose their jobs to cheap child workers, though not in any way averse to children working under subcontract to themselves. [4] At a different level, Cunningham has argued that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, romanticism fostered an image of childhood as properly protected, dependent and happy, an

2 Weiner, 1991, p. 3.
3 Nardinelli, 1990, p. 112.
4 Bolin-Hort, 1989.



The industrial revolution, made possible by the application of steam power to machinery, began in the 1760s in England, reaching other European countries somewhat later. The first mechanized textile mills were established in Belgium in about 1800, and in Spain only in the 1850s. Here boys are depicted at work on spinning mules in a factory in East Flanders in the early 1800s.

image that inspired campaigners against child labour and suggested a role for children unimagined in previous history. If child labour was to end, a new image of childhood was necessary, and romanticism provided it, enabling campaigners to make damaging comparisons between childhood as it existed in factory and mine and as, ideally, it ought to be. [5]

These differing interpretations of child labour in the past and of its decline arise in part because of the lack of firmly based research. There are two key areas in which the historical evidence as it at present exists lends itself to a variety of interpretations. The first of these relates to whether the position of working children was indeed worsened by the transition from pre-industrial to industrial economies. The second concerns the relative weight of the various factors that are supposed to have led to the removal of children from the workforce. It is to these issues that we shall now turn.

Child Labour in Pre-industrial and Industrial Societies

It was widely assumed in the traditional interpretation that child labour increased and became more exploitative in the initial stage of industrialization, a process encapsulated in images of little children in mills and factories or in coal mines in the British industrial revolution. It was acknowledged, of course, in the traditional interpretation that children worked before industrialization, but such work was thought to have been relatively unexploitative. Recent studies on proto-industrialization have cast some doubt on this assumption: it may well be that child labour was most intensive and pervasive in workshop and home-based industry, primarily in textiles, prior to mechanization and the concentration of the workforce in factories. [6] It was in this kind of work that Defoe in early eighteenth-century England delighted to find children aged four contributing to their own subsistence. Proto-industrialization was widespread throughout Europe, and, where it existed, children from a young age formed a key part of the family workforce.

This interpretation of the significance of proto-industrialization in the history of child labour has been the dominant one over the past decade, but has now in turn been challenged by a study of English family budgets which gives renewed weight to the traditional interpretation: it was in the central period of the industrial revolution, in the 1820s and 1830s, that children's participation rates were highest, and the age at which they started work was lowest. [7] The evidence may be said to be neatly poised between the two interpretations. In Catalonia the move to factories seems to have raised the starting age from 6 or 7 years to 10 (see Camps in this volume).

The inadequacy of the statistical evidence makes it extremely difficult to state with any confidence the level of child labour either before or during the industrial revolution. As a general rule, data generated within an industry are likely to be more reliable than census material, for in the latter the instructions given to the local enumerators were often ambiguous or simply not followed. However, only the better-organized industries were likely to produce their own figures, so that the children working in the informal economy (a crucial sector for child labour) escaped attention, as, too often, did all those children working part-time or casually.

Attempts to gauge the extent of child labour tend to work from one of two approaches. The first is to assemble all available data on the distribution of occupations by age and gender, so that children's labour force participation can be seen as a proportion of either the total labour force or of their own age range. Thus, children working might be said to constitute a percentage of the total labour force, either nationwide or in a particular

5 Cunningham, 1991.
6 Levine, 1987.
7 Horrell and Humphries, 1995a.

industry (see, for example, the data provided in this volume by De Herdt, Table 1; Camps, Table 1; Saito, Table 4; Muñoz, Table 1); and/or a percentage of those aged, say, 5-14 or 12-14 (see, for example, Cunningham, Tables 1 and 2, Figure 1; Camps, Tables 3 and 5; Saito, Table 2; Muñoz, Tables 1 and 2). This approach nearly always allows a breakdown by gender, but frequently children are grouped together in unhelpful age brackets — ideally we would need to know the number of those at work at specific ages, rather than the number in the age bracket 10-14.

A second approach is to try to calculate the contribution made by children to family incomes, and, if possible, the ages at which they make their contributions. This kind of information is in many ways an essential underpinning for a family strategy approach, for if it exists in comparable ways over a long time period, it can show whether child contributions are increasing or decreasing, and how their contributions are related to those of other family members or to other sources of family income. It can also show how the age order and gender of a child can affect his or her contributions to the family economy. [8] In addition, potentially at any rate, this approach might show the impact of legal enactments on family income. Two points in particular require attention in this respect. Can we see in the industrializing countries of the nineteenth century a move towards a concentration of earning power in the hands of adult males and the establishment of 'the male-breadwinner norm'? And can we see any pattern in the earnings generated respectively by children and by mothers? Recent investigations of family budgets in England 1790-1865 show that children's contributions to the family budget were always greater than those of mothers. [9] These figures are consonant with similar findings for the United States and five European countries at the end of the nineteenth century. Adult male earnings peaked between the ages of 30 and 39; thereafter, children contributed an increasing proportion of family income, in European countries nearly one third when the head of the household was aged 40-49, and over 40 per cent when the head was over 50. [10] Mothers contributed much less than children in terms of earnings to family income. As Michael Haines has expressed it, "The most dramatic aspect of the aging of the family was the extent to which children went to work and contributed their earnings to the family".[11] This was true even where, as in Belgium, there was a pronounced tradition of adult female industrial employment. [12] And the pattern analysed by Haines is confirmed by the detailed evidence from Catalonia in this volume.

To the extent that industrialization involved people in working outside their homes, there seems, then, to be strong evidence that children were preferred as wage earners to their mothers. We can with some confidence assert that in Europe and North America a new type of family economy came into being with industrialization, and that a central part of it was the contribution made by children through wage earning. Children's earnings were considered part of family earnings. As late as the 1920s in the United States, sons contributed 83 per cent and daughters 95 per cent of their earnings to the family.[13] This then was an economy in which there was an incentive for parents to keep children in the family home, and in this sense it can be contrasted with typical family strategy in Northern Europe before industrialization, where children left the parental home in their early adolescence to work, say, as farm labourers or as domestic servants. [14]

8 Robinson, 1995.
9 Horrell and Humphries, 1995b.
10 These findings emerge from an analysis of the 1889-1890 U.S. Commissioner of Labor Survey of budgets for 8,544 families in nine industries in the United States and five European countries (Belgium, Britain, France, Germany and Switzerland). See Haines, 1979.
11 Ibid., p. 302.
12 Hilden, 1993; Van den Eeckhout, 1993.
13 Hareven, 1982, pp. 189, 215-216.
14 Kussmaul, 1981; Hajnal, 1983, pp. 92-99.

The problem with these studies of the family economy, however, is that they rarely provide information on the ages of 'children'; these child contributors to the family economy might well be in their late teens or early twenties, and it would be odd to describe their work as 'child labour'. What information do we have on age of entry to the workforce?

The answer is that it varied from industry to industry, depending on the perceived usefulness of children, and on the supply of children. The lowest age of entry was likely to be for children living in the care of (and at the expense of) the state. For centuries orphans and other institutionalized children provided a labour force for industrial undertakings; the English use of workhouse children as a labour force in the early textile mills was in line with sanctioned policies.[15] This policy was not confined to Europe. In both Japan and Colombia, as discussed by Saito and Muñoz, children in the care of the authorities were those most likely to be engaged in labour at an early age.

Across national boundaries there were some industries that relied to a heavy extent on the labour of young children. Perhaps the most notorious was lacemaking, where, although children were supposedly in 'schools', there was no doubt that they were in fact labouring (see Cunningham and De Herdt). In textile factories, too, there was a relatively young age of entry, though only exceptionally was it below the age of nine. In coal mining in Britain in the 1840s, the mean age of entry was just under nine.[16] In workshop and home-based industries, an earlier age of entry may have been the norm. These ages of entry in the early stages of unregulated industrialization were probably commonplace across Europe, but, as Saito shows, not in Japan where the age of entry was significantly higher.

Although in some industries there was considerable demand for child labour, in others the problem, as many commentators perceived it, was that there was not enough: children were unemployed, idle, living on and off the streets, or roaming around the countryside, a threat to the stability of society. Students of child labour are naturally drawn to those sectors of the economy where children were disproportionately at work; they should, it can be argued, pay equal attention to situations where it was hard for children to find ways of entering the labour market.[17] These would include not only heavy industries, such as building, where children's size was a disadvantage, but also environments where the labour market was so structured as to discriminate against certain groups; for example, in late nineteenth-century Philadelphia, black children were less likely than white to be employed, largely, it seems, because whites controlled entry to the types of jobs where children could be employed.[18]

The Removal of Children from the Workforce

Given that children continued to contribute significantly to the family economy long after the worst phases of the history of child labour were over, the crucial question becomes, How was it that the age of entry to the labour force rose? A number of factors may be considered:

1. Higher wages: The simplest answer is that this change was made possible by the higher wages earned by adult males. This, as we have seen, is Nardinelli's argument, and it has also been sustained by Heywood with respect to France.[19] It receives some endorsement, though accompanied by other factors, in the essays that follow. In its crude form, however, as the main or sole explanation for the end of child labour, the wage theory raises as many

15 Cunningham, 1995a, pp. 129-130.
16 Church, 1986, pp. 193-194.
17 Cunningham, 1990.
18 Goldin, 1981.
19 Heywood, 1988.

Across national boundaries the lacemaking industry was among the most notorious employers of child labourers. Girls learning the skills of the cottage lace trade at Mrs. Dobbins' lace school at Stokenchurch, Buckinghamshire, in 1860.

Apprentices in a lace school, this time in Bruges at the turn of the century. Before qualifying as fully skilled lacemakers, these children, mostly girls, had to face long years of toil in overcrowded and underheated rooms.

questions as it resolves. The assumption is that higher wages lessened the pressure to put children to work at the earliest possible moment. The problems with it are:

a) It assumes that working-class families' needs and expectations were constant and unchanging. It is quite plausible that a rise in real wages would have been accompanied by an increase in demand for goods and services, which could only be met by continuing to put children into the labour market at an early age.

b) It is linked to the establishment of the norm of the adult male breadwinner, but it does not show what factors (for instance, labour power, cultural assumptions about gender roles) may have helped to establish that norm.

c) The rise in real wages does not always fit the chronology of the removal of young children from the labour market.

d) It assumes a recognition on the part of working-class families that investment in education (even if measured only in forgone wages) would work to the benefit of the family.

Two of these problems merit further comment. Part of the answer to the establishment of the male-breadwinner norm may lie in the power of adult labour in trade unions to obstruct the substitution of adult male labour by female or child labour. There was continual fear among adult male workers that their jobs would be deskilled, and evidence does exist that, in some cases at least, employers bent to the pressure against substitution.[20]

The idea that working-class families valued education for the rewards it could bring to the family as a whole is hard to assess. There is evidence, for example from Japan, that the acquirement of literacy was not necessarily linked to school attendance. In this respect, there are almost certainly deep-rooted cultural factors, which differentiate among and within countries, in the value placed on literacy and other educational achievements, and this may not be linked in any direct way to an expectation of a monetary return on investment in them. Moreover, there is no evidence to show that an expectation of a return on investment in education of children was at all realistic.

2. Technology: It is frequently argued that technological factors played a key part in the decline of child labour. As technology became more sophisticated, so the argument goes, the demand for child labour was reduced. Although there are clear instances of technical innovation leading to the removal of children from the labour market, hypotheses emphasizing the role of technology are controversial — both empirically, as numerous counter-examples can be cited (Camps, for example, suggests that technological advances in mid-nineteenth-century Catalonia led to an increase rather than a decrease in child labour), and theoretically, as their deterministic penchant can easily minimize the role of the social organization of work and other associated factors.

3. Child labour laws: The traditional argument, as we have seen, is that child labour laws were the instrument whereby child labour was reduced. There is, of course, plentiful evidence of child labour laws that were at best partially obeyed, and at worst totally ineffectual (see, for example, the case of Colombia analysed by Muñoz in this volume). Child labour laws, it has been argued, "may have been more an effect of the decline [in child labour] than a cause".[21] Nevertheless, there is good evidence that some laws (for example, the 1833 Factory Act in Great Britain) did have an immediate and substantial effect on the amount of child labour, and on the conditions in which children worked. The problem

20 Cunningham, 1995b, pp. 3-5.
21 Nardinelli, 1990, p. 115.

with them, considered as the main instrument for the raising of the age of the entry of children to the labour market, is that they could operate effectively only in what we would now call the formal sector of the economy; they left untouched the informal sector where conditions of child labour were far worse.

4. Compulsory schooling: Compulsory education laws at least in theory could overcome this problem, and, as we have seen, Weiner has accorded them much importance. What we can undoubtedly see in school attendance laws is a progressive raising of the age at which it was legitimate to leave school; in Great Britain, for example, a rise from 10 in 1880 to 14 in 1918, a change that amounts to a radical redefinition of 'childhood' itself. Even if the implementation of these laws was not wholly successful, they were effective in removing a significant segment of those aged 10-14 from the formal labour market. It can be argued that the passage of the laws was possible only because public opinion was ready to abide by them, but there is equally good evidence that they themselves helped to shape public opinion and determine the strategies of individual families. Nevertheless, as some of the case studies here show (see Cunningham, Saito and Muñoz), and as contemporary evidence from developing countries confirms,[22] the argument that compulsory schooling laws will eliminate child labour is by no means conclusive. At the very least, we need to distinguish between enrolment rates and completion rates, and to recognize that schooling and child labour were not incompatible. Even assuming high attendance levels, children could contribute to the family economy outside school hours, and there is considerable evidence that they did so.[23]

The studies collected here all contribute to these debates on child labour in the past. Quite deliberately, they cover a wide range in terms of geography, of economic development and of cultural background; for it is only through comparative history that we can begin to see how far the history of child labour in any one country may conform to some widespread experience, or, alternatively, may need to be understood by reference to the particular conditions within that country.

The first two essays look at the countries where the use of child labour in the process of industrialization gained and has retained most notoriety: Belgium and Britain. In Belgium the intervention of the state came late, whereas Britain provided not only a warning to other countries of the effects of child labour, but also a model, which became embedded in the 'traditional view', of how to reduce it by child labour laws. The third essay, an analysis of children's contribution to the labour force and to the family economy in a medium-sized textile town in nineteenth-century Catalonia, enables us to begin to see to what extent child labour in Southern Europe, on which studies are few and far between, may have had similarities with that in Northern Europe. Japan, the country studied in the fourth essay, has a history of economic development and industrialization which has many similarities with that of Europe, but which, as Saito illustrates, differs interestingly in the use made of child labour. The final essay, on Colombia, shows us that Europe is by no means unique in having a long history of child labour; as in the case of Japan, however, the essay points to different cultural traditions respecting its use.

Some of the studies make assessments of the amount of child labour in the past, either from national figures (Cunningham, Saito, De Herdt, Muñoz), or from micro-data (Camps, Saito). The national figures show that, for reasons to be discussed later, children played a much more significant role in the labour force in Britain and Belgium than they did in

22 Boyden, 1994.
23 Cunningham, 1995a, p. 174.

Japan. Camps' study of a Catalonian town confirms studies undertaken in Northern Europe and North America showing that children's earnings were a vital part of the family income.

It was undoubtedly in the textile industries that children were most likely to find employment. Cunningham's evidence shows an earlier entry into the workforce and a greater likelihood of work in textile towns than elsewhere. In Japan, the vast majority of children in formal employment were in cotton spinning and silk reeling. Camps' evidence shows the extent to which employment opportunities in a textile town could be dominated by one industry. There is no doubt that the demand for child labour differed substantially by industry, with considerable effects on the prevalence of child labour within as well as between countries.

It was also a characteristic of the countries studied that child labour proliferated in the informal economy; and equally a characteristic that we have no reliable way of providing figures for the level of this involvement. This was not some hangover from proto-industry, but, as Saito argues, represented new types of low-paid, casual work for which children were adjudged especially suitable, and which existed in symbiotic relationship with the formal economy (see also Muñoz on Colombia).

If we turn to the strategies adopted by families, Japan stands out from the European countries in the relative willingness of families to gain from the wage-earning potential of the mother rather than children. Even in Belgium, where there was a strong tradition favouring the employment of adult females, children seem to have been employed as much as or more than mothers.[24] Catalonia followed the classic European and North American pattern of children contributing an increasing proportion of the family income as the family aged.

In some senses, wage levels encouraged this strategy. In the woollen industry in Sabadell (Catalonia) in 1890, females could never earn as much as a male aged between 15 and 19, and the wages of an adult female were only marginally higher than those of a 10- to 14-year-old. In Belgium, De Herdt suggests, the fact that adult females had higher wages than children may in part account for the greater propensity of adult females to work in that country.

In terms of family strategy, European countries and North America (and Japan?) were clearly entering a transition phase in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This transition was associated with a rise in real wages, the effective introduction of compulsory schooling, legislation against child labour, the beginnings of a decline in family size, and some social welfare provision. Together these factors led ultimately to a greatly diminished reliance on children's contributions to the family economy, and a shift to the waged labour of adult women. Although no one has yet devised a research strategy that can determine how to relate these different factors, each of the essays that follow makes an assessment of how they might be related.

Lessons from the Past?

Policy makers legitimately look to history to inform their decisions, but history cannot be seen as an unproblematic resource. The evidence on child labour in the past is often fragmentary, and it certainly lends itself to more than one interpretation. It is just as probable (and just as appropriate) that historians will be informed in their studies, and in the questions they ask, by writings on the contemporary world as that policy makers will draw on history. A mutual exchange of views is to be encouraged.

The conclusions that can be drawn from the study of the history of child labour are likely to be complex ones, differentiating between types of child labour and between child

24 Alter, 1984; Van den Eeckhout, 1993.

labour in different cultures. Many historians, as a first resort, will seek economic or demographic explanations for human behaviour, and that may be said to be the approach underlying the family strategy analysis. The inspiration for much of it is the 'New Home Economics' which directs its focus on the wages earned by family members in trying to maximize advantages to the family as a whole; cultural, technical and organizational factors are of only secondary importance. To ignore approaches of this kind would be folly, but it is clear from the studies collected here that they are not sufficient. In particular, they do not explain the much lower use made of child labour in Japan as compared with Britain and Belgium. That difference seems to stem from deep-rooted cultural factors, the Japanese being famous, as Saito points out, for an indulgence of children unknown in Europe. These cultural differences may be identified, as Saito suggests, by distinguishing between early-starter and late-starter cultures. For the key to the history of child labour lies in the age at which it occurs. If there is one firm conclusion that may be drawn, it is that children in industrializing countries in Europe and North America contributed to their family economies, and did so to a greater extent than mothers; but that said, the crucial question is, At what age did they start work?

It may further be suggested that there is a two-stage process in the ending of child labour. In the first stage, the age at which children entered the labour market gradually rose, and the conditions under which they worked were slowly improved, largely through factory laws and accompanying inspection. Nevertheless, children still contributed essential funds to the family economy. In the second stage, which is associated with declining fertility and rising living standards, children ultimately ceased to contribute to the family economy, their place being taken by wives. The studies here concentrate in the main on the first phase, and they suggest that no monocausal explanation is in itself convincing. The state's role was certainly of considerable importance. Its effects on child labour were sometimes inadvertent rather than deliberate; for example, compulsory schooling might be introduced primarily to get idle children off the street rather than to stop child labour. Whatever the state's motives, however, its actions define limits and constraints within which parents, employers and children had to devise strategies that would work to their best advantage. The balance of power within the workplace was therefore of critical importance, and could result in quite different levels of child labour in different environments.

The historical record suggests that while international pressures and national legislative action can set the parameters within which child labour can or cannot operate, the effect of those parameters will differ from country to country and within countries; and that this will depend as much upon cultural traditions as on the automatic impact of economic and demographic factors or on the formal passage of laws.

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CHILD LABOUR IN BELGIUM
1800-1914

by René De Herdt*

Industrialization, Poverty and Child Labour

Child labour in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Belgium was associated both with industrialization and with poverty. The first manifestations of the industrial revolution in Belgium had become obvious in about 1800. The steam engine was introduced, the first textile companies were established in Verviers and Ghent, and textile labour was gradually mechanized. Both the mining and steel industries expanded. In 1817, John Cockerill built a coke blast furnace, and it was in Belgium that the first steamboat on the European continent was built. Amidst the cheering of numerous interested spectators, the first train on the continent steamed from Mechelen to Brussels in 1835, the coal for it having been mined in the provinces of Liège and Hainaut.[1] By 1840 Belgium possessed the infrastructure necessary to become Europe's second industrial nation.

These industrial developments put immense pressure on traditional crafts and home industries.[2] Home workers had to produce against ever-lower prices in order to be able to compete, and this meant longer hours of work and increased participation in work by all family members, including children.[3] Even so, many families were in acute poverty. In the late 1820s, one person in seven was estimated to be in need; by the later 1840s, this had increased to one in six. In 1850 in the industrial city of Ghent, one third of the population was supported by the authorities. Inevitably in such circumstances, children were more likely to be sent to work in factories than to school; a boy's wage might be one third that of his father, a crucial addition to the family income.[4]

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1 Lebrun et al., 1979; Dhondt, 1976; *De industrie in België. Twee eeuwen ontwikkeling 1780-1800*, Gemeentekrediet van België, Brussels, 1981.

2 Veraghtert, 1981.

3 Chlepner, 1956; De Herdt and De Graeve, 1979; Vander Meersch, 1852; Van den Eeckhout and Hannes, 1981; Ducpectiaux, 1850.

4 For a discussion of wages in industry, see Dhondt, 1960, pp. 73-82.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, labourers' wages gradually increased, aided by a drop in prices in the last quarter of the century; there was more money available for food, and its quality improved. But, significantly, the first measures to restrict child labour in Belgium were passed as late as 1889, by which date the importance of children's contributions to the most basic needs of the family budget had diminished.[5]

Children in the Labour Process

Children were to be found at work in virtually every sector of the Belgian economy in the nineteenth century.

Agriculture was one of the most important employers of children, much of it seasonal work which resulted in school absenteeism, particularly in the summer months. Many young boys worked as cattle herders or stableboys. In the polders and the 'Land van Waas' region, children were engaged in the so-called weeding groups, which were formed by a number of adults from the village who were called weeding bosses. They recruited between 30 and 40 children 8-14 years of age, who were put at the disposal of the local farmers to pull out the weeds in the beet, oat and flax fields. These groups rose at 5 a.m., often walked for an hour to reach the fields, and remained there until 7 p.m. Other children sold milk before school started.

Children played an important role in rural and craft industries such as rope making, metalworking, domestic weaving, processing skins or weaving baskets. In rope making, for example, young children worked throughout the day, turning the rope wheel or moistening the ropes before they were twined. Children as young as six or seven worked in the widespread straw-plaiting industries, making baskets, hats and chairs. Industries of this kind were particularly affected by mechanization. In order to compete with the machine, cottage industry workers had to work longer hours for a smaller return and make increasing use of the assistance of wives and children. A typical example of this process could be seen after the creation of the first mechanized flax mills in Ghent and Brussels in the late 1830s. The 220,000 Flemish women who spun flax, assisted by their children, were gradually forced to abandon this work.[6]

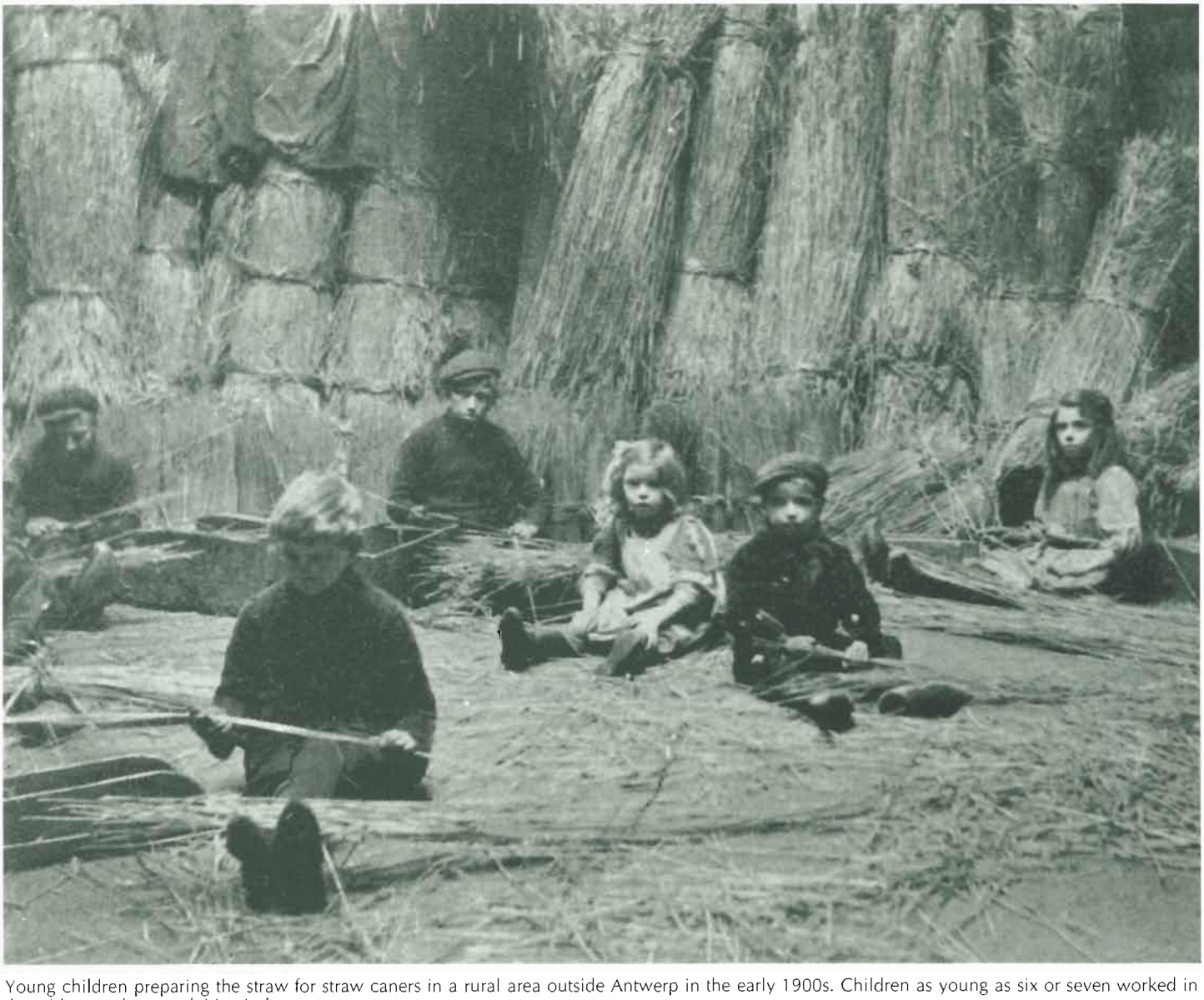
Some of the worst conditions of child labour were in the coal mines of Wallonia, where in 1846 there were as many as 10,000 children between 10 and 12 years of age. During the Napoleonic regime, in 1813, child labour in the mines had been prohibited for children under 10 years of age. Thereafter, officially at least, child coal miners had to be 10 years old before accompanying their fathers or mothers to the mine where they were registered to haul *('traineur')* or to push *('hiercheur')* the mining carts.[7] Up to 1840, children hauled the carts by means of chains. From about 1840, there was a new transport system which required children to push the small rectangular carts on iron rails. Since many mining shafts were barely four feet high, children had to work with bent backs. Young miners only rarely saw daylight in the summer, and never in winter. Many, indeed, having worked during the day, joined the night shift, remaining underground for 36 hours without any proper rest.[8] Most children were allowed to keep the supplementary income they thus earned, whereas they generally gave their entire wages to their parents.

5 De Weerdt, 1960; De Herdt and De Graeve, 1979, pp. 21-29. In about 1840, the purchasing power of a large number of workers was fairly high, but declined sharply thereafter. By 1850, for instance, a 25 per cent decline over 1840 levels could already be observed in the purchasing power of cotton workers. This rate would fluctuate considerably in the following years, reaching, by the end of the century, only slightly higher levels than it had been in 1840. The situation for mineworkers, however, was much more favourable. See Gaus, 1992, p. 156.

6 Coppejans-Desmedt and Van Schoenbeek, 1981; Veraghtert, 1981, p. 287.

7 Ministère de l'Intérieur, 1848, pp. 225-304.

8 De Weerdt, 1986.



Young children preparing the straw for straw caners in a rural area outside Antwerp in the early 1900s. Children as young as six or seven worked in the widespread straw-plaiting industry.

In the brickyards, children brought up the clay and carried the moulded bricks to the drying sheds. At night they slept in open sheds where they were exposed to wind and rain. It was often difficult to waken the young children in the morning even after a dousing with cold water thrown at their faces; sometimes they were dressed while they slept, and carried to their place of work by their father or a neighbour.[9]

A number of surveys enable us to gain some indication of the proportion of the total labour force made up of children in different industries. From the beginning of the nineteenth century, both child and women's work was especially widespread in the mechanizing textile industries. Lieven Bauwens, who introduced the first mechanical spinning mule in Ghent in about 1800, mentions in one of his letters that 75 per cent of the workforce in spinning mills in Ghent — the 'Manchester of the Continent' — was made up of women and children.[10]

Table 1 - **Child labour in some Ghent factories, 1817**

Kind of factory	Number of factories	Number of labourers	Number of children (under 17 years)[1]	Per cent
Spinning mill	12	1,093	277	25
Weaving mill	5	148	24	16
Textile printing mill	7	360	45	12
Sugar factory	4	71	3	4
Paper mill	3	123	32	26
Tobacco factory	2	18	6	33
Yards	3	131	2	1
Joineries	2	24	—	—
Hatters	2	25	4	16
Cooperage	1	7	—	—
Roof slating	1	8	1	12
Total	42	2,008	394	20

Source: Stadsarchief Ghent, Reeks K15, 1817.

[1] Only some of the documents mentioned the age of the labourers

Table 1, covering a sample of the Ghent workforce, shows that children below the age of 17 years constituted on average 20 per cent of the workforce in a selection of Ghent industries. Especially high proportions of children were to be found in the spinning mills (25 per cent), paper mills (26 per cent) and tobacco factories (33 per cent). The spinning mills provided by far the largest amount of child employment.

An additional indication of the overall participation of children in the economy comes from a government-sponsored enquiry into child labour set up in 1843, and reporting in 1848.[11] In a survey of 54,181 workers in a range of industries, the enquiry found that 1.3 per cent were under nine and 19.5 per cent were under 16 years of age (Table 2).

In 1845, the failure of the potato harvest, the collapse of traditional linen and cottage industries (which were no longer competitive with the less expensive machine-made linen from England), and a series of epidemics, focused the government's attention on social

9 Van de Velde and Vinck, 1978, pp. 17 and 35.
10 Balthazar, 1989, p. 158.
11 Ministère de l'Intérieur, 1848.

Table 2 - **Child labour in factories in various Belgian provinces, by age and gender, 1843**

Age	Male	Percentage of total workers	Female	Percentage of total workers	Total	%
Under 9 years	532	1	164	0.3	696	1.3
9-11 years	1,615	3	684	1.3	2,299	4.3
12-15 years	5,638	10.4	1,881	3.5	7,519	13.9
16-20 years	5,768	10.6	3,377	6.2	9,145	16.8
21 and over	29,520	54.5	5,002	9.2	34,522	63.7
Total	43,073	79.5	11,108	20.5	54,181	100

Source: Ministère de l'Intérieur, 1848.

questions. A general census was carried out in 1846 under the leadership of a great Belgian statistician and astronomer, Adolphe Quételet, who is regarded as the father of the quantitative method in sociology.[12] The census, the first carried out in Belgium on a genuinely scientific basis, provided detailed information on the Belgian workforce (see Table 3).

Table 3 - **Child labour in some important Belgian crafts and industries, by age and gender, 1846**

Type of company	Number of companies	Number of labourers by gender and age				
		Male	Female	Over 16	Under 16	Total
Coal mines and coke works	202	39,120	7,066	35,847	10,339	46,186
Craft metal treatment	12,028	15,853	158	13,583	2,428	16,011
Industrial metal treatment	2,419	24,345	1,933	23,674	2,604	26,278
Craft brickyards and potteries	6,786	11,624	165	10,843	946	11,789
Industrial brickyards and potteries	1,613	18,231	1,745	16,367	3,609	19,976
Craft flax and hemp	18,732	13,920	28,874	22,387	20,407	42,794
Industrial flax and hemp	2,401	8,497	8,732	13,591	3,638	17,229
Wool	768	12,210	5,943	14,820	3,333	18,153
Craft cotton processing	43	4	358	101	261	362
Industrial cotton processing	350	10,042	4,276	10,580	3,738	14,318
Silk	27	588	87	438	237	675
Clothing	10,036	7,169	3,888	8,458	2,599	11,057
Craft food processing	7,928	6,979	478	6,725	732	7,457
Industrial food processing	8,434	19,780	2,624	20,508	1,896	22,404
Craft woodwork	20,636	19,020	215	17,129	2,106	19,235
Industrial woodwork	1,032	1,659	63	1,577	145	1,722
Craft leatherwork	11,841	10,189	270	8,257	2,202	10,459
Industrial leatherwork	968	2,449	243	2,472	220	2,692
Craft paper factories and printing works	611	2,666	39	2,054	651	2,705
Industrial paper factories and printing offices	142	1,582	1,089	2,106	565	2,671

Source: Statistique de la Belgique. Industrie. Recensement général (15 octobre 1846), Brussels, 1851, pp. x-xi.

12 Vander Mensbrugghe, 1905, pp. 468-477.

It showed that children featured prominently in the workforce, not only in textiles, but also in coal mining, brickworks, potteries, the food industry, leatherwork, metalwork and woodwork. Altogether children made up 21 per cent of the labourers, the proportion being higher in craft and home-based work than in mechanized industry. Child labour in the mining sector was a constant throughout the nineteenth century, and, according to one source, the number of children under 16 employed underground in coal mines increased significantly between 1843 and 1864.[13]

Some employers, perhaps most prominently the Ghent cotton firm Voortman, seem deliberately to have employed large numbers of women and young children in order to keep down their labour costs. Low wages and high female and child employment went hand in hand in Voortman's mill, and in the Ghent textile trade as a whole. The figures in Table 4 give some indication of the effects of this employer strategy on the structure of the workforce, though they considerably understate the number of young children by omitting the spinners' helpers. As Peter Scholliers has put it,

> women were forced to do wage labour as long as their children were too young to contribute to total family income. So the *cercle vicieux* — profitable to the employer and unbreakable to the labour movement — was established: cotton wages were low due to the many women and young people in the factories, and women and youngsters were obliged to do wage labour because of low textile wages. In general this led to low purchasing power, harsh working conditions and a low standard of living.[14]

Table 4 - **Textile workers in the Voortman cotton mill in Ghent, percentage by age and gender, 1842 - 1902**

	1842		1859		1879		1902	
Age	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
5-9	0	0.6	0	0	0	0	0	0
10-14	0	3.1	2.6	7.4	1.0	7.0	0	3.8
15-19	4.4	9.5	11.1	9.5	2.0	22.0	6.5	22.7
20-24	7.6	13.3	11.1	13.7	5.0	12.0	7.6	14.6
25-29	3.1	14.5	7.9	5.3	6.0	10.0	4.8	6.5
30-34	8.2	3.8	5.3	3.1	4.0	4.0	3.8	4.3
35-39	5.0	3.1	2.6	0	2.0	3.0	5.4	1.6
40-44	7.6	1.3	5.8	3.1	5.0	3.0	3.8	2.2
45+	9.5	5.0	9.5	1.5	8.0	6.0	10.7	1.5

Source: Scholliers, 1995.

In the Ghent cotton industry as a whole in the 1870s, about one fifth of the workers were children aged between 10 and 16 years. By 1896, seven years after the passing of the first law controlling child labour and after a rise in the standard of living, there had been a significant decrease in the number of working children under 12, but still one tenth of the 842,000 industrial workers in Belgium were children under 16, the largest numbers being in textile factories (11,863), coal mines (10,167), clothing (9,674), and glass factories (4,429).[15] The youngest children were in the ceramics, glass, tobacco and matchbox industries. Children continued to remain active in agriculture, domestic work, and even in heavy industry. In 1914, when com-

13 Puissant, 1976, p. 162.
14 Scholliers, 1995, p. 218.
15 *Recensement général des industries et des métiers (31 octobre 1896)*, XVIII: *Exposé général des méthodes et des résultats* (1902), Brussels, p. 135; Kruithof, 1960, p. 199.

pulsory education prohibited children from working under the age of 14, there were still 1,500 children under that age at work in the coal mine of Mons (Bergen, province of Hainaut), 406 of them working underground.[16] In rural Flanders, 5.2 per cent of the male workers and 3.9 per cent of the female workers were between the ages of 12 and 14 years.[17]

Working Hours and Health

Working hours for children varied by industry, but as a general rule they were the same as those for adults, between 10 and 16 hours a day. Hours were often longer in summer than in winter, particularly in industries where good light was essential.

A typical example was Aalst (East Flanders) where in 1843 working hours were from 6 to 8 a.m., and then, after a half-hour break, until noon. There was a one-hour break for lunch, but then a non-stop working schedule until 8 p.m. In Ghent cotton mills in1845, children had an extra half-hour break at breakfast and at supper, but otherwise worked the same hours as adults, from dawn to 10 p.m. in winter, and from 5 or 5.30 a.m. until 8 p.m. in summer.[18] Since many children did not live in the immediate vicinity of the factories, they might have travelling time of between one and three hours, both morning and evening, to add to their long working hours.[19]

There is evidence, however, as Table 5 shows, that as the century progressed working hours were reduced.[20]

Table 5 - **Working hours in Ghent industries, 1840-1914**

Year	Hours/day	Hours/week
1840	13	78
1847	13	78
1859	12	72
1869	12	72
1871	12	72
1892	12	72
1897	11	69
1900	11	69
1904	11	69
1914	11	69

Source: De Neve, 1992, p.17.

The long working hours, sometimes during the night, inevitably affected the health of the children. The monotonous and repetitive work they had to do was further detrimental to their well-being. And there were, moreover, conditions specific to each industry which could be extremely damaging to health. To give some examples:

- In both cotton and flax mills, children's health was seriously impaired by dust. In addition, the steam of the boiling water was so dense that girls standing only two or three metres apart could scarcely see each other. The condensation from the factory ceiling fell onto their bare necks, and hot water splashed upon their already drenched clothes. They worked barefoot in mud, with an ambient temperature of between 39° and 49° C. Consequently, hands and feet were quickly affected by gangrene. Moreover, since the girls went home in their wet clothes, even when there was heavy rainfall or freezing conditions, lung disease was a frequent occurrence.[21] There were no proper measures to protect workers against moving parts until an Act of 1903; girls and boys risked having their arms and fingers crushed, or their clothes or hair caught and being dragged along by the transmission belts and driving wheels.
- In the matchstick factories, which were set up in the second half of the nineteenth century, mainly near Lessines (in the province of Hainaut), Ninove and Geraardsbergen [Gramont] (in the province of East Flanders), conditions were even more appalling.

16 Puissant, 1976, p. 162.
17 Vandenbroeke, 1981, p. 146.
18 Mareska and Heyman, 1845.
19 De Weerdt, 1959.
20 See also Gaus, 1992, p. 150.
21 Glibert, 1902; De Weerdt, 1959; and *Uit het martelaarsleven van de kinderen der vlasfabriek. Onderzoeken op de buiten door Jan Samyun* (1914), Ghent: Volksdrukkerij, pp. 8-24.

Young girls cutting hair from hides in East Flanders in about 1900. The hide-processing industry was particulary dangerous as children were expected to use large scissors and to handle mercury-dipped skins.

Children as young as five had to fill matchboxes or dip matchsticks in a phosphoric mixture that contained 30 per cent white phosphorous, a substance that rapidly affected the bones. There was no proper system of ventilation.[22]

- Lace schools economized on heating costs in winter by squeezing as many apprentices as possible in a small room. For example, in the lace school of Mrs. Sabien in Turnhout (province of Antwerp), 51 lacemakers, including two teachers, were packed into a room 75m^2. Lace workers also suffered from curvature of the spine.[23]
- Children in the tobacco workshops of Antwerp had serious chest complaints, caused by tobacco dust.
- Girls working in the sewing workshops, stitching collar buttons, often suffered from tuberculosis and anaemia.[24]
- In the processing of skins and fluffing of hair, boys and girls used large scissors to cut the skins which had previously been prepared with mercury.[25]
- In coal mining, dust and coal grit affected the lungs of the child workers.

It is hardly surprising that the weakest among those who worked in these industries died from exhaustion after a few years or were marked for life. It could not be claimed, moreover, that these were conditions of which contemporaries were simply unaware. In 1844, a medical commission had given the following description of working children:

> They are skinny, shrivelled, uncared-for, they suffer from chlorosis, scrofulous tumors and rachitis. Their lean, pale faces show signs of suffering. Their muscles are hardly developed, their bellies are swollen, they suffer from troublesome digestive systems coinciding with acid indigestion. The children complain of headache, diarrhoea and intestinal colics, they grow slowly and irregularly and their stature is below average.[26]

Table 6 - **Height and weight of children working in the Ghent cotton industry, by age and gender and compared with normal values, 1843**

	BOYS				GIRLS			
Age	Normal height (meters)	Height of working boys (meters)	Normal weight (kg)	Weight of working boys (kg)	Normal height (meters)	Height of working girls (meters)	Normal weight (kg)	Weight of working girls (kg)
10	1.275	1.210	24.52	23.40	1.248	1.204	23.52	22.96
11	1.330	1.300	27.10	26.62	1.299	1.240	25.65	23.80
12	1.385	1.310	29.82	28.47	1.353	1.339	29.82	27.14
13	1.439	1.368	34.38	29.45	1.403	1.372	32.94	29.57
14	1.493	1.367	38.67	31.69	1.453	1.388	36.70	31.23
15	1.546	1.480	43.62	38.49	1.499	1.415	40.37	34.61

Source: De Neve, 1992. Figures for working children are derived from Mareska and Heyman, 1845, pp. 134 and 136. Normal values are the ones estimated by Quételet in his *Sur l'homme et le développement de ses facultées ou Essai de statistique sociale*, 1835 and 1869, a work that marks the beginning of modern anthropometrics.

Height and weight are one way in which historians measure the well-being of populations in the past, and they are often taken as an effective indicator of an overall standard of living.[27] Some figures for Ghent working children in Tables 6 show that their heights and weights were considerably below the norm. Not all of this deficiency can be ascribed to working conditions, which were only one element alongside poor living conditions, a low-calorie diet and lack of sleep. The figures do nonetheless indicate that young Belgian workers were subject to a process of physical deterioration.

22 De Winne, 1909.
23 Ministère de l'Intérieur, 1848.
24 Ibid.
25 De Winne, 1909.
26 Vandenbroeke, 1981, p. 245.
27 Floud et al., 1990.

Children's Earnings

Table 7 shows the extent to which children's wages rose in the second half of the century. In 1880, children in the Ghent cotton industry earned twice to three times what was paid in 1846.[28] The lowest wages were paid in the textile industry, particularly in flax. Part of the reason for this may lie in the way children were taken into employment. In the Ghent cotton industry, for example, there was a system of subcontracting whereby children were paid by the spinners rather than by the factory owner. The spinners tried to keep the wages of their helpers as low as possible, and on holidays (saints' days as well as a few days at Carnival and the Ghent festival) they were not paid at all. Children's wages varied not only according to the sector of the economy in which they were employed, but also, as can be seen in Table 8, by gender. Girls earned less than boys. The differences in earning by sector of the economy are also apparent.

Table 7 - **Average wages paid to children under 16 years of age, 1846 and 1880**

Sector	1846 Belgian Francs	1880 Belgian Francs
Ceramics industry	1.28	1.64
Mining	0.81	1.69
Glassworks	0.72	1.82
Steel industry	0.48	1.76
Cotton industry	0.47	1.36
Flax and hemp	0.33	1.20

Source: De Weerdt, 1960.

A survey of Ghent workers in 1845 carried out by Drs. Mareska and Heyman gives some indication of the contribution children made to the family economy. An adult male cotton worker could earn about 656 francs a year, an adult female about 383 francs. A factory child under 12 could earn 114 francs, while one between 12 and 15 years could earn up to 241 francs. The annual expenditure of a family consisting of parents and four small children was about 742 francs. The older child's earnings would be enough to meet the family's expenditure on the staple food, bread, and the younger child's would nearly pay for the family's potatoes. These were levels of contribution which no family could afford to do without.[29]

Table 8 - **Daily wages of Ghent children under 16 years of age, in cotton, flax and steel industries, before 1896**

Wage group Belgian Francs	Cotton		Flax		Steel
	% Boys	% Girls	% Boys	% Girls	% Boys
-0.5	3.19	1.51	—	5.42	22.53
0.50-0.99	16.23	38.49	23.07	37.12	45.79
1.0-1.49	54.52	60.00	72.37	57.46	23.76
1.5	26.06	—	4.56	—	7.92
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Source: De Neve, 1992.

School or Work?

In 1830, Belgium broke away from the Netherlands and proclaimed itself a sovereign state. In the absence of specific legislation, the number of schools quickly soared, increasing from one school for every 1,007 inhabitants in 1830 to one for every 785 inhabitants by 1840. This trend was mainly the result of a proliferation of private schools, which working-class families could not afford.[30] The first organic law relating to primary education was passed in 1842. It required each community to support at least one primary school provid-

28 Varlez, 1901-1904, Vol. I, pp. 207-211 and Vol. II, pp. cxxxvii-cxl.
29 Mareska and Heyman, 1845.
30 De Vroede, 1986.

ing free education to poor children.[31] Parents were not obliged to send their children to school, and, because of the difficulty in meeting their primary needs and the importance of their children's contribution to the family economy, there were strong pressures on parents to put their children to work at as early an age as possible.

In rural areas, some children did not go to school at all; particularly keen learners might attend Sunday school. In urban areas, the schooling situation was better, although it was still common for very young children to be at work.

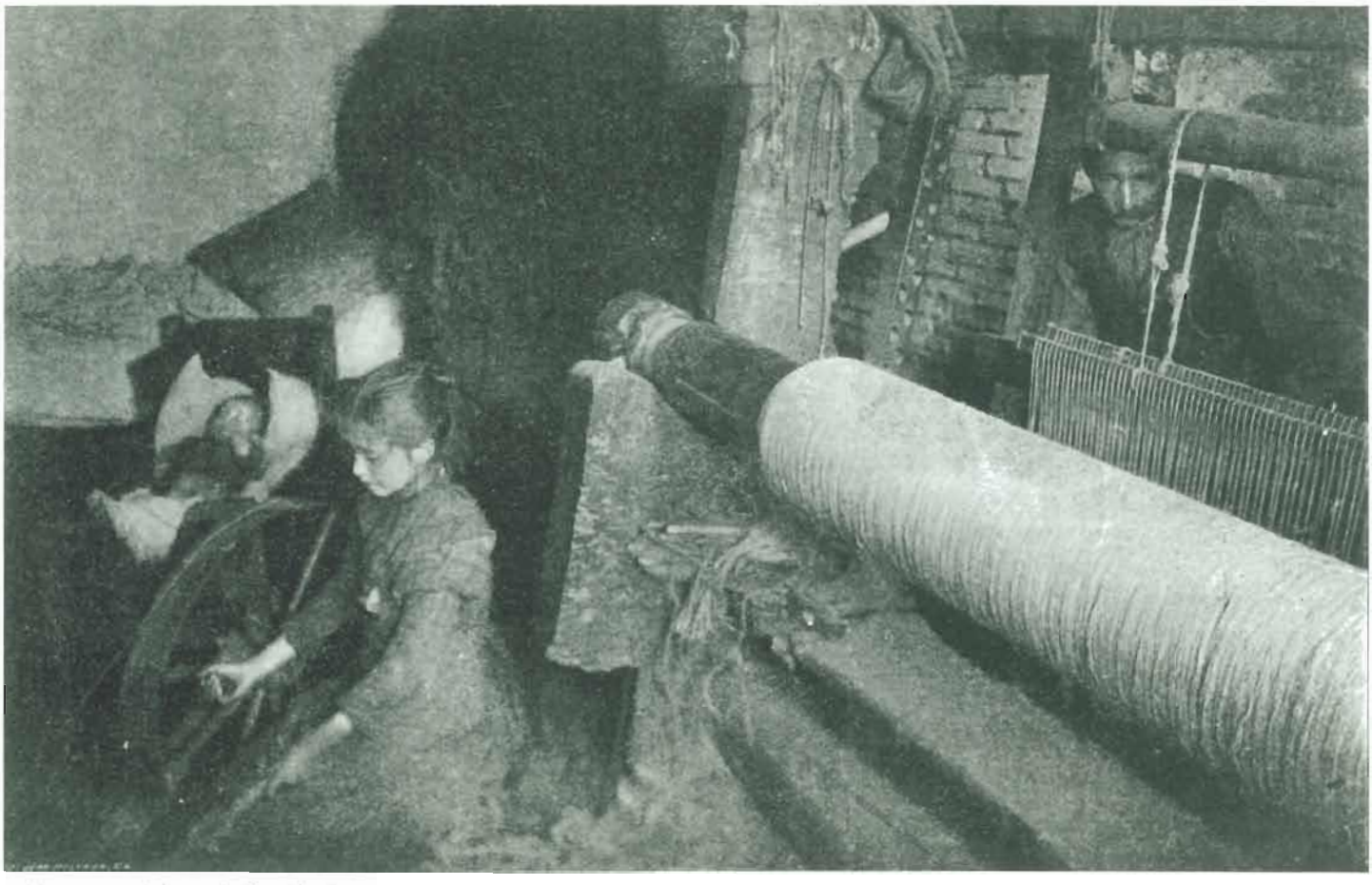
To counteract high illiteracy rates, the city council of Ghent, in 1853, set up a school for adult factory workers, offering evening classes in literacy. However, because of their long working hours, workers were unable to take full advantage of this opportunity. Consequently, the city council decided in 1861 to open a Sunday school for approximately 350 students. Enrolment was nearly double capacity, leading to the creation of a second Sunday school servicing an industrial area. Because many pupils left primary education at the age of 11, the city council set 11 as the minimum age for entry to the Sunday school rather than 14 years as suggested in government guidelines. The lower age limit facilitated the link between day classes and adult education and was clearly favourable in terms of educational efficiency. In 1865, a letter was sent to every factory in Ghent informing them of the adult education available and requesting them to encourage their workers to take it up. Sunday education was especially successful. During the 1865-1866 school year, more than 1,100 men and women factory workers followed adult education courses (44 per cent of the numbers in adult education). One industrial company, the flax spinner La Lys (from where 275 students came) even offered cash incentives to workers who excelled in these courses.[32]

Some children's schooling amounted in effect to a participation in the labour process. In the hundreds of lace schools in Flanders, girls primarily, but also boys, served an apprenticeship from the age of five or six. In theory they were first given a general education before gradually acquiring qualifications in lacemaking. By the age of 12, they were considered fully skilled lacemakers, and they were kept at the schools until they were 18. Their work contribution covered the costs of their schooling and maintenance. Sometimes they were paid a supplement, but it was very small. Even their contemporaries were very much aware of this form of exploitation.[33]

Second-chance schools were established in the 1840s to re-educate girls who had become unemployed due to the decline of the Flemish linen industry. Girls were trained in handwork (lace and linen), but received only scant general instruction, usually religious. In 1845, there were 611 of these private institutions, servicing 35,996 students. By 1857, their numbers had shot up to 962, but then declined rapidly, reaching, for example, 430 schools attended by 22,810 girls in 1875.[34] According to an 1896 commission, these schools were

> ... only small, dirty workshops where a woman with a financial interest makes these girls work beyond their capacities, apparently with the agreement of their parents. There is no other aim than to make as much profit as possible from these poor creatures' drudgery and they thereby remain deprived of any education or proper upbringing... They occupy themselves exclusively with making bobbin lace and remain sitting on their chairs for 12 of the 13 or 14 hours of the working day, their bodies permanently bent and their eyes focused on the lace pillow.[35]

31 Luykx, 1964.
32 Steels, 1978, pp. 143-144.
33 Ministère de l'Intérieur, 1848.
34 De Weerdt, 1980; De Nauw, 1987, pp. 8-10.
35 De Vroede, 1978, p. 120.



Inside a weaver's house in East Flanders at the beginning of this century. An 1889 law prohibited children under 12 from working in industry, but did not apply to cottage industries where young girls often had the twin tasks of childminding and labouring.

Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, manufacturers firmly opposed making education compulsory, claiming that many industries would be forced to close if they had to do without child labour; that factory work was an easy way for children to learn a trade; and that there was a close connection between knowledge, virtue and work. The manufacturers also voiced a widespread fear that social unrest and even social revolution would ensue if the lower social classes received too much education.[36]

Nevertheless, despite the lack of legal obligation, the number of children receiving an education increased. Factors contributing to this trend included demographic developments, governmental efforts and, generally, a greater awareness of the advantages of education. In 1845, according to one source,[37] 33.7 per cent of 7- to 14-year-olds were not educated at all, whereas by 1875 this figure had fallen to about 27 per cent. According to another source,[38] the percentage of children aged 5-14 enrolled in school rose from 48 per cent in 1846 to 60 per cent in the mid-1860s, where it would remain up until 1914. Incomplete schooling was a major concern. In 1877-1878, 80.4 per cent of the non-paying pupils left school before completing the primary cycle, compared with 62.9 per cent of the paying pupils.[39] This situation improved after the passage of the 1889 law limiting child labour. In 1897, drop-out was 9 per cent, whereas by 1910, of a total of 929,347 pupils, drop-out was only 4 per cent.[40] Table 9 shows broad trends in literacy in Belgium from 1866 to 1910.

Table 9 - **Literacy in Belgium, by gender, 1866-1910**

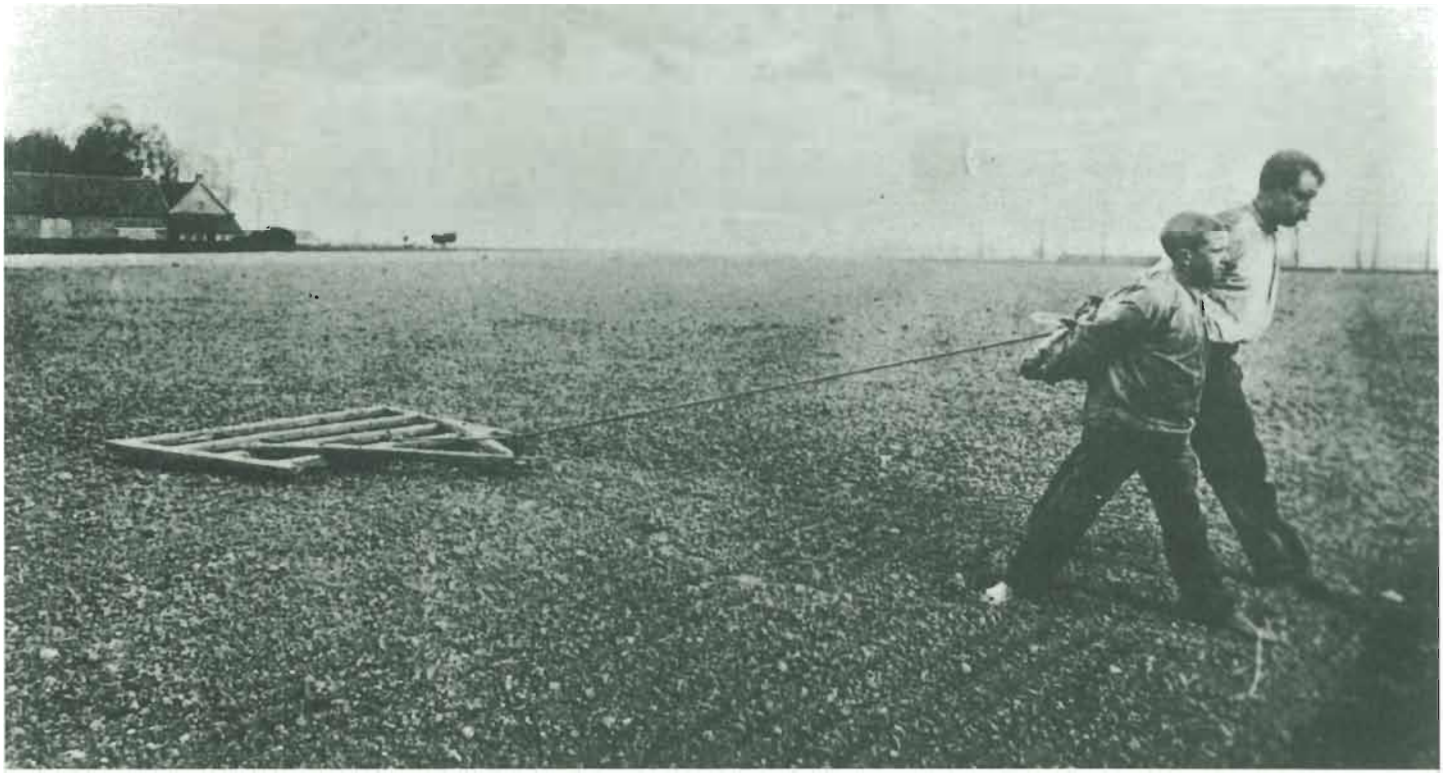
Date	Male population (000s)	No. literate (000s)	% literate	Female population (000s)	No. literate (000s)	% literate
1866	2,420	1,209	50	2,408	1,070	44
1880	2,758	1,661	60	2,762	1,527	55
1890	3,027	1,948	64	3,042	1,838	60
1900	3,325	2,309	69	3,369	2,247	67
1910	3,681	2,781	76	3,743	2,765	74

Source: Mitchell, 1981, p. 29 (all figures rounded).

Child Labour Legislation

Although Belgium in the nineteenth century was one of the most industrialized countries in Western Europe, it was the last one to introduce a law on child labour. This was not for lack of awareness of the extent and conditions of child labour. In 1841, partly as a consequence of similar enquiries in England, the government's attention was drawn to the miserable physical and moral conditions under which children had to work in Belgian industry.[41] In his speech of 8 November 1842, King Leopold announced a bill for the protection of children working in the manufacturing industry. In 1843, a special commission was appointed to enquire into the working and living conditions of the working class and at the same time to study child labour. The commission gathered information from 164 industrialists, 14 Chambers of Commerce, 8 mining engineers and 19 medical associations.[42] This led in 1848 to the introduction of a rather progressive bill which, had it been

36 De Vroede, 1978.
37 Ministère de l'Interieur, 1848.
38 Mitchell, 1981, pp. 40, 786, 789; see also Flora, 1983, pp. 561-566.
39 De Vroede, 1978, pp. 118-119.
40 De Clerck et al., 1984, p. 35.
41 De Herdt and De Graeve, 1992, p. 22.
42 Thijs, 1986, pp. 42-43; De Weerdt, 1959, pp. 17-20.



Harrowing a flax field in about 1900.

passed, would have prohibited child labour under the age of 10, and restricted the working day for 10- to 14-year-olds to 6.5 hours. Industrialists, however, were the dominant force in Belgian politics, and they successfully argued that the bill's restrictions on their economic freedom would make Belgian industry uncompetitive; it did not become law.[43]

Although industrialists remained hostile to government intervention, in the 1860s a number of them in the Ghent textile industry began to impose restrictions on themselves, employing children only when they reached the age of 12, rather than, as previously, when they were seven or eight. In other industries, however, there were no such self-imposed restrictions: an investigation in 1869 showed that there were still significant numbers of children under the age of eight employed in the cigar industry in Antwerp; in lace workshops in Bruges, Ypres and Courtrai; and in sewing workshops in Aalst. Night work for children remained common practice, especially in paper factories, sugar refineries and rolling mills. In the coal industry there were still 1,700 children working underground, and a law passed in 1884 prohibiting boys and girls under 12 from working in the mines had little practical consequence.

In 1886, there was a severe economic recession, accompanied by major strikes and serious unrest. This prompted yet another investigation into working conditions, one that led to the passage of a law in 1889 that made it illegal for a child under the age of 12 to be employed in industry at all, and for boys aged 12-16 and for girls aged 12-21 to work more than six days a week or more than 12 hours a day. Night work was prohibited for boys under 16 and for girls under 21. From 1892 onwards, girls under 21 were prohibited from working underground in mines. The law of 1889, however, applied only to industry, and not to domestic labour or farming. Moreover, in the handicraft industries, to which it did apply, it was often circumvented by registering the boys and girls as apprentices. Although other child labour laws were passed subsequent to 1889, the next decisive legislative act was the introduction of compulsory schooling for children under 14 in 1914, an act only enforced after the First World War.

In both child labour and compulsory schooling legislation, Belgium lagged behind comparable countries in Europe, a fact best explained by the dominance of bourgeois liberalism throughout the nineteenth century. It was only the severe unrest of 1886 that eventually pushed the government into legislation which was still less restrictive of child labour than in other countries.

Some Conclusions

Belgium made extensive use of child labour in virtually every sector of the economy; it was an essential element both in agriculture and in industrial processes. Belgium lagged behind comparable countries in its failure to take any steps to control child labour by means of legislation until the late nineteenth century (in the case of child labour laws) or the early twentieth century (in the case of compulsory schooling laws). There is evidence that a consequence of this was a lower level of schooling and a higher level of child labour than existed in other countries at a similar stage of economic development. It is easier to state this than to explain it, but it is likely that it is connected to a balance of political forces which effectively gave power to the industrial bourgeoisie who themselves had espoused an ideology hostile to any state intervention. Although most Belgian children almost certainly received some schooling prior to the Act of 1914 which made it compulsory up to the age of 14, that voluntary school attendance was compatible with an extensive engagement by children in a wide variety of forms of child labour.

43 Kuypers, 1957, pp. 60-62.

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COMBATING CHILD LABOUR: THE BRITISH EXPERIENCE

by Hugh Cunningham*

It is easy in the late twentieth century to lose sight of the fact that attempts to make child labour illegal and to bring it to an end are of comparatively recent date. Until the late eighteenth century, governments and voluntary organizations devoted their efforts not to stopping child labour but to forms of job creation which would ensure that children had work. In Britain, John Locke in the 1690s proposed that working schools be set up in each parish "to which the children of all such as demand relief of the parish, above three and under fourteen years of age, whilst they live at home with their parents, and are not otherwise employed for their livelihood ... shall be obliged to come". A century later, Schools of Industry were being established and received the endorsement of the Prime Minister, William Pitt, who noted, in 1796, "the advantages of early employing [children] in such branches of manufactures as they are capable to execute".[1]

The reasoning behind moves of this kind was that employment would help prevent the much-feared idleness of children: idleness, it was believed, would lead to disorder, and to children growing up without having been habituated to the labour that would be their lot in life. As late as 1840, the Mayor of Liverpool was deploring the "want of employment for children" in that city, leading to children running wild in the streets and living "by plunder".[2]

When, therefore, opposition to child labour began to be voiced, it was in the face of a previously unchallenged tradition that, for the mass of children, labour was both necessary and desirable. With hindsight we may come to think that the eventual abolition of child labour was inevitable; in fact, it was entirely unpredictable. Industrialization was seen not as an assault on childhood itself, but as offering the opportunity of finding jobs for chil-

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1 Cunningham, 1990, p. 128; Cunningham, 1991, p. 32.

2 Quoted in Winstanley, 1995, p. 10.

dren who might otherwise be without them. By the 1830s it had come to be thought that the more industrialized a country was, the more it would make use of child labour.

It is against this background of the unexpectedness of the campaigns against child labour that I should like to explore some of the facets of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century experience in Britain that seem to have most relevance for developing countries today. These are the extent of child labour; the relationship between schooling and child labour; the role of government and of campaigning groups; the debate about the half-timers — those who were both in work and at school; working-class families' and their children's valuation of child labour; and fertility decline and the end of child labour.

The Extent of Child Labour

The census figures (Table 1) provide the best, though inadequate, guide to the extent of child labour. These percentages are almost certainly an understatement of the actual extent of child labour, perhaps particularly in later censuses where people may have feared prosecution if their children were not at school; and they do not reveal the doubtless numerous children, particularly girls, who were working unpaid at home looking after younger siblings or helping around the house.[3] It is worth noting that the percentages for 10- to 14-year-olds in employment in the third quarter of the century are comparable to those in many parts of the developing world today.

Table 1 - **Percentage of children recorded as working, by age range, England and Wales, 1851-1911**

	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911
Boys 5-9	2.0	2.0	0.8	—	—	—	—
Girls 5-9	1.4	1.1	0.7	—	—	—	—
Boys 10-14	36.6	36.9	32.1	22.9	26.0	21.9	18.3
Girls 10-14	19.9	20.2	20.5	15.1	16.3	12.0	10.4

Source: Census of England and Wales

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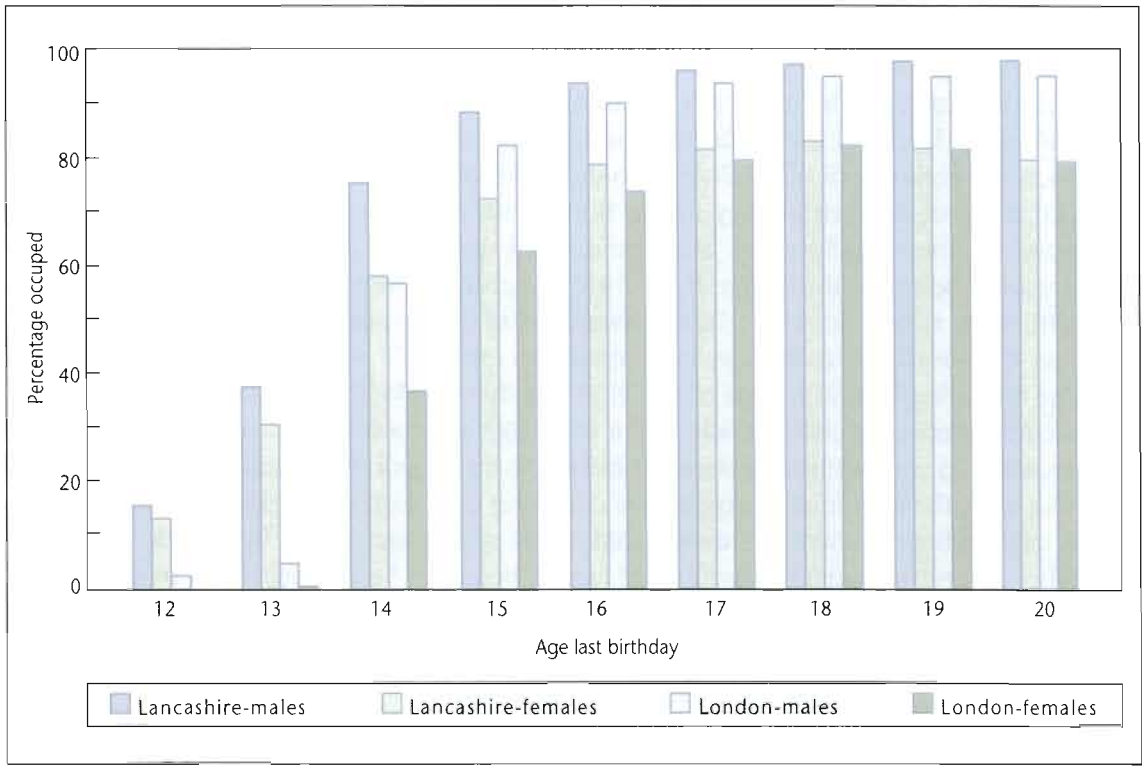


Figure 1
Workforce participation rates of population under 21, London and Lancashire, 1911
Source: Census of England and Wales 1911, Cd. 7018, Tables 14B and 14C.

3 Higgs, 1989, pp. 82-85.

At first glance, the trend in these figures may suggest a steady decline in the amount of child labour. In 1881, it was felt to be no longer worth recording the employment of children aged 5-9 because the numbers were so small. By 1911 the percentage of the 10- to 14-year-old age range in employment was about half what it had been in 1851. Nevertheless, within this age range there were increases in the percentage employed in 1861 compared with 1851, and in 1891 compared with 1881 — the latter increase studiously ignored by the Registrar-General in 1891 who chose to draw a more comforting comparison with 1871. In 1901, the 1891 increase was ascribed to 'special industrial conditions', implying that when there was a boom in the economy, child labour increased. If we had a year-by-year census of child labour, rather than one at 10-year intervals, we might find considerable fluctuation within the overall downward trend.

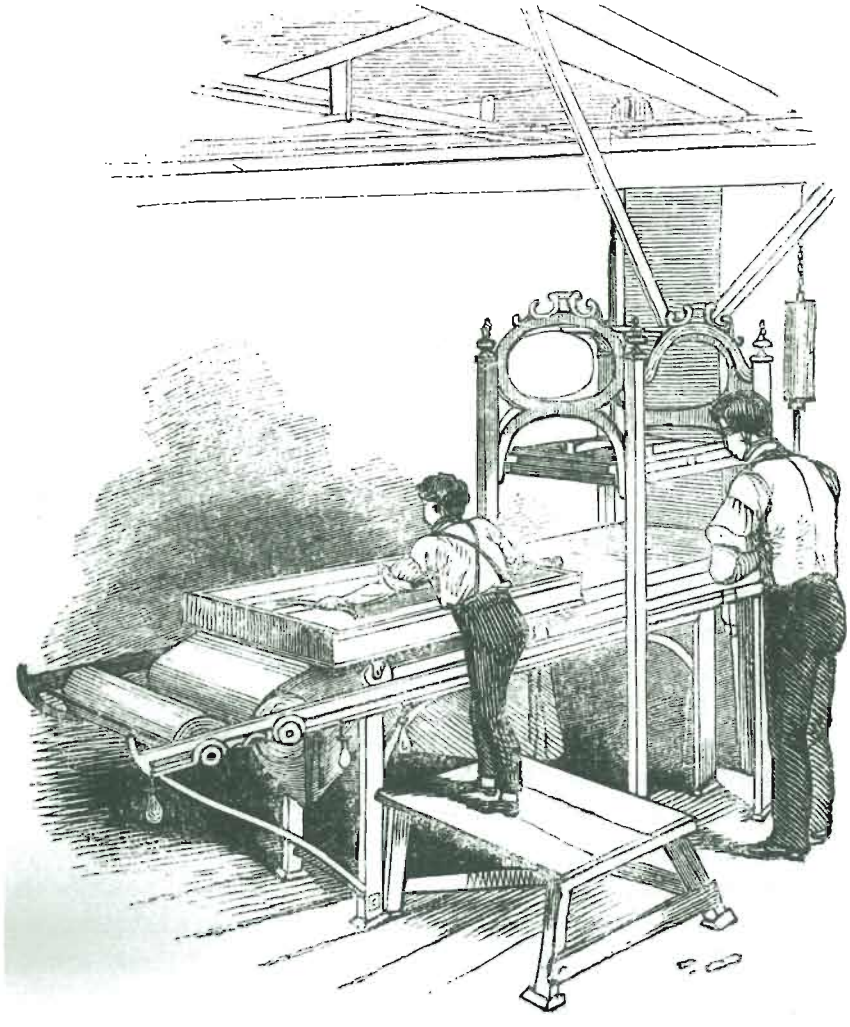
The figures in Table 1 are for England and Wales as a whole, and they conceal the most significant fact about child labour in these years: the amount of it varied enormously from one part of the country to another and even within towns quite closely adjacent to one another. This variation persisted through time; for example, at whatever date one looks, the textile areas of Yorkshire and Lancashire have relatively high child employment rates. In 1851, over half the 10- to 14-year-old boys in the textile districts of Yorkshire were employed, compared with a mere 18 per cent in Middlesex. Similarly, Figure 1 for 1911 shows the very much earlier entry to the labour force in Lancashire compared with London. As a general rule, girls had lower employment rates than boys, but in 1911 a 14-year-old girl in Lancashire was more likely to be in paid employment than a boy of the same age in London. Within Lancashire, whereas over 80 per cent of 14-year-old girls were employed in many textile towns in 1911, less than 20 per cent were employed in St Helens, a glass-making town in the same county.[4] We can almost certainly ascribe these differences to variations in the opportunities for child labour, rather than to any deeply engrained differences in parental or employer attitudes, though the significantly lower child employment levels in Scotland as compared with England and Wales may reflect a higher valuation of schooling in Scotland, with roots reaching back to the Calvinist Reformation.[5]

The opportunities for child labour were strongest in two types of economic situation: first, where, as in textiles, children worked alongside and in an ancillary capacity to adults; and second, where there were occupational niches that children filled almost exclusively. The ratio of child to adult labour varied enormously from occupation to occupation. Boys were to be found in most occupations, but by the early twentieth century they were particularly likely to find work in so-called blind alley jobs (for example, as messengers or newspaper vendors) in which adult employment was rare or non-existent. For girls, employment opportunities were much more restricted, over half of those under 14 in employment in 1911 being in textiles and over a third of the remainder in domestic service.

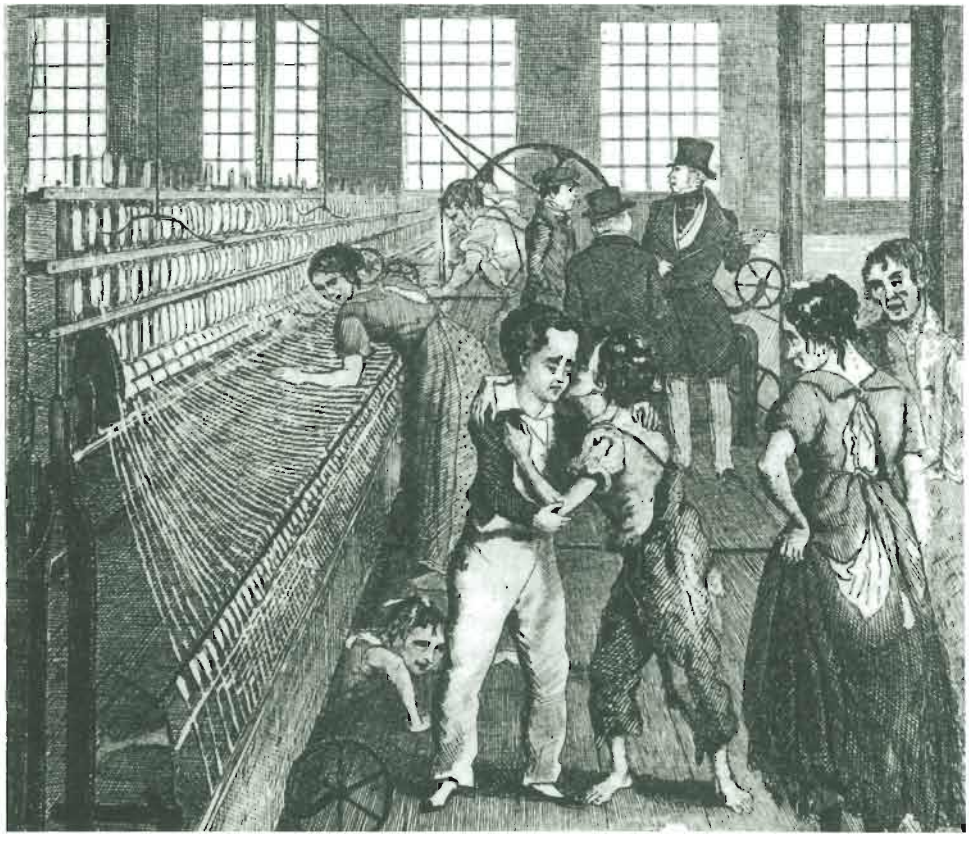
Schooling

It is widely argued now that the most effective way of ending child labour is by making school compulsory. There is certainly evidence that the introduction of compulsory schooling in Britain in 1880 was associated with a decline in the proportion of children described as in the workforce. Moreover, compulsory schooling not only increased the number of children at school but also edged up the age at which entry to the workforce became a norm. Thus, although the percentage of 10- to 14-year-olds in work declined by about half between 1851 and 1911, the percentage of 12-year-olds (and *a fortiori* of 10- and 11-year-olds) fell much more dramatically: for boys, from 34 to 5 per cent; and for girls,

4 Winstanley, 1995, p. 16.
5 Hunt, 1981, p. 17.



There were many employment opportunities for children in textile mills, where they worked alongside and in an ancillary capacity to adults. The boy in this illustration, taken from G. Dodd's *Textile Manufactures of Great Britain*, London, 1844, is applying colours to blocks.



Young children were also used for scavenging waste materials that fell under the looms, as can be seen in this 1840 illustration taken from Frances Trollope's *Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy*.

from 18 to 3 per cent. The 18.3 per cent of 10- to 14-year-old boys and the 10.4 per cent of girls in employment in 1911 were nearly all 13 or 14.[6] But, despite this evidence of the positive effect of schooling on reducing child labour, the relationship between schooling and child labour is much more complex than one might imagine.

In Britain the vast majority of children received some schooling before schooling was made compulsory. The reasons for making it compulsory were basically two. The first was to compel those children described in the census of 1871 as 'unemployed' to go to school: 22 per cent of boys and 30 per cent of girls aged 5-14 were neither 'scholars' nor 'engaged in occupations', but 'sons and daughters at home, and others of no stated occupation'. As Table 2 shows, the decline in the proportion in this category of the census was more rapid than the decline for those in occupations. Secondly, compulsion was designed to make sure that schools were of a standard acceptable to government. Figures for school enrolment and attendance are as fraught with difficulties as those for child labour. The government's preferred mode of measurement was of 'the average number of children attending inspected day schools', and, as Figure 2 shows, on this scale of measurement the proportion of those aged 5-14 at school rose from a mere 6.2 per cent in 1851 to 74.8 per cent in 1911. The census figures are a useful check for they show, for example, that in 1851 almost exactly half of all those aged 5-14 were returned as 'scholars' — that is to say, they were in some form of school. Most children were receiving some form of schooling, but only a minority were receiving it in inspected day schools.

Table 2 - **Occupational status of children aged 5-14 in England and Wales as a percentage in the total age range**

	Boys			Girls		
	1851	**1861**	**1871**	**1851**	**1861**	**1871**
Scholars	50.5	57.7	62.2	49.1	58.4	59.7
At home	30.9	23.7	22.1	40.7	31.5	30.3
Occupied	18.6	18.6	15.7	10.2	10.1	10.0

Source: Census of England and Wales, 1871.

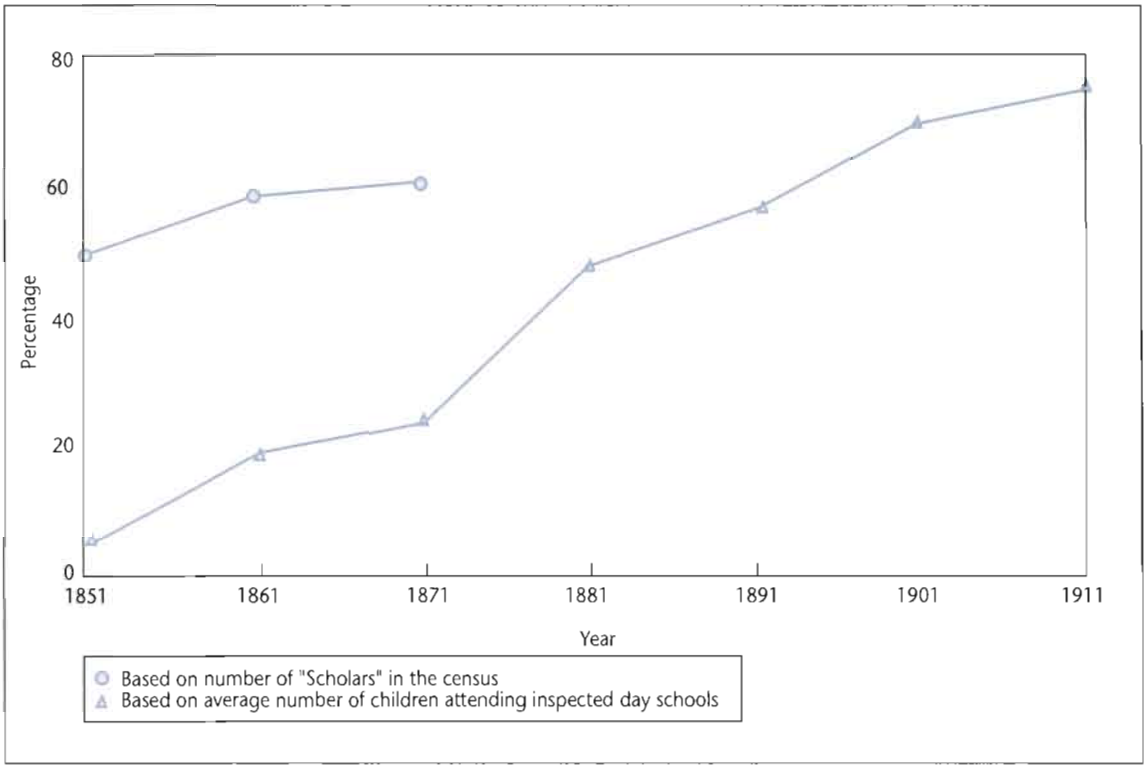


Figure 2
Children in school in England and Wales as a percentage of all children aged 5-14, 1851-1911.
Source: Calculated from 1871 Census of England and Wales, and from Mitchell and Jones, 1971, pp. 212-213.
Note: Average attendance was calculated by dividing the total number of attendances recorded by the number of times the school was in session.

6 Heward, 1993, pp. 237-238.

Enforcing compulsion in government-inspected schools was no easy task, and involved thousands of people in court appearances. In England and Wales there were nearly 100,000 prosecutions a year for truancy in the 1880s, and although the number had dropped to 37,000 by 1910, the offence was second only to drunkenness out of all those brought before the courts.[7] Those trying to enforce compulsion often found, to their disgust, that magistrates sympathized with the non-attenders. The process of making people accept that regular attendance at schooling was normal may be seen as stretching out over some 30 years.

It is apparent that one reason for opposition to schooling was a dislike of the formality of compulsory schooling and the syllabus that went with it. Such was the dislike that working-class people preferred to send their children to private schools where fees were payable but where the government had no control, and where children could attend when it was convenient that they did so. Families appear to have had an instrumental attitude to schooling, seeing it as a place for learning basic skills in reading, writing and arithmetic. In the colliery districts of the North-East of England, it was reported in the 1860s, parents "regard schooling, not as a course of discipline, but only as a means of acquiring reading, writing, arithmetic, sewing, and knitting, as a preparation for the main business of life — earning a living".[8] By contrast, government was looking to schooling as "a course of discipline", which would inculcate such values as individual competitiveness, Christianity and imperialism. Although it is possible to exaggerate the degree of hostility to schooling, there nevertheless remains a core of evidence that many working-class people, both parents and children, found state schools alien and forbidding places.[9] Keith Thomas's assessment of schooling in early modern England as "a repressive regime, governed autocratically, sustained by corporal punishment and tempered only by the master's mildness, incapacity, or financial dependence upon his pupils" might with some justice be applied to late nineteenth-century England.[10]

If the introduction of compulsory schooling is indeed the most effective way of combating child labour, the British evidence adds some important qualifications: opposition to child labour is not necessarily the reason for introducing compulsion; enforcing compulsion is no easy task; and the experience of school may be such that it is not entirely obvious that children are better off at school than at work.[11]

There is another feature of compulsory schooling in Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that will be immediately recognizable to those who have studied it in developing countries: compulsory schooling could coexist with the continuance of child labour. As well as truanting, children worked before school, after school and at weekends. In the United Kingdom on the eve of the First World War, over 30 years after compulsory schooling had been introduced, there were over half a million children under 14 in employment, most of them school children who had part-time jobs, typically as messengers or deliverers of newspapers.[12]

Government and Campaigning Groups

The history of attempts to control child labour in Britain by government action is normally seen as starting in 1802, and stretching out from that point to become more and more effective and encompassing more and more forms of child labour. As the Fabian Sidney Webb was to put it in 1910, "Each successive statute aimed at remedying a single ascertained evil". The outcome was the acceptance of "the principle of a 'national minimum' in the standard of life, to be prescribed by the community, and secured by law to every one

7 Hurt, 1979, p. 203.
8 Ibid., p. 31.
9 Humphries, 1981; Rose, 1993.
10 Thomas, 1976, p. 14.
11 These issues are explored further in Hopkins, 1994, especially pp. 219-263.
12 Keeling, 1914.

Children engaged in 'sweated' trades in the home were among the most exploited part-time employees in the early twentieth century. A mother and her children at work making boxes.

of its citizens"; and from Britain, argued Webb, "this principle has spread to every industrial community in the Old World and the New".[13] What must first of all strike us is that this principle, a century and more after it first began dimly to be perceived, was still not fully enforced in 1910; Webb was aware of the areas of national life that it did not reach. Moreover, there is a long time span — 30 years — between the first Factory Act of 1802 and the first one reckoned to be in any way effective, that of 1833; and even that covered only one industry, textiles. If factory laws did, as the evidence shows, effectively reduce the amount of child labour in the areas of the economy that they covered, it was only after a long period when they failed to achieve this end.

In the early stages of this process, the government was responding to external pressure rather than legislation being the outcome of some dynamic within government itself. The 1833 Factory Act is rightly remembered as the first effective Factory Act; it should also be remembered as an Act passed by a government seeking to outmanoeuvre its opponents, who wanted a more wide-ranging Act with much stiffer penalties for offenders. The Act was the outcome of a political contest, and would not have come into being without the agitation for reform. This campaign is central to an understanding of the British experience in combating child labour. It had its origins in the early trade unions in the textile areas, and it was fertilized by a rhetoric drawing on the romantic image of childhood as articulated by Blake and Wordsworth, and by the support of middle- and upper-class critics of the 'factory system'. What these people were confronting was the shock of the new, a factory system that seemed to them socially unnatural and economically fragile. In the 1830s and 1840s, although government shaped the actual terms of legislation, in resorting to legislation at all it was responding to an outside pressure of enormous proportions. This raises the question as to whether child labour can be combated effectively without a mobilization and articulation of public opinion on a massive scale. The initial steps to control child labour in Britain were achieved not by government and non-government organizations working in reasonable harmony towards an agreed goal, but by a campaign, employing every means of publicity at its disposal, to persuade or force government into action. Only when those initial measures proved to be perfectly compatible with the successful pursuit of profit by entrepreneurs did there emerge, in the second half of the century, a moderate amount of quiet cooperation between government and a much less vociferous pressure for reform. Statute began to be added to statute in the way Webb described.

This was easy enough to do in factories, and to a lesser extent in workshops, defined as places with less than 50 workers. The difficulty arose in those areas of the economy that we would now describe as 'informal': children at work on the canals, or in brickworks, or in the theatre; or women and children in the sweated trades where they worked at home on industrial tasks. An outcry was raised about this latter type of labour in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but the officials in the Home Office, though they did not deny the extent of child labour, commented that "legislation even if carried could not be enforced".[14] Campaigners were concerned that the effect of factory legislation might be simply to divert child labour from the formal to the informal economy where exploitation would be less visible and possibly more extreme.

The Half-time Solution

Although there were powerful voices in Britain from the 1830s articulating the view that children should not work at all, this was far from being the position of the government or of officialdom. In the 1860s, the Newcastle Commission on education did not doubt that

13 Hutchins and Harrison, 1966, p. vii.
14 Cunningham, 1991, p. 178.

The children pictured in this pre-1914 photograph were among approximately one hundred half-timers employed by Horrockses, Crewdson & Co. Ltd., Farnworth, one of the largest weaving sheds in the United Kingdom. According to an 1899 *Daily News* report, many half-timers were undersized and underweight for their age. Half-time work finally came to an end in 1918.

"if the wages of the child's labour are necessary, either to keep the parents from the poor rates, or to relieve the pressure of severe and bitter poverty, it is far better that it should go to work at the earliest age at which it can bear the physical exertion rather than it should remain at school".[15] As late as 1901, an official report was asserting that "all children should have liberty to work as much, and in such ways as is good for them, and no more": a framework of law was necessary to ensure that the "no more" was not exceeded, but otherwise children should be free to labour.[16] This took account of the views both of employers, who often asserted the necessity of child labour for the profitability of their businesses, and of parents, who proclaimed the importance of the contribution of child wages to the family economy. For a period of some 30 or 40 years from the 1840s, the method of allowing some child labour under legal control while also enforcing a degree of schooling was the half-time system. Essentially the half-time system was a means of reconciling the perceived needs of business and family economies with the sense that some level of schooling was necessary for the successful reproduction of society. It should not be seen as an expression of a disapproval of child labour. The aim of its most ardent advocate, Edwin Chadwick, was to work out a system of schooling that would take away as little time as possible from labour. In the 1870s, he was arguing "that compulsory detention to mental instruction in all elementary schools should be limited to three hours daily", which would leave time for physical training "whilst it will extend the freedom for productive occupation of children, which is itself a high practical moral condition, to which it is submitted that school-teaching should be subordinate".[17] Such statements are a necessary and salutary reminder that there was no universal consensus in nineteenth-century Britain that child labour in itself was wrong.

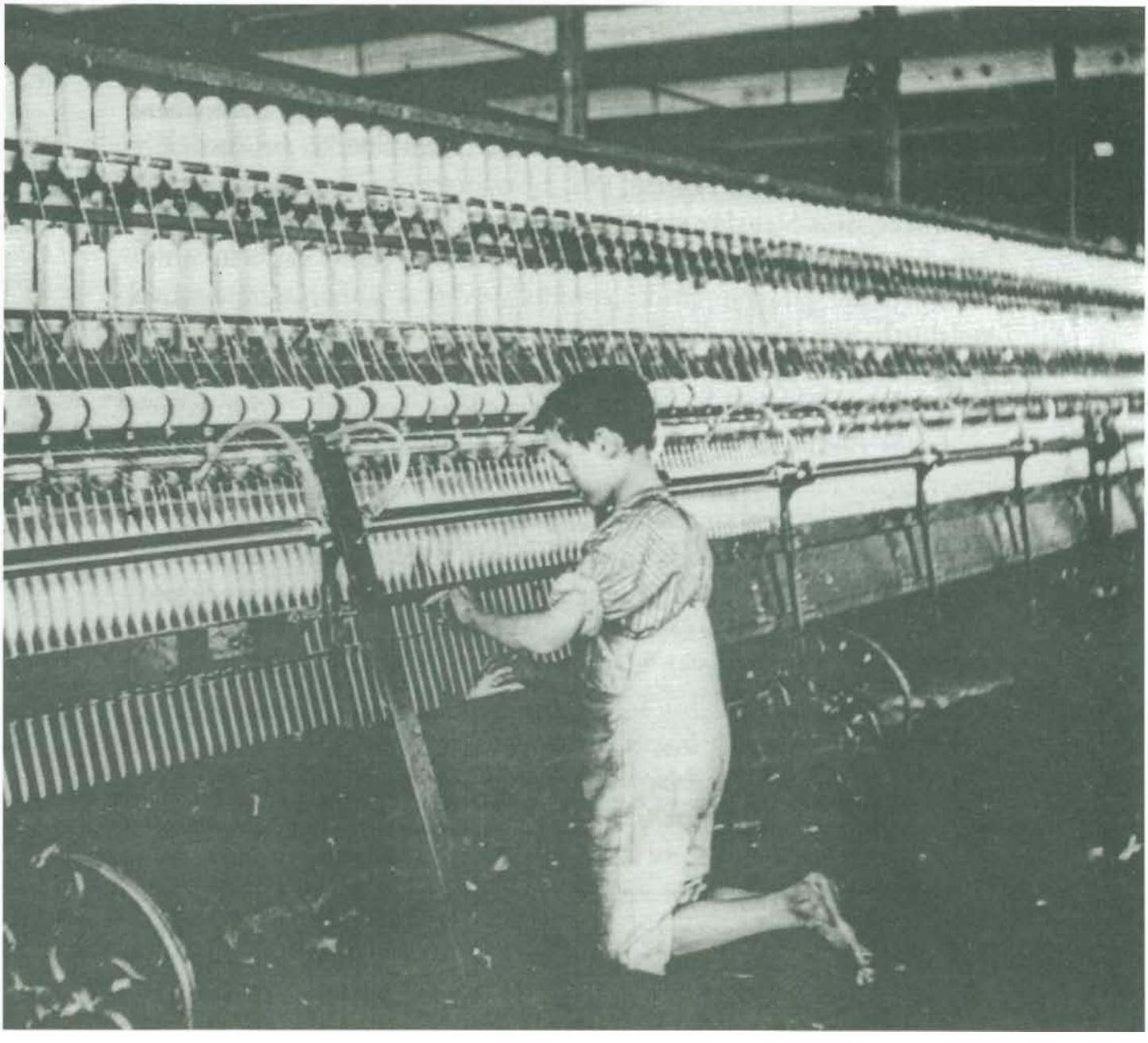
The half-time solution to child labour, to which the government was fully committed in the third quarter of the century, came under increasing fire from the last quarter of the nineteenth century until its eventual abolition in 1918. Why was this? Most of the opposition seemed to come from teachers who argued that the half-timers were too tired to learn anything effective in school, and had at work learned adult ways of behaviour and speech which made them disruptive and difficult to control at school.[18]

Child Labour and the Family Economy

The opponents of the half-time system confronted a degree of opposition within the Lancashire working class which ensured that the system survived for nearly half a century after criticism of it first became vocal. Child labour found its strongest and most persistent advocates within the working class, much to the embarrassment of trade union leaders at national level who had internalized a sense of shame at the existence of child labour. How, then, was child labour viewed by children themselves and by their families?

The answer is that it depended greatly on the economic circumstances. The circumstances in which there was likely to be most opposition to child labour were those in which adult male workers felt threatened by technological changes that might be accompanied by a substitution of children for adults. Employers in a situation of competitive capitalism had an interest in reducing their costs as far as possible, and labour costs could obviously be reduced if children formed a substantial part of the workforce. The only downside to the substitution of child for adult labour would come if child labour actually turned out to be less efficient or productive than adult labour. This process of substitution was widely perceived to be almost unstoppable in the cotton industry in the first half of the century. It met with considerable resistance when it began to be applied to the boot and shoe

15 Hurt, 1979, p. 36.
16 Cunningham, 1991, p. 180.
17 Ibid., p. 169.
18 See further Bolin-Hort, 1989, pp. 208-247.



A wide range of jobs became labelled as children's jobs during the nineteenth century. One of those was 'piecing', or the tedious task of joining threads during the spinning and winding process. Here a young piecer works on a mule in an Oldham spinning mill, c. 1900.

industry and in engineering industries later in the nineteenth century. Trade unions had the full support of their adult male members in resisting this substitution of adults by children.

Child labour was much less likely to be resisted if it did not challenge adult male labour, and in particular if it played an ancillary role in labour processes in which adult males had an established place. What we see in the nineteenth century is an expansion of the child labour market in the sense that a wider range of jobs became labelled as children's jobs. Children had always worked in agriculture in a subordinate way, and as domestic servants, and those remained the largest single occupations in which they worked. But they also came to play a central role in occupations that had been created around them, in particular straw-plaiting and lacemaking. It comes as something of a surprise to those brought up on stories of children at work in factories and mines to find that the county in which the highest proportion of children were recorded as at work in 1871 was Bedfordshire, a centre of the straw-plaiting and lacemaking industries.

The fundamental assumption in working-class areas was that children should contribute to the family economy as soon as they were able to. Children themselves naturally accepted this, and often expressed pride in their contributions. The reasons for this acceptance of child labour were fundamentally and straightforwardly economic: children's contributions could make a substantial difference to a family's standard of living. In his famous study of poverty in York at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Rowntree divided the working class into different classes by family income. He noted, for example, how "many of those now in Class 'B' will rise into a higher class as soon as their children begin to earn money", and added that "the importance attaching to the earnings of the children in the families of the poor reminds us how great must be the temptation to take children away from school at the earliest possible moment, in order that they may begin to earn".[19]

It is less obvious why families chose to add to their income by child rather than adult female labour, though that this was the case seems undoubted. With the notable, though only partial, exception of the Lancashire textile industry, married women were remarkable for their absence from the statistics of those recorded as in employment. This did not mean that they did not work, both in unpaid housework, and in paid casual labour, and there may well have been an economic rationality in married women contributing to the family economy in this way rather than in formal employment. But there seems also to be a social aspect to this, entrenched in custom, wherein mothers became the central focus of the family in emotional terms, and the careful spenders of whatever income the family raised. The reversal of this pattern of expectations did not occur until after the Second World War; thereafter mothers worked for the sake of their children rather than vice versa.

Fertility Decline and the End of Child Labour

In Britain the ending of child labour was accompanied by a new valuation of childhood. It is not at all easy to say how much this was the cause and how much the consequence of the end of child labour. In the new valuation, children had a worth higher than that of other members of the family; the balance of power changed and the flow of economic resources began to go from parents to children, not from children to parents. It is a process perhaps encapsulated in the London working-class mother in the 1950s who recalled how in her own childhood her father would eat any food left over, but now, "if there's one pork chop left, the kiddie gets it".[20] This new valuation of children went hand in hand with a reduction in the number of children per family (Figure 3). How far was the fertility decline linked to child labour? Theoretically the two could be linked in a number of ways. Perhaps

19 Rowntree, 1902, pp. 59-60.
20 Cunningham, 1995, p. 183.

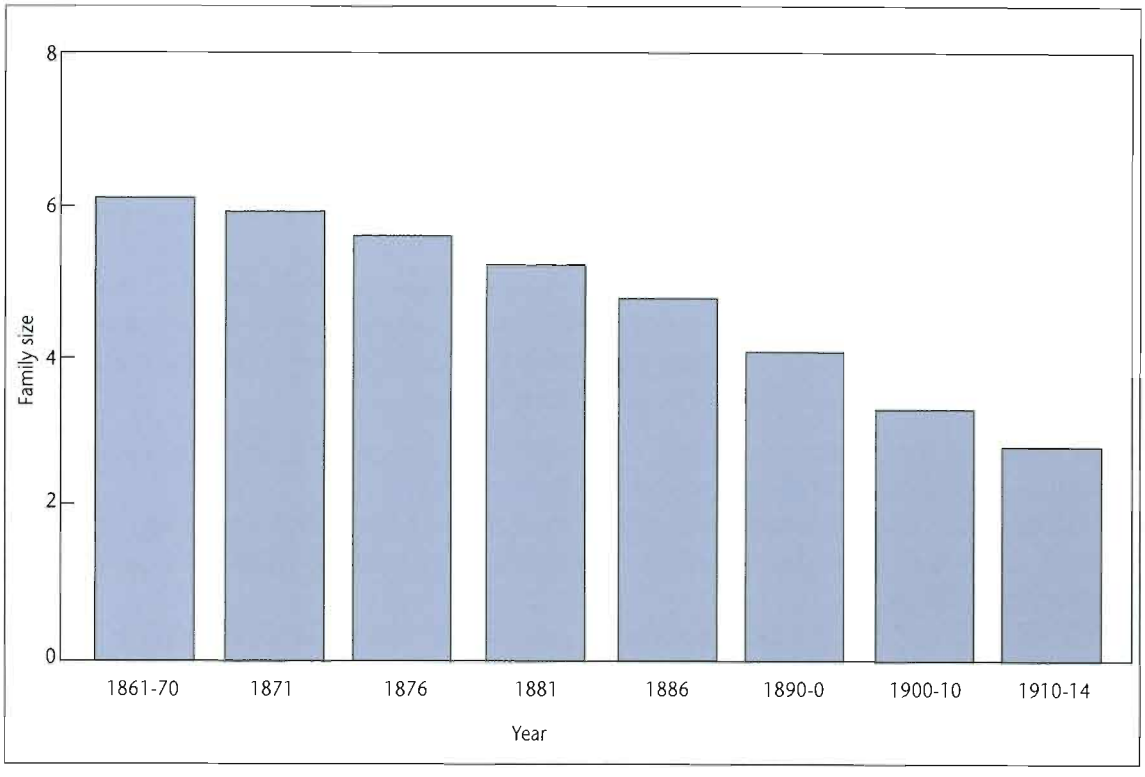


Figure 3
The decline in family size, by marriage cohorts in England and Wales, 1861-1914
Source: Wrigley, 1969, p. 197
Note: Size of family is the mean ultimate family size of marriages contracted when the woman was under 45.

people decided to have fewer children when it was clear that, because of compulsory schooling and factory laws, children were a cost; that is, the fertility decline could be seen as a consequence of other measures that were restricting child labour. Or it could be that, as a family strategy, irrespective of laws, people decided that the best way to manage the family economy was to have a relatively small number of children, invest in their education, and reap the benefits in terms of increased incomes and social mobility in the children's generation; in this scenario, fertility decline and the reduction of child labour are inextricably linked. Or it could be that mothers in particular were determined to escape from the long years of childbearing, the consequent strain on health and the associated poverty. Or, of course, it may be some combination of these factors, operating in different ways in different families. Whatever the case, fertility levels are undoubtedly important in any discussion of the end of child labour.

In the British case, the determining factors in fertility decline may be outlined as follows. The decision to reduce the numbers of children born did not stem from a narrow family-centred desire for family advancement, but rather from an awareness, from experience, particularly on the part of mothers, of the disadvantages of large families, combined with two things: a rise in real wages, and hence in family incomes, in the later nineteenth century, which made possible an escape from what had previously been seen as the necessity of early child labour for family survival; and the laws making schooling compulsory, which at the very least delayed a child's ability to earn a significant income.[21] Fertility decline was a response to this situation. Large families became associated with child labour — and with poverty.

Some Conclusions

It is tempting both for historians and for policy makers to look for one single factor that stands above all the other possible factors in explanations for the end of child labour. Two perhaps stand out in current discussions: compulsory schooling and family strategy. The

21 Seccombe, 1990, pp. 151-188.

former calls for an apparatus of government to establish the schools and to enforce attendance. The latter depends on changes in economic and social structure, in themselves hardly susceptible to government action, whereby parents will decide to invest in their children's future rather than seek to maximize income from their labour.[22] Neither merit the kind of faith that may be placed in them. What the experience of Britain seems to show is that the ending of child labour, a process never complete, is the outcome of a multiplicity of factors interlocking in unpredictable ways.

The reduction of child labour is likely to require some positive action on the part of government in the shape of child labour laws and of schooling laws, but these in themselves, however vigorous the attempts to enforce them, are unlikely to be successful. They can operate successfully only if three conditions are met:

- An economy that raises a sufficient number of people to a level where it is feasible to do without a child's contribution to the family economy;
- A belief on the part of employers that they can achieve competitive advantage by investment in technology or in skilled labour, rather than by keeping down their labour costs by employing children;
- The existence of information networks, particularly among women, which make a reduction in child numbers possible.

If these circumstances are met, there may fairly rapidly follow a revaluation of children in the way I have described. Children become an undoubted cost (it costs £100,000 to raise a child in Britain today), and ironically are valued more highly when they are such a cost in comparison with when they were, at least potentially, an asset.

22 See Nardinelli, 1990.

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FAMILY STRATEGIES AND CHILDREN'S WORK PATTERNS: SOME INSIGHTS FROM INDUSTRIALIZING CATALONIA – 1850-1920 –

by Enriqueta Camps i Cura* [1]

Recent studies in family history have emphasized the flexibility with which families in the past made use of all of their labour resources.[2] In particular, it has been argued that patterns of labour force participation among 'secondary' wage earners (wives, children and other co-residing relatives) can be properly understood only when the internal dynamics of domestic groups and their adaptive strategies are fully taken into account. A plausible hypothesis, advanced both for industrializing regions in the nineteenth century and for present-day developing countries, is that the activity rates of working-class wives and children are negatively correlated with the income of the male household heads. The strong positive correlation that tended to exist between the vibrancy of a region's economy and the level of male earnings suggests that, in periods of deep crisis, entrepreneurs made increasing use of the cheaper labour of women and children. When the formal economy failed and male unemployment rose, 'family teams' made up of wives and children sometimes provided the family's only income through their work in the informal sector. Yet, even in times of prosperity, the contributions that women and children made to the family income could become critical. This was most obviously the case when families were afflicted by illness, death and other adversities, but the need for contributions from secondary wage earners also varied as a function of the family life cycle.

Historical studies have often found that the income of the principal male wage earner peaked rather early in the life cycle, while expenditures peaked later. This created a gap which had to be bridged by secondary workers and was done so in various ways. In some areas, or periods, families preferred to send children into the labour market, restricting women's wage labour; in other cases, they apparently preferred to rely on women's earn-

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2 Wall, 1986; Delille, 1990; Camps and Reher, forthcoming.

ing capacities.[3] The reasons for these different adaptive strategies are not always clear. Undoubtedly, a number of economic, technological and legal constraints prevented families from freely deploying their members in the labour market, and different patterns of women's and children's work might simply reflect the varying strength of these constraints. Some historians believe, however, that the persistence of traditional domestic roles and other factors broadly labelled as 'cultural' might have carried equal or greater weight in shaping family responses.

This chapter examines these highly complex issues from the perspective of the historical experience of industrializing Catalonia. Supporting data have been derived from a detailed study of Sabadell, a medium-sized urban centre located some 20 km north-west of Barcelona. In the second half of the nineteenth century, when industrial production shifted to the factory system, Sabadell underwent a rapid process of economic and demographic growth. Its case is representative of the region of Catalonia in general, which by 1900 had become one the most industrialized and urbanized areas in Europe. The first part of this chapter will briefly outline the development of the textile industry in Sabadell and document significant changes in the patterns of labour force participation, especially as far as women and children were concerned. The second part will provide a framework for analysing family strategies and the family economy by focusing on how household composition, the age of the household head and the family life cycle influenced family income, expenditure and labour force participation.

Technological Innovation and Patterns of Labour Force Participation

Throughout the nineteenth century, the economic and demographic history of Sabadell was thoroughly dominated by the development of the textile industry. The town's population expanded rapidly to meet the industry's growing demand for labour. From 1787 to 1887, the population increased tenfold, reaching 20,000 inhabitants, and then doubled again in the following three decades. As in many other industrial towns, demographic growth was largely accounted for by migration from neighbouring villages as well as from more distant villages and towns specialized in textile work. In addition to weavers and spinners, migrants included peasants who combined agricultural and industrial activities.

By 1849-1850, the starting point of our research, immigrant families made up over one third of Sabadell's total population.[4] About half of the town's inhabitants were employed in the textile industry. Production was still domestic rather than factory-based, which had an important bearing on the extent and characteristics of child labour. According to an 1849 census of the working population, children accounted for approximately 13 per cent of Sabadell's textile workers (Table 1). They worked predominantly in the cotton sector where they represented nearly one quarter of the total labour force and where girls outnumbered boys (257 versus 212). On the other hand, only 90 children worked in the woolen sector, forming only 4 per cent of the total labour force.[5] This source, like many others, probably underestimated the extent that children were involved in domestic production, as their work was often considered simply an auxiliary by-employment. Moreover, there is little consensus concerning the age at which children began to help family teams in the pre-factory era: some sources claim that children as young as 6 or 7 years

3 See, for example, Haines, 1979, and Van den Eeckhout, 1993.

4 See Camps, 1992.

5 These figures are provided by a summary census of the working population *(Copiador d'oficis del 1849)* found in the municipal archives of Sabadell. Both for 1849 and for subsequent dates, activity rates have been obtained by relating statistical sources of this kind to the closest census of the total population. All the archival sources used in this chapter (including the manuscript population censuses) are preserved in the municipal archives of Sabadell.

Workers posing against a steam engine in a Sabadell factory in 1906. The steam engine, introduced in the 1850s, radically changed the age distribution of the workforce and the gendering of occupations.

were drawn into domestic production, while other sources point to a later age. The evidence concerning the productive role of women is clearer and more reliable. It shows that women participated in all stages of textile production, including manual weaving and finishing, which helps to explain why, in 1849-1850, the activity rate of adult women was as high as 70 per cent.

Table 1 - **Activity rates in Sabadell's textile industry, 1849-1850**

	Number of textile workers in 1849	Population in 1850	Activity rate %
Adult men	1,580	3,152	50.1
Adult women	2,155	3,087	69.8
Boys	240	1,153	20.8
Girls	319	1,123	28.4
All	4,294	8,515	50.4

Source: *Copiador d'oficis del 1849* and municipal population census of 1850.
Note: 'Adult' refers in this table to individuals 14 years of age and over and 'boys' and 'girls' to children under 14.

In the 1850s, Sabadell witnessed rapid changes in the organization of textile production, as technical innovation gave rise to the first forms of factory work. The introduction of the steam engine into the spinning process, in an area such as Sabadell where water-power was not available throughout the year, was instrumental in bringing production into the factory. By 1860, most spinning was undertaken in coal-powered mills, to which even entrepreneurs operating on a modest scale had access through the payment of a rental fee. It was only at this time that children's work began to be recorded more systematically, and the first reliable and detailed statistical data on the extent of child labour became available. A manuscript census of Sabadell's textile workers in 1858 provides valuable information on the age structure of the labour force and suggests that the shift from home-based production to the factory system might have raised the age at which children started to work from 6 or 7 years to 10 (Table 2).

Table 2 - **Age and gender structure of textile workers in Sabadell, 1858**

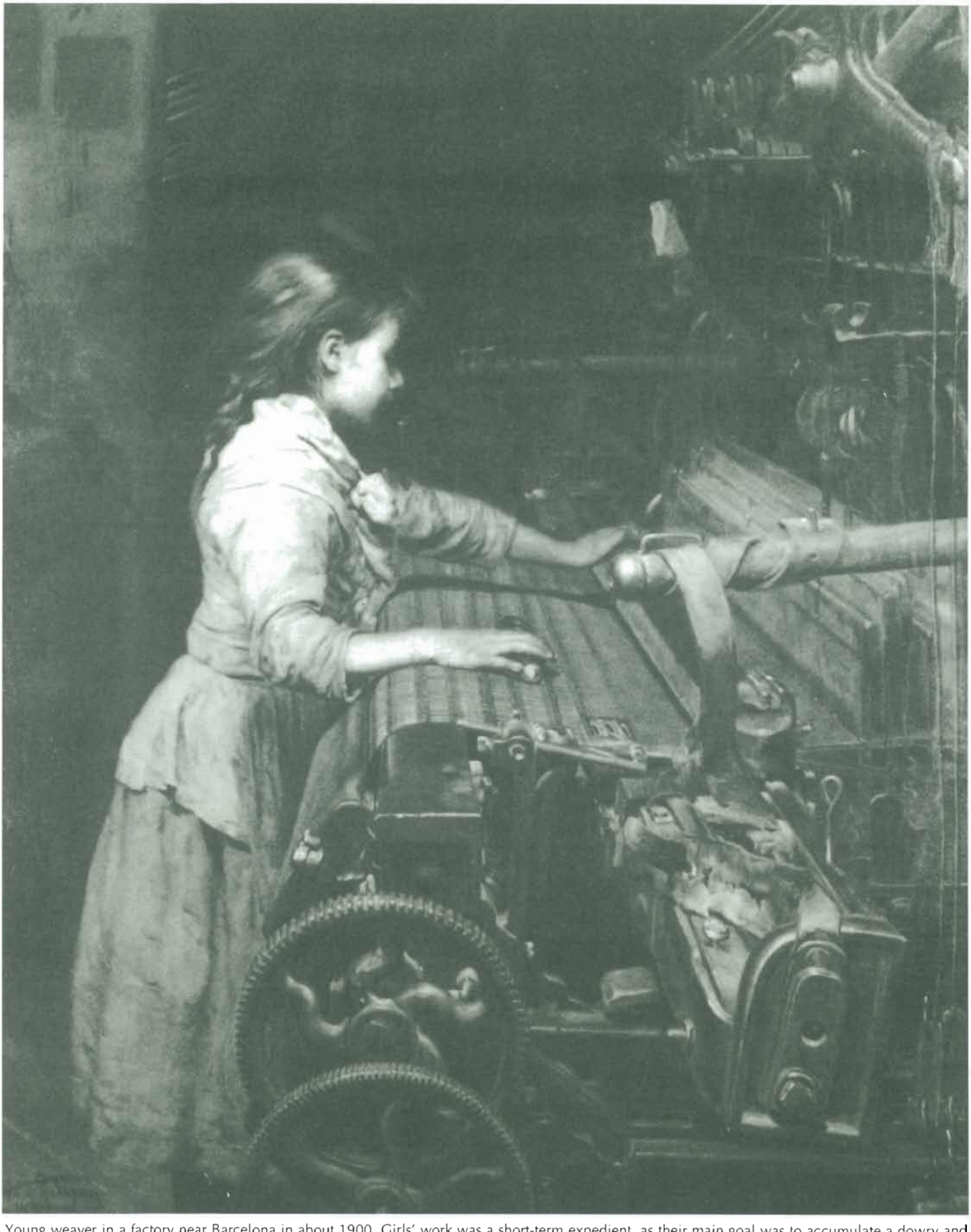
Age	Male	Female
6-10	13	2
11-15	237	183
16-20	259	408
21-25	270	361
26-30	282	186
31-35	274	155
36-40	167	60
41-45	151	68
46-50	54	33
51-55	45	35
56-60	32	14
61-65	9	11
66-70	6	7
All	1,799	1,523

Source: Manuscript census of Sabadell's workers (1858).

Technological change not only affected the age distribution of the workforce but also the gendering of occupations. When production was mechanized and moved out of the household, the economic contribution of women abruptly declined, as they were given responsibility only for a few subsidiary tasks in the production process. Although activity rates by marital status are not available, the aggregate figures in Table 3 leave little doubt that the role of married women, in particular, lost much of its previous importance. While males remained in the workforce until they were in their fifties, many women appear to have stopped work by the time they were 30-35. Only in atypical cases would a married woman continue to work after her eldest child had reached the age of 10.[6] This pattern was to remain virtually the same for about 50 years, until the early twentieth century.

Although technological change was certainly a primary factor in displacing married women from the labour force, it is likely that the economic value placed on the various kinds of work also played an important part. An analysis of the level of wages by age and gender in 1890 (Table 4) reveals not only that the difference between male

6 Throughout the nineteenth century, most women had married by the age of 23 to 25 years. See Reher and Camps, 1991.



Young weaver in a factory near Barcelona in about 1900. Girls' work was a short-term expedient, as their main goal was to accumulate a dowry and not to learn a trade.

Table 3 - **Activity rates in Sabadell's textile industry, by age and gender, 1857-1858**

Age	Male			Female		
	N. employed in 1858	Population in 1857	Rate %	N. employed in 1858	Population in 1857	Rate %
8-15	250	1,169	21.4	185	1,151	16.1
16-20	259	655	39.5	408	718	56.8
21-30	552	1,487	37.1	547	1,388	39.4
31-40	441	1,076	41.0	215	929	23.1
41-50	205	669	30.6	101	589	17.1
51-60	77	414	18.6	49	379	12.9
61-70	15	176	8.5	18	177	10.2
All	1,799	5,646	31.9	1,523	5,331	28.6

Sources: Manuscript census of Sabadell's workers (1858) and municipal population census of 1857.
Note: The age groups are those specified in the aggregated population census of 1857.

and female earnings widened markedly after the age of 20, but also that already in the 15-19 age group, male wages showed a strong upward trend whereas female wages stagnated. From the age of 15, young men generally undertook formal apprenticeships within the factory. Their wages naturally increased as they became more qualified. Young women instead received no specialized training, but worked mainly to earn enough money to accumulate a dowry. The wage differential was the natural product both of the apprenticeship system and of the gender-specific roles that the family was perpetuating. From the viewpoint of a working-class family, it was logical to substitute women's with children's work since, in the medium term, the latter yielded the greater monetary return. This is perhaps the main reason that married women so rarely worked outside the family after the age of 30 or 35. By then, most would already have had at least one child old enough to enter the factory. The higher wages that children could secure in the medium term and the accumulation of domestic tasks[7] forced most women, some years after their marriage, to withdraw permanently from the labour market.

Table 4 - **Wages in the wool sector of Sabadell's textile industry, by age and gender, 1890**

Age	Male Pesetas/day	Female Pesetas/day
10-14	1.15	1.50
15-19	1.85	1.66
20-24	3.60	1.66
25-29	3.84	1.80
30-39	4.35	
40-49	4.02	
50-59	3.70	

Source: Payrolls of the factories Jenny Turull and Can Quadres (linked to individual data on ages from the manuscript municipal population census of 1890).

This pattern remained basically the same until the early twentieth century, when further technological developments, an increase in the standard of living, the beginning of a decline in fertility rates and the introduction of compulsory education led once again to major changes in the division of labour by age and gender. Activity rates for 1919 contrast clearly with comparable figures for the second half of the nineteenth century. The most striking difference is the much lower extent of child labour. By1919 there were almost no child workers between the ages of five and nine years, and the percentage of those between 10 and 14

7 In fact, the domestic tasks performed by married women may have been the cornerstone of the urban family wage economy, since their value, if measured at current price levels, exceeded the income of the husband. Evidence on this point is provided by Perez-Fuentes, 1993, for some parts of Spain in the nineteenth century, and by Carrasco, 1991, for certain families in the present day.

In the late nineteenth century, women over 30-35 years of age rarely worked in factories. The higher wages their children could command in the medium term and the value of the many domestic tasks women performed forced them to withdraw from the labour market some years after marriage. Textile factory in the province of Gerona, 1889.

years had fallen significantly (to only 4.3 per cent of the boys and 6.6 per cent of the girls in that age group). Considered together, male and female child workers under 14 constituted less than 3 per cent of the population. The activity rates in the 15-19 age group had also dropped dramatically for males and, to a lesser degree, for females.

The levels of labour force participation of women, on the other hand, did not show the same steep declines as they had 60 years earlier. In 1919, the activity rate of women aged 25-29 was actually lower than in the 30-34 age group, and not appreciably higher than the rates for women in their late thirties, or even late forties (Table 5). Activity rates were high among widows, especially in certain age groups, but the proportion of active married women in their thirties (and their late forties) was far from negligible. The reduced burden of child-bearing and child-rearing apparently allowed a growing number of married women either to remain in the labour market or to re-enter it later in their life cycles, an early example of a more generalized process that would eventually lead married women in most Western European countries to replace children both in the labour market and in the family economy.

Family Strategies and the Family Budget

Ever since Frédéric Le Play and his followers started, towards the middle of the nineteenth century, to collect family budgets in various parts of Europe,[8] the study of family economies and family budgets has attracted the attention of both economic and social historians. Nonetheless, this field of historical research remained somewhat marginal until the 1970s, when the incorporation of a life cycle perspective gave it new impetus, causing it to move rapidly to the fore of the international debate on family history. The family life cycle is, basically, a sociological construct which assumes that families pass through a series of recognizable stages. Economic historians, in particular, have found it useful to hypothesize that each life cycle stage has a regular relationship to family earning and expenditure profiles and to the allocation of market work among family members. This has crucial implications for the study of patterns of activity among secondary wage earners and makes it easier to investigate the determinants of female and child labour force participation.[9]

During the last decade, several scholars have made valuable attempts to arrive at a formal empirical assessment of the economic effects of the demographic life cycle on Spanish families in the past.[10] Unfortunately, very few Spanish sources exist that allow a direct study of family budgets in a life cycle perspective, and these generally date back only to the early 1900s. As Sabadell is no exception to this general pattern, the figures presented in this section are mostly indirect estimates. The documentary evidence available for Sabadell is nevertheless very rich. This study has been able to draw upon data on household composition derived from a manuscript census of 1889, preserved in the local municipal archives; detailed information on wages in 1890 contained in company payrolls; and some contemporary estimates of family expenses.[11] Once the composition of households by age and gender was determined, both family income and expenses could be estimated and such estimates correlated with the age of the household head.

The aim of this exercise has been to reconstruct the experiences of average Sabadell households whose male household heads were continuously employed until the age of

8 Le Play, 1877-1879.

9 See Haines, 1979, pp. 289-291.

10 The pioneering study on the province of Cuenca by Reher, 1988, has been followed by the very detailed work on mining families in the Basque region by Perez-Fuentes, 1993, and by the analysis of early twentieth-century family budgets from Mallorca by Schurer and Moll-Blanes, 1990. For a comparison between Cuenca and Sabadell, see Reher and Camps, 1991.

11 The best source remains the impressive work by Cerdà, 1867. A leading town planner, Cerdà collected hundreds of family budgets through a number of specific inquiries. While not providing the kind of information required for a life cycle analysis, the evidence he assembled is still essential for any study of the condition of the working classes in nineteenth-century Catalonia.

Table 5 - **Activity rates of Sabadell's female textile workers, by age and marital status, 1919**

Age	Single			Married			Widows			Total female population		
	N.	Pop.	Rate %	N.	Pop.	Rate (%)	N.	Pop.	Rate (%)	N.	Pop.	Rate (%)
5-9	13	1,320	1.0	—	—	—	—	—	—	13	1,320	1.0
10-14	78	1,180	6.0	—	—	—	—	—	—	78	1,180	6.6
15-19	427	1,428	29.9	8	86	9.3	—	1	0.0	435	1,515	28.7
20-24	354	1,217	29.1	178	729	24.4	—	8	0.0	532	1,954	27.2
25-29	117	1,357	8.6	239	1,204	19.9	8	48	16.7	364	2,609	14.0
30-34	43	770	5.6	279	1,070	26.1	51	56	91.1	373	1,896	19.7
35-39	21	368	5.7	170	1,162	14.6	17	97	17.5	208	1,627	12.8
40-44	—	285	0.0	52	968	5.4	48	143	33.6	100	1,396	7.2
45-49	—	152	0.0	82	907	9.0	73	193	37.8	155	1,252	12.4
50-54	11	123	8.9	12	656	1.8	44	276	15.9	67	1,055	6.3
55-59	10	66	15.2	17	571	3.0	43	342	12.6	70	979	7.2
60+	—	182	0.0	12	546	2.2	26	890	2.9	38	1,618	2.3
All	1,074	8,448	12.7	1,049	7,899	13.3	310	2,054	15.1	2,433	18,401	13.2

retirement. On the basis of statistics on the age and gender structure of the working population in the textile industry (such as those presented in Table 2), all male household members between 10 and 60 and all female members between 10 and 30 have been assumed to be employed in factories. It is important to note that these families lived in relatively favourable economic conditions. The fact that even these families were bound to experience economically difficult periods over the life cycle is a powerful reminder that far greater hardship was experienced by those families whose members were frequently unemployed, not to mention even weaker domestic groups such as the small number of households headed by widows.

It will be noticed that the somewhat stylized Sabadell households whose life cycle will be examined presently could contain not only the household head, his wife and his children, but also other members grouped under the label 'relatives' (see Table 6). The presence of relatives in the household is mainly explained by Catalonia's prevailing inheritance system, which was based on the rules of primogeniture. This system allowed only one son, usually the first-born, to inherit the title to parental property, thus ensuring that it remained intact. The other siblings either had to leave the household or, if they did stay, remain

Table 6 - **Size and composition of Sabadell working-class households, by age of head, 1890**

	Age of household head								
	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	> 60
Husband	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Wife	0.99	0.95	0.93	0.94	0.92	0.88	0.93	0.89	0.83
Offspring	0.50	1.44	1.75	2.17	2.70	2.59	2.75	2.58	1.54
Relatives	0.61	0.58	0.58	0.61	0.64	0.53	0.67	0.67	1.01
Total size	3.10	3.97	4.26	4.72	5.26	5.00	5.35	5.16	4.38

Table 7 - **Activity structure of Sabadell working-class households, by age of head, 1890**

	Age of household head								
	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	> 60
HUSBAND									
Active	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	—
Inactive	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
WIFE									
Active	0.83	0.76	0.46	0.20	0.08	0.05	0.04	0.06	—
Inactive	0.16	0.19	0.47	0.74	0.84	0.83	0.89	0.83	0.83
OFFSPRING									
Active	—	0.21	0.25	0.65	1.24	1.80	2.03	2.13	1.42
Inactive	0.50	1.23	1.50	1.52	1.46	0.79	0.72	0.45	0.12
RELATIVES									
Active	0.39	0.30	0.25	0.28	0.27	0.29	0.45	0.39	0.62
Inactive	0.22	0.18	0.33	0.33	0.37	0.24	0.22	0.30	0.39
Total size	3.10	3.97	4.26	4.72	5.26	5.00	5.35	5.16	4.38
N. active	2.22	2.27	1.96	2.13	2.59	3.14	3.52	3.58	2.04
N. inactive	0.88	1.70	2.30	2.59	2.67	1.86	1.83	1.58	2.34
Ratio	2.52	1.34	0.85	0.82	0.97	1.69	1.92	2.27	0.87

unmarried. This system led to a notable proportion of extended families (about 20 per cent in Sabadell in the late nineteenth century). Thus, in the early stages of his married life, the young household head typically lived with his widowed mother and with his unmarried siblings, whereas in later stages, the household was likely to include his daughter-in-law.

As indicated in Table 7 (which is based on the assumption that all persons commenced employment at the age of 10 and retired at 60), the ratio of economically active to inactive members of the household peaked in the years immediately following marriage. In this phase, both husband and wife worked, their earnings supplemented in some cases by those of the other members of the household (for instance, the ageing father or the young man's unmarried brothers). As the family cycle advanced and the family grew with the birth of each successive child (assuming that none of the original members had died), the older generation retired causing the worker-consumer balance to deteriorate. The low point occurred when the household head was between the ages of 30 and 35 and the largest numbers of inactive children were present, even though his wife most likely had remained in the labour force. Thereafter, however, as children progressively entered the labour market, the number of workers increased, peaking at 2.27 active members for every one inactive when the household head was between 55 and 59 years of age. Subsequently, the family cycle again entered a critical phase because, as we have seen, in late nineteenth-century Sabadell the household head who left the labour market was not replaced by all of his children as they reached adulthood. Instead, only one son stayed with the ageing parents, while his siblings left the parental home to form households of their own. Thus, the only income available to the family at this point, and a variable income at that, came from the co-residing children, who contributed a greater share of the family's income as the cycle progressed.

Per capita income inevitably followed a similar path over the life cycle. Table 8 shows that per capita income declined from the birth of the first child until the household head reached the age of 40-44, since the total income of the family remained stable while the family increased in size. Once the household head approached his fifties, however, per capita income rose due to his offspring's income, but then it declined again when he reached the age of 60 and retired. As is also evident from Table 8, for persons in middle or old age, the work of their offspring was an essential resource. When a father reached

the age of 50, the income derived from the work of his offspring represented the largest share of the family income (44 per cent), a proportion that increased until it constituted, together with that of relatives, the entire family income once he had reached his sixties. In other words, as the parents withdrew from the labour market, the economic well-being of the family was maintained through the contributions of the younger generation.

These findings call into question the claim made by David Levine that during the second phase of the industrial revolution, families began to rely increasingly on the earnings of the (male) household head.[12] When formulating his argument, Levine took no account of the impact of the family life cycle on the proportion of the family income derived from this one source. Yet our findings (for Catalonia, but in this respect generalizable) reveal that the husband's earnings represented only 58 per cent of the income of a newly married couple, rising to a maximum of 70 per cent when the household head was in his early thirties. This, in fact, is the proportion of a family's income that Levine suggested was contributed by male household heads in England. As he grew older, the household head contributed an ever-declining proportion of the total income due to the increased earnings arising from the work of never-married or married children. Eventually, the entire family income, as we have seen, would be derived from the work of the younger generation.

Although it was especially the work of grown-up children in the final stages of the life cycle to be vital to the family economy, the data in Table 8 reveal that, at earlier stages, children were already making a fairly significant contribution. If we compare the Sabadell pattern with income profiles for working-class families in other industrializing economies in the same period, we see that Catalan children rank high in their ability to contribute to the family income. A study of the budgets of working-class families in Ghent around 1900 has shown, for instance, that the children's contribution was virtually non-existent (only 1 to 1.5 per cent of the total family income) until the father reached his late thirties, when it rose to approximately 10 per cent. In Sabadell, as indicated by Table 8, the corresponding shares were sensibly greater. Young children were compensating for the fact that their mothers made smaller contributions to household incomes than did Ghent married women.[13]

Table 8 - **Composition of family income and per capita income of Sabadell working-class households, by age of head, 1890**

	Age of household head								
	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	> 60
INCOME (*)									
Husband	14.4	15.4	17.4	17.4	16.1	16.1	14.8	14.8	—
Wife	5.7	6.7	3.2	1.4	0.6	0.3	0.3	—	—
Offspring	—	1.3	1.5	3.9	7.8	12.4	15.6	18.3	13.9
Relatives	4.6	3.1	2.6	2.5	2.5	2.8	4.7	4.1	6.5
Total	24.7	26.5	24.7	25.2	27.0	31.6	35.4	37.2	20.4
% INCOME									
Husband	58.3	58.1	70.4	69.0	59.9	50.9	41.8	39.8	—
Wife	23.1	25.3	13.0	5.6	2.2	0.9	0.8	—	—
Offspring	—	4.9	6.1	15.5	28.9	39.2	44.1	49.2	68.1
Relatives	18.6	11.7	10.5	9.9	9.3	8.9	13.3	11.0	31.9
PER CAPITA INCOME (*)	7.97	6.68	5.80	5.33	5.13	6.32	6.62	7.21	4.66

(*) In *reales* per day.

12 Levine, 1985.

13 The Ghent data are provided by Van den Eeckhout, 1993, p. 99. The Catalan pattern can be usefully compared with the income profiles that emerge from the analysis of the 1889-1890 Commissioner of Labor Survey of 8,544 budgets for families in nine industries in the United States and in five European countries. See Haines, 1979.

Table 9 - **Family budget of Sabadell working-class households, by age of head, 1890**

	Age of household head								
	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	> 60
Size of household	3.10	3.97	4.26	4.72	5.26	5.00	5.35	5.16	4.38
Ratio active/ inactive	2.52	1.34	0.85	0.82	0.97	1.69	1.92	2.27	0.87
Per capita income (*)	7.97	6.68	5.80	5.33	5.13	6.32	6.62	7.21	4.66
Income-Expenditures (*)	4.28	3.68	1.08	-1.01	-2.45	0.66	1.46	4.67	-5.35

*) In *reales* per day.

A more detailed analysis at the household level confirms what aggregate data on activity rates had already suggested about the family strategies adopted by Sabadell's textile families — namely, that they tended to restrict the mother's wage labour and preferred to send children to work from an early age. This is not to say, however, that in a simple profit-and-loss framework children were an investment bringing short-term tangible benefits. On the contrary, it can be estimated that both wives and children were a net drain on the household's resources during a large part of the family life cycle in that the amount expended on their consumption exceeded their income.[14] While in the case of women this could easily be predicted as arising from their work patterns, it is interesting to note that the deficit occasioned by children occurred even when it is assumed that all children over the age of 10 are employed in factories.

An estimated final balance sheet of income and expenditures is presented in Table 9. It can be seen that in the years immediately following marriage the family was able to save. The budget yielded a net surplus until the household head reached the age of 35. Later, when he was between 35 and 45, the economic condition of the household became precarious, since this was the stage of the life cycle during which the family carried the heaviest dependency burden. The critical situation only eased when the household head reached the age of 45 and his offspring began to make a significant contribution to the fortunes of the family. Nevertheless, the relief was only temporary given that on reaching the age of 60 the household head would retire.

These findings suggest that the situations of working-class families could differ considerably, with some even facing an absolute deficit in their budget. Indeed, such variability was noted by their contemporaries and has been discovered in other parts of Europe such as mid-nineteenth-century Lancashire or Florence in 1825, where couples with dependent children had to cope with particularly critical circumstances.[15] To cover budget deficits, Sabadell's textile families had only three alternatives: saving while earnings exceeded expenditures; relying on charity; or going into debt. If the family maximized the use of its labour (in other words, if the family saved during the periods when the composition of the household put the family budget into surplus), some savings could be produced over the life cycle amounting to an estimated average of 1.27 *reales* per day, or 463.55 per year. This surplus is equivalent to the annual rental of a working-class house or to 20 days of holiday per year for all members of the family. This would be the wealth of a working-class family at the end of the nineteenth century, assuming no unemployment, no sickness and only Christmas and Sundays taken as holidays.

14 Following standard practice, estimates of consumption by age and gender have been based on the coefficients proposed by Smith, 1984.

15 For industrial Lancashire, see Anderson, 1971; for early nineteenth-century Florence, see Woolf, 1986.

The end of a long working day for children and adults alike in a factory near Barcelona, c. 1900. Married women would begin to replace their children in the labour market only in the 1920s after essential goals in welfare and education had been achieved.

The implication is that working-class families had to save during the stages of the family cycle when budgets were in surplus, and that their strategies had to take account of both medium- and long-term needs. In this connection, it is interesting to observe that the very nature of their family economy led all the members of these households to work the maximum number of hours, even without the supervision of foremen. A second force promoting discipline at work came from the dictates of the factory production system, which sought to regulate the rhythm of work. In contrast with the factory, however, the economy of working-class families appears to have secured such discipline with very little input of a managerial nature. This explains why, in the second half of the nineteenth century, textile factories in this area were structured as aggregations of artisanal workshops, and foremen could concentrate more on factory politics than on production.

Some Conclusions

The case of nineteenth-century Catalonia confirms the importance of technological innovation as a factor explaining changes in the extent of child labour, and more generally in the division of labour by age and gender. The very rapid process of mechanization of the textile industry witnessed by Sabadell in the 1850s, which affected both the gendering of occupations and the age distribution of the workforce, was made possible and greatly accelerated by the introduction of the steam engine. As soon as production was mechanized and moved out of the household, the economic contribution of married women to the family income declined abruptly while the participation rate of children and young adults in the labour force increased.

The shift from proto-industry to the factory system created a pattern of married women's work similar to the one found in urban areas in the Third World today.[16] For such areas, it has been noted that a wife's participation in the waged labour force is negatively correlated with the husband's income. Evidence for Catalonia in the late nineteenth century indicates that only in cases of great need would women aged 30 or over continue to work outside the household. Families in viable economic circumstances preferred to send children into the labour market, as their additional income was expected to bring a greater monetary return in the medium term. This fact and the value of the many domestic tasks women performed resulted in the segmentation of the labour market on the basis of gender.

Children's work was often critical for their families. The analysis of family budgets in a life cycle perspective has shown that the work of young children played an important role early on in the family life cycle. As consumption expenses grew faster than the income secured by the principal wage earner when he was in his thirties, a gap between income and expenditures became manifest. Such a gap was at least partly bridged by the work of children who were for the most part between 10 and 14 years of age, while the contributions of other secondary wage earners were negligible. When the household head reached the age of 50, his offspring contributed the greatest part of the family income. Later still in the life cycle, they would be the principal asset ageing parents could use to maintain a reasonable standard of living.

This pattern remained virtually unchanged throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. In the early decades of the twentieth century, however, further technological innovation in the textile industry, a rise in the standard of living, the onset of the demographic transition, the introduction of compulsory schooling, and the development of primary and technical education all concurred to cause a massive decline of child labour. It would seem that only when industrial society had achieved essential goals in welfare and education did married women start to replace their children in the labour market.

16 Rodgers, 1989.

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CHILDREN'S WORK, INDUSTRIALISM AND THE FAMILY ECONOMY IN JAPAN
– 1872-1926 –

by Osamu Saito*[1]

Introduction

In the 1850s, Japan opened its ports to international commerce, thus ending two centuries of self-imposed isolation during which no Europeans except the Dutch had been allowed on Japanese soil. Visitors from abroad in the decades that followed were understandably eager to share their impressions of this newly accessible land. In the many books and travel journals written at the time, it is not unusual to find comments on how well the Japanese treated their children. Isabella Bird, for example, remarked in her book *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, published in 1880:

> I never saw people take so much delight in their offspring, carrying them about, or holding their hands in walking, watching and entering into their games, supplying them constantly with new toys, taking them to picnics and festivals, never being content to be without them, and treating other people's children also with a suitable measure of affection and attention. Both fathers and mothers take a pride in their children.[2]

Similar passages can be found in other publications. In *Japan Day by Day*, an American professor wrote:

> Again I must repeat that Japan is the paradise for children. There is no other country in the world where they are so kindly treated or where so much attention is devoted to them. ... However, this is all trite, as every book on Japan has said the same thing again and again.[3]

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1 The research for this chapter was conducted as part of a Ministry of Education-funded joint project on industrial development and regional economies in pre-war Japan.

2 Bird, 1880, p. 80.

3 Morse, 1917, pp. 351-352.

No doubt most Japanese mothers and fathers would agree with these authors, as suggested in the old Japanese saying: "Children are treasures".

Yet, this romantic view may well be misleading when discussing the problem of child labour. Industrialism, however alien it had been to Far Eastern soils, was undoubtedly the late nineteenth-century reality. During the 1880s and 1890s, a number of industrial enterprises sprang into existence in Japan. "When the present writer landed at Nagasaki in the spring of 1873, there existed in the whole country not a single 'workman', using the term in its modern semi-political acception [sic]", wrote Basil Chamberlain, an Englishman who later became a professor of philology at the Imperial University of Tokyo. By the late 1890s, however, he noted:

> Not a month passes without seeing new manufactories of cement, carpets, soap, glass, umbrellas, hats, matches, watches, bicycles, smelting works, electrical works, steel foundries, silk, cotton, and woollen mills, machine-shops of every sort. Nor is everything left to private enterprise; the government steps in with liberal subsidies. The silk industry, once confined to certain narrow districts, is fast spreading over the entire centre and south. Formerly the Nakasendo was an old-world trail among the mountains. The last time we travelled along the new, finely graded carriage road, we were wakened every morning by the scream of the factory whistle. Journeying on and reaching the town of Kofu, we found its silk filatures to be now its most noteworthy sight, troops of girls coming in at five every morning and working straight on till eight at night - fifteen hours at a stretch![4]

Clearly, this British writer associated the coming of industrialism with the growth of child labour. Such a view seems to be shared by Japanese scholars. A recent article in the encyclopedia of Japanese history, for example, states: "With the establishment of the mechanized large-scale industry in the industrial revolution, the substitution of children, youths and women for adult male workers took place".[5]

However, a cursory look at the literature reveals that surprisingly little has been written about industrial labour supplied by 'children' as distinguished from 'youths' and 'women'. Without established facts about *child* labour, therefore, it is difficult to assess the supposedly ill effects of advancing industrialism, and more specifically, to evaluate the view, which has recently gained support from specialists on the present-day Third World, that "compulsory primary education is the policy instrument by which the state effectively removes children from the labor force".[6] It is interesting to note in this connection what Clark Nardinelli has said about the case of Japan, where four years of schooling was made compulsory in 1879:

> Factory legislation came late in Japan. By the time the first Factory Act was passed in 1911, 98 per cent of the children between the ages of six and thirteen were in school, as were a high proportion of older children. The battle to get young children out of factories and into schools, then, was already over by the time factory legislation appeared in Japan.[7]

He too sees education as an important factor in removing children from the labour force, but seems to place more emphasis on family preferences than on government enforcement.

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4 Chamberlain, 1898, pp. 266-268.
5 'Jidō rōdō, nenshō rōdō', in *Nihonshi dai-jiten*, Vol. 3, 1993, p. 924.
6 Weiner, 1991, p. 3.
7 Nardinelli, 1990, p. 147.

Table 1 - **Selected chronology**

1872	Promulgation of the Educational Ordinance by the new Meiji government, announcing the establishment of universal education.
1879	Education Law enacted, making four years of schooling compulsory.
1882	Investigation into working conditions in factories begun by the Industry Department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce.
1887	Two bills for factory legislation drafted but not published. Subsequently various proposals discussed, but none formally presented to the Diet.
1900	School fees abolished for primary schooling.
1907	Compulsory schooling raised from four to six years.
1911	First Factory Law passed through the Diet.
1916	Factory Law came into force. Employment of children under 12 prohibited.
1926	Other provisions in the 1911 Factory Law, the prohibition of night work and a 12-hour day for children under 15, came into force.

Note: Meiji designates the period from 1867 to 1912 during which Emperor Mutsuhito reigned.

This chapter will examine the statistical evidence available on child labour in Japanese industry and children's involvement in paid employment in general in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Also examined are education statistics as well as case studies that help to illuminate the Japanese family's attitudes towards children and child work. Finally, an attempt will be made to place Japan's experience in a comparative context.

Child Labour in Industry

Although factory legislation came late in Japan (see Table 1), the debate on the factory question started as early as the 1880s with the first wave of 'factory' industrialization. A majority of the newly built factories were modelled on Western mills and borrowed Western technology. What was borrowed, moreover, was not limited to tangible components of industrialism, but included ideas on how to combat the adverse by-products of the modern factory system. In 1882, backed by a small but enlightened group of bureaucrats and academics, research on factory legislation began within the Industry Department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce. Various proposals were made and debated, but none of them was presented to the Diet. To make a further case for legislation, the Ministry thus conducted an investigation into working conditions of factories and workshops.[8] Thanks to this ministerial effort, therefore, the state of children in industry at the turn of the century is comparatively well documented.

Table 2 reports changes that occurred in the percentages of children in industrial employment during the period 1899-1914 The percentages are calculated from 'factory censuses', which covered only factories with 10 operatives or more in 1899, whereas in 1909 and 1914, they covered factories with five operatives or more. Caution must be exercised when comparing the absolute size of the workforce in these different periods. If allowance is made for this change in coverage, it is probable that the total industrial workforce doubled from 1899 to 1914. In proportional terms, only minor differences appear to exist in 1909 and 1914 between the cases with over five and with over 10 operatives.

As Table 2 clearly shows, females outnumbered males in industry at this stage of development. Moreover, the female workforce was younger than the male. More than half

8 See Dore, 1969; and Taira, 1970, Ch.6.

Factory workers (women and girls holding reels) pictured outside a silk filature, Suwa, c. 1900. Silk reeling was one of the few indigenous industries that underwent a successful transition to the factory. It relied heavily on female workers but compared with other industries in the early twentieth century employed fewer workers under the age of 14.

Table 2 - **Children in industrial employment, by age and gender, 1899, 1909 and 1914**

Year	Proportion (%)			Total workforce (all ages)
	under 12	under 14	under 20	
Males				
1899	—	6	—	138,119
1909	0.4	3	26	307,139
1914	0.3	3	27	383,957
Females				
1899	—	13	—	254,790
1909	1	7	58	493,498
1914	0.4	6	58	564,308

Sources: Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce [MAC], *32-nen zenkoku kōjō tōkeihyō* (1902), *Meiji 42-nen kōjō tōkeihyō* (1910), and *Taisho 3-nen kōjō tōkeihyō* (1916).
Note: The 1899 survey covered factories *(kōjō)* with 10 operatives or more, while the 1909 and 1914 surveys also included those with 5-9 operatives.

of the female workers were under 20 years of age, a pattern that apparently did not change until the First World War. Among the female workers, the proportion of those under 14 years of age was substantial in 1899 but declined during the next 15 years. Most female workers were found in the textile industry, especially in cotton and silk: the textile industries altogether accounted for more than 80 per cent of the total female workforce surveyed in 1899.

The first Factory Law, passed in 1911, prohibited the employment of children under 12 years of age, though it was applied only to factories and workshops with 15 operatives or more. However, *even before the law came into force* in 1916, the proportion of children under 12, never very high to begin with, had fallen to less than 0.5 per cent of the total number of workers in industrial employment. It may not be a coincidence, therefore, that in the published report of the subsequent factory census, carried out in 1919, only one category was established for all ages under 15, suggesting that the number of children under this age was negligible.

A slightly different picture emerges from the same data if disaggregated by factory size (Table 3). With regard to the male workforce, there is no evidence that more children were employed by larger factories. However, the pattern was different for females. In both the 1899 and 1909 censuses, the larger the factory, the higher the proportion of girls under 14. Since most factories of the 1000-plus category in earlier years were found in textiles, especially in cotton spinning, and since, as mentioned, their workforces were characteristically young and female, this pattern might be seen as evidence that, in Japan too, child labour was associated with the industrial revolution.

Table 3 - **Child labour by factory size and gender, 1899, 1909 and 1914**

Factory size (operatives per establishment)	Proportion under 14 (%)					
	Males			Females		
	1899	1909	1914	1899	1909	1914
5-9	—	4	4	—	6	6
10-29	6	3	3	13	8	8
30-49	7	3	3	12	7	8
50-99	6	3	2	12	7	7
100-499	8	3	2	12	6	5
500-999	4	4	2	14	8	5
1000+	4	2	1	17	10	5

Sources: Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce [MAC], *32-nen zenkoku kōjō tōkeihyō* (1902),*Meiji 42-nen kōjō tōkeihyō* (1910), and *Taisho 3-nen kōjō tōkeihyō* (1916).
Note: The 1899 survey covered factories *(kōjō)* with 10 operatives or more, while the 1909 and 1914 surveys also included those with 5-9 operatives.

To verify this interpretation, we need to disaggregate the data by industry. Fortunately, a government survey for 1900 allows us to break down the national labour force into 70 industrial categories and, furthermore, provides us with additional information about the various characteristics of those industries. Only seven of the 70 industries will be

considered here. Cotton spinning and silk reeling have been singled out because they are representative of the leading industries of the day, the former exemplifying industries transplanted from the West, and the latter being one of the few indigenous industries that underwent a successful transition to the factory. Also analysed are five industries in which under-14 workers made up more than 20 per cent of the total workforce. These are rug weaving, rope braiding (that is, the production of braided bands and belts used for kimono dress), matchmaking, glass-making and paper-products manufacturing.

The data presented in Tables 4, 5 and 6 show that the numbers of child workers and their working conditions varied widely across these different industries. The cotton-spinning and silk-reeling industries, together accounting for as much as 46 per cent of the total workforce surveyed in 1900, employed female workers in large numbers. Although both were power-driven factory industries, some important differences existed between the two. Silk reeling was rural in location, which is reflected in a small factory size and a low number of days in operation. Working conditions were much harsher in the large, urban-based cotton spinning mills, which operated on a 12-hour working day with a night shift. On the other hand, the other five were industries whose shares in the nation's labour force were small, and it seems that all were located in urban or suburban areas.

Several points can be made on the basis of Tables 4-6. First, it is evident from Table 4 that the proportion of workers under 14 was substantially lower in the cotton and silk industries than in the case of the other five industries. Among the latter, particularly high percentages were to be found in the rug industry, where more than four in every 10 male workers were under the age of 14 years, and in the matchmaking industry, the largest of the five, where the proportion was more than one in three.

Secondly, as seen in Tables 5 and 6, the five industries can be further grouped into two very different categories. Group II (rug making, rope braiding and matchmaking) had a greater percentage of female workers, whereas Group III (glass-making and paper products) had more male workers, including a substantial number of apprentices. In fact, apprenticeship in glass-making factories accounted for much of its proportion of under-14-year-olds (see Table 5).

Thirdly, wages were low in Group II industries whereas workers in Group III were comparatively better paid. This is not because the former's workforce was predominantly female, whereas the latter employed more male labourers. Gender-specific wage rates for children under 14 in Table 6 show, in fact, that although girls consistently earned less than boys, boys were also paid low wages in the three Group II industries. Both boys and girls in the matchmaking industry, for example, received 26 to 28 per cent less than their counterparts in glass-making and cotton spinning.

It should be emphasized that the 1900 survey only covered workshops and factories with 10 or more operatives. In these low-wage industries,

Table 4 - **Child labour in selected industries, by gender, 1900**

Industry	Proportion of workers under 14 (%)			Total no. of workers
	Males	Females	Total	
Group I Cotton spinning	9	12	11	55,511
Silk reeling	4	10	10	124,241
Group II Rug weaving	42	13	20	1,031
Rope braiding	22	30	28	1,107
Matchmaking	38	35	36	12,804
Group III Glass-making	26	0	24	2,573
Paper products	15	24	20	1,085

Source: MAC, *Meiji 33-nen zenkoku kōjō tōkeihyō* (1903).
Notes: (1) Only factories *(kōjō)* with 10 or more operatives were surveyed. (2) 'Workers' include not only *shokkō* (operatives) but also *totei* (apprentices).

therefore, it is very likely that those surveyed were the 'tip of the iceberg'. Its invisible part consisted of a number of small-scale workshops and an even greater number of out-workers. They were, in short, sweated trades, and it was in these trades that child labour was an especially difficult social problem. Contemporary journalists and government investigators were well aware of this. In fact, some of the evidence gathered by the government's Industry Department strongly indicates that child labour must have been more pervasive than the percentages in Table 4 would suggest. In the rug industry, for example, the Osaka and Hyogo trade associations' data for 1901-1902 showed that exactly 50 per cent of the total employees (both sexes combined) were children under 14, of whom one in five was under the age of 10.[9] This difference in data undoubtedly arises because trade associations were umbrella organizations covering not just factories, but also small-scale family businesses and 'putters-out' (that is, those who gave out work to be performed off the premises). The same may be said about the matchmaking industry. Indeed, in his classic account of working life in the lower classes of Meiji Japan, published in 1899, Gennosuke Yokoyama contrasted matchmaking with the cotton industry, noting that "in cotton mills the relationships between girls' work and working hours, between their work and health conditions, and the like, can be investigated, while in matchmakers' workshops one can collect materials most suitable for an inquiry into child labour".[10]

Table 5 - **Characteristics of the workforce in selected industries, 1900**

Industry	No. of workers per factory	Sex ratio	Proportion of apprentices to:	
			total workers %	workers under 14 (%)
Group I Cotton spinning	495	0.27	0.05	0.3
Silk reeling	49	0.07	4	18
Group II Rug weaving	16	0.29	0.04	0
Rope braiding	43	0.33	2	0.3
Matchmaking	70	0.35	1	1
Group III Glass-making	50	18.79	25	43
Paper products	32	1.02	7	16

Source: MAC, *Meiji 33-nen zenkoku kōjō tōkeihyō* (1903).
Note: Sex ratio (M/F) refers to workers including apprentices.

It is unlikely, therefore, that child labour increased with the advance of 'industrialism' in modern Japan if the term refers to the emergence of the factory industry. The leading industrialists tended to employ more and more juvenile labour (that is, over the age of 14), but not necessarily more child labour. It is true that young mill girls had to work long hours and sometimes in unhealthy conditions, but not many school-age children were found among them.[11] It is also true that some of the cotton mills did employ children aged 7, 8 or 9, but the overall proportion of those under 10 years old never reached the 1 per cent mark. It is worth noting, furthermore, that the absolute size of the under-14 child population in those mills did not increase at all, even though, at the time, factory legislation had not yet been enacted.[12]

9 Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce [MAC], *Kōjō chōsa tōkeihyō*, 1902, p. 92. The total number of employees was 9,378.
10 *Nihon no kasō shakai*, 1899; reprinted edition, 1949, p. 129.
11 By 1905, primary schooling was nearly universal. Children were required to attend school for four years (roughly from the ages of 6 to 10 years). In 1907, the number of years of compulsory schooling was raised from four to six.
12 It should be stressed, however, that concern over child labour was not the sole motive of the government pressing for legislation. The public became increasingly worried about health conditions of juvenile workers as tuberculosis spread in both factories and in the countryside, from which mill workers were drawn. A government-commissioned survey conducted in 1909-1911 by a young medical researcher, Osamu Ishihara, revealed that the mortality rate was 6 per 1,000 for girls who died on factory premises, rising to 38 per 1,000 for mill girls who died at home, having, in all probability, been dismissed because they had tuberculosis. The results, the first of which appeared in 1910, became immediately known to the government and undoubtedly played a significant part in bringing the bill through the Diet in 1911. Some of Ishihara's findings are summarized in Hunter, 1993, pp. 75-84.

Table 6 - **Working conditions in the selected industries, 1900**

Industry	Power-driven establishments (%)	Days in operation (per year)	Hours in operation (per day)	Daily wages for under-14	
				Males *(sen)*	Females *(sen)*
Group I Cotton spinning	95	329	12 (21.8)	12.6	10.4
Silk reeling	83	186	10	11.7	9.6
Group II Rug weaving	0	289	9.5	7.0	6.7
Rope braiding	27	308	11	9.9	9.2
Matchmaking	3	313	10	9.2	7.7
Group III Glass-making	16	323	9.5	12.7	10.5
Paper products	3	300	10	11.7	9.7

Source: MAC, *Meiji 33-nen zenkoku kōjō tōkeihyō* (1903).
Note: The figure in parentheses in the column for hours in operation includes the night shift.

It was instead in some non-factory industries such as matchmaking and rug weaving that the real child labour problem seems to have existed. Most of these industries were not 'visible' in official statistics, but what is important to realize is that they were not slow-dying, traditional trades. A majority of them were new: matchmaking was introduced in Japan after the opening of the country, while rug weaving was an export industry which responded to the commencement of overseas trade. It was in pockets of such sweated trades that child labour was to be found.

Workforce Participation

To determine how many small children were actually employed in those sweated trades, and whether child labour there increased over time, we have to turn to other sources since none of the 'factory' censuses covered all places of productive activity. Detailed tabulations of children's age-specific activity rates, ideally by single years, might do for this purpose, but readily available statistics do not exist for industrial districts, nor for the nation as a whole prior to the first national population census of 1920.

The only usable data for the pre-1920 period derive from a pilot census taken in 1879 in the Yamanashi Prefecture (formerly Province of Kai), whose results were published as the Kai Census Report in 1882. As Kai was a rural province, this census can hardly be considered as being representative of a country that had just embraced industrialism. Yet Kai was not entirely agricultural either. It was one of the areas where 'proto-industrialization', particularly in the silk industry, was taking place. In fact, this was precisely the area in which Professor Chamberlain, during his journeys in the 1890s, noted troops of girls coming in and out of silk filatures. A substantial number of paid-employment opportunities for both women and children were therefore likely to have been available in this province, including jobs in the silk industry. Moreover, the Kai Census Report enables us to compute children's workforce participation rates by single years, an advantage not always found in later published census reports.

Age profiles of workforce participation calculated from this 1879 census are shown in Figure 1, and are contrasted with a different profile derived from a survey of pauper children in 24 poor houses in 1902. There are no significant differences between the curves for Yamanashi boys and girls. Both show that few children entered the labour force before the

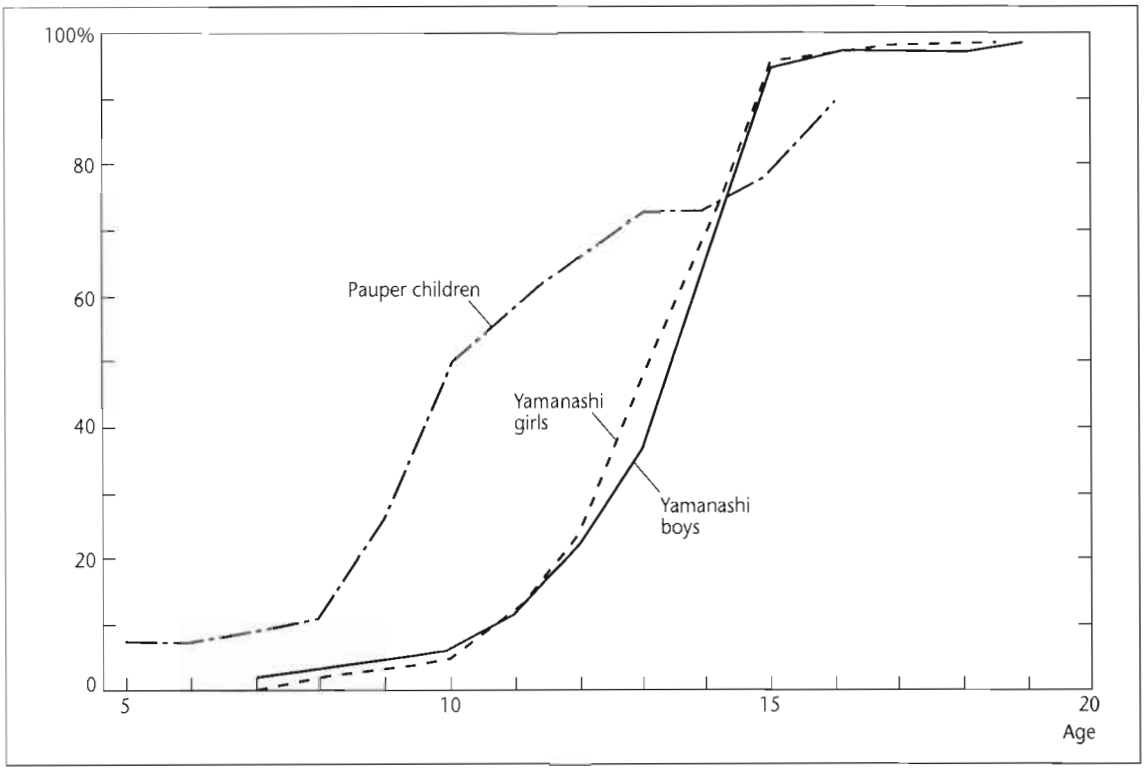


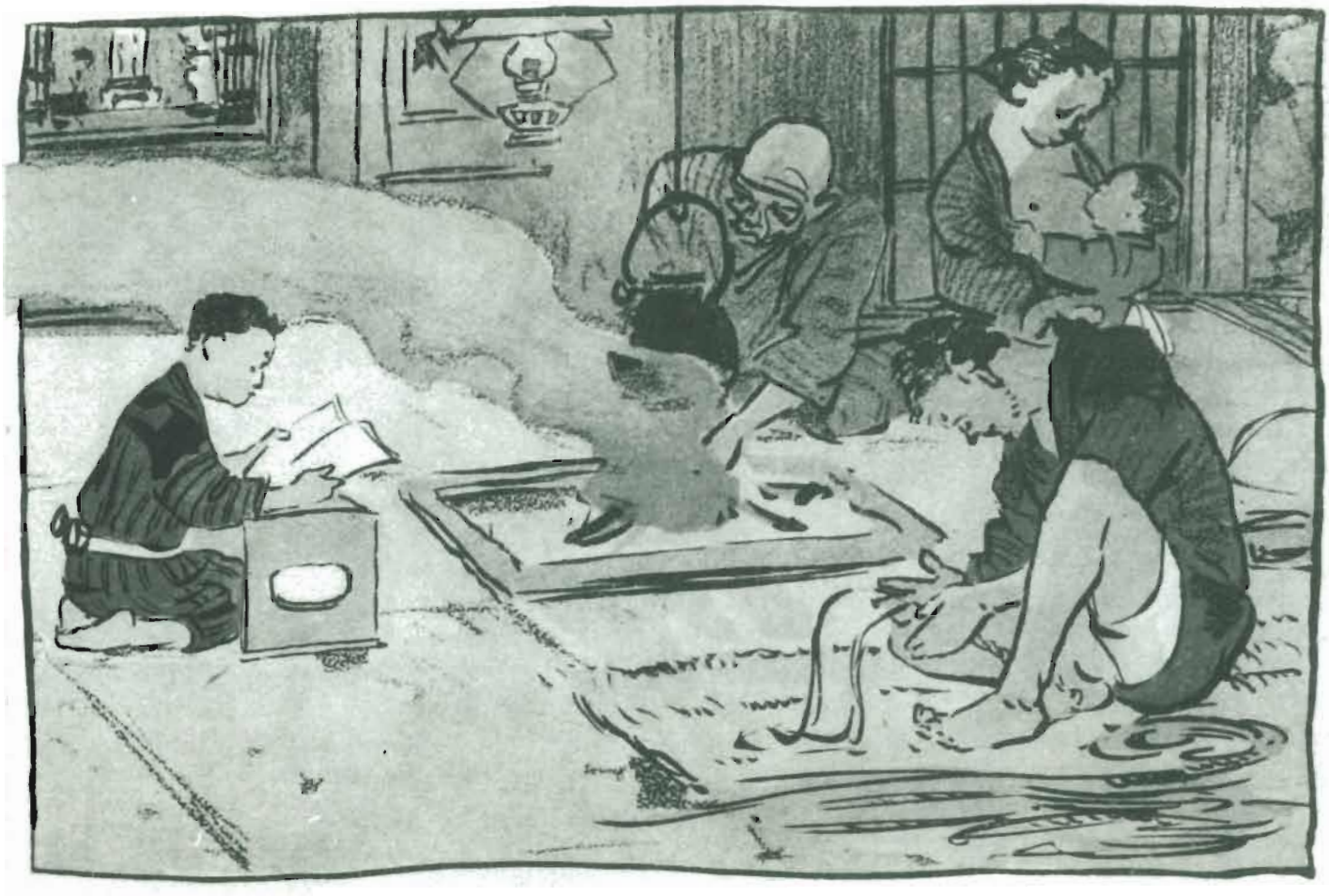
Figure 1
Age profiles of children's workforce participation: children in Yamanashi Prefecture, 1879, and pauper children in 24 poor houses, 1902
Source: Tōkeiin, Kai-no-kuni genzai ninbetsu shirabe (1882); and MAC, Kōjō chōsa tōkeihyō (1902), pp. 103-111.

age of 11. The proportion working was slightly over 10 per cent at age 11 for both sexes, but rose rapidly thereafter, reaching the 90 per cent mark by age 15. The quinquennial average for children aged 10-14 was 29 per cent for boys and 32 per cent for girls. Variations across the districts within the prefecture were not very large: the male percentage varied from 26 to 34 per cent while the female percentage varied from 22 to 46 per cent.

This pattern, which may be designated 'late-starting', is in sharp contrast with the one for children in poor houses (most of which were actually orphanages and foundling hospitals). A majority of 'pauper children' started working by age 10, and two thirds were in paid employment before age 13. Thereafter, the tempo of percentage increase is less rapid, probably because many of the children who stayed on in the poor houses were physically unfit or unable to work. If we calculate the mean age of entry into the workforce by applying a method used by demographers to calculate, on the basis of some reasonable assumptions, the 'singulate mean age at marriage,'[13] then we have 13.4 years for both boys and girls in Yamanashi, and 10.8 years for pauper children. In other words, what Figure 1 shows is a contrast between the early-starting and late-starting patterns of children's workforce participation, and it is probably safe to assume that the overall pattern for the nation was closer to the Yamanashi profile than to the one for pauper children.

As for a time trend over the period in question, we can compare the 1879 Yamanashi figures with those from the first national census in 1920 (when Yamanashi was still one of the major silk-producing prefectures). A close scrutiny of the definitions adopted by the census-takers on the two occasions reveal that part-time and occasional workers were included in the 1879 definition of those working but excluded in the 1920 one. By subtracting those in such a category from the 1879 figures, therefore, we can make the two cases comparable. The results show that the participation rate for boys in the age group 5-14

13 The 'singulate' mean age at marriage is an average age at first marriage calculated from census-type data on proportions left single in successive age groups. It is equivalent to the mean number of years spent in the single (never-married) state by those members of a given cohort who marry by age 50 (see Hajnal, 1953). Here the proportion not working is used instead of the proportion single (assuming that those who were not working had never been in the workforce before), and the end point is set at age 20 rather than 50.



Despite their 'hard lot', peasant families placed great importance on education. In this 1910 illustration, a father makes sure that money is put aside from his meagre income for his son's schooling.

decreased from 14 to 9 per cent over the four decades, while the rate for girls in the same age group changed little over the same period, from 14 to 13 per cent. If this can be a guide for a change that took place nationally, then it is unlikely that the rate of children's workforce participation increased during the early phases of industrialization.

The Role of Education

Much emphasis has been placed on the importance of primary education as a factor removing children from the labour force. Indeed, as early as 1872, the new Meiji government's Educational Ordinance declared that "every man shall, of his own accord, subordinate all other matters to the education of his children". At the primary level, age-old *terakova* (temple schools) were replaced by Western-style formal education. Seven years later, a new, comprehensive law was enacted, making four years of schooling compulsory (although it was not free until 1900). Thereafter, primary school enrolment showed an upward trend and, by 1905, reached nearly universal levels. In this respect, it is interesting to note that the educationalists' view has an affinity with one held by development economists working on long-term economic statistics in modern Japan. Basing their work on the assumption that school enrolment rates are the best guide for changing workforce participation rates of children, a group of economists attempted to estimate the number of gainfully employed child workers in the pre-1920 period. Their conclusion was that initial levels of workforce participation for children aged 10-14 were high, but that levels displayed an unmistakable downward trend as primary school enrolment rates increased.[14]

This estimation is not fully substantiated by the data relating to Yamanashi in 1879-1920, discussed earlier. While the rate of participation for boys showed a certain decline in Yamanashi, the magnitude of this decline was much less dramatic. Furthermore, the participation rate for girls remained virtually unchanged. The Yamanashi data, therefore, would seem to cast doubts on the assumption that any rise in the primary school enrolment rate must have resulted in a corresponding decrease in children's engagement in paid employment.

Thus, some other aspects of the 'success story' often told on the basis of the Ministry of Education's primary school enrolment statistics need to be explored. Table 7 sets out the rate of primary school enrolment as well as two new indicators of educational attainment, both derived from conscription data.

On the basis of this information, it can be seen, first, that not all ever-enrolled children finished school. The difference between the enrolment and the completion rates was wide in early years — 22 percentage points in 1889. The difference narrowed in the 1890s, but widened again in 1900 after all fees were dropped for primary schooling, prompting substantial advances in enrolment rates. The gap stood at 18 points when the enrolment rate reached a saturation point in about 1905. It had again narrowed by the time factory legislation was enforced, although there was still a 10-point gap in 1915, partly because of the extension of years of compulsory schooling from four to six. In any case, if it was not the number of children who enrolled but rather the number who completed schooling that was really instrumental in removing children from the labour force, then Meiji Japan's records would look less impressive.

Since the data on completion are taken from conscription statistics, girls are not covered by this table, but several case studies suggest that their completion rates were substantially lower than those for boys. Indeed, the Ministry of Education issued in January 1894 instructions urging prefectural governments to make special arrangements for children who were unable to attend school. Thereafter a number of night classes, Sunday schools and the so-called childminders' classes appeared in clusters, especially at the turn of the

14 Umemura et al., 1988. To be fair, it should be noted that their intention was never to set out age-specific proportions of the gainfully employed. They were concerned with changing aggregates.

Young childminders at school, Hokkaido, c. 1900. Childminders' classes, night classes and Sunday schools began to appear at the turn of the century to enable children, and especially girls, to reconcile work and study.

Table 7 - **Primary school enrolment and two indicators of educational attainment 1875-1925 (male children only)**

Year	Enrolment rate (%)	Proportion of those who could write (%)	Proportion of those who completed compulsory schooling (%)
1875	51	—	—
1889	64	77	42
1895	77	89	66
1905	98	98	80
1915	99	99	89
1925	99	99	98

Sources: The first column is from the Ministry of Education's *Mombushō nenpō*, and the second and third from calculations made by Ikuko Kiyokawa, which are based on the Ministry of War's *Rikugunshō tōkei nenpō*. I am grateful to Mrs. Kiyokawa for allowing me to use her worksheets.
Notes: (1) The first column measures a male *gakurei* (school-age) population, defined as children between 6 and 14 years of age. However, it is likely that over-14-year-olds were included in that population. This was because not all children went to school at age 6: some were enrolled for the first time as late as age 10 or 11. In other cases, children who had dropped out earlier returned to school to finish the compulsory years. Unfortunately, it is not possible to know the exact mean age of each *gakurei* population.
(2) The second and third columns measure a population of males who were examined at age 20 for conscription 10 years later than the year shown in the table. Kiyokawa believes that this group of examinees corresponds roughly to the *gakurei* population on enrolment documents in the year specified.

century. Most were attached to state schools, but there are some examples where such arrangements were made in factories. According to a recent study of 318 known cases, a majority of students attending such classes were from 11 to 14 years old, an age group in which most young girls were sent away from home to work as childminders.[15] Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine how widespread such half-time solutions were because no Ministry of Education data exist.

The second point to be noticed is that literacy, in the sense that boys could write their names, addresses and the like, was consistently higher than the rate of primary school enrolment. In 1889,when slightly less than 64 per cent of the nation's male children went to school, 77 per cent of them could write. Moreover, according to two prefectural surveys, conducted in 1910 and 1911, two out of every five boys who had never been to school or who had failed to complete compulsory schooling displayed basic literacy skills at the time of conscription.[16] This strongly suggests that school was not the only place where one could acquire literacy. Although it is difficult to know exactly where this ability was learned, these interesting findings might be taken to imply that 'self-advancement' was an important virtue not only for élite ex-*samurai* but for common people as well.

Children in the Family Economy

The use of the term 'self' in the preceding paragraph needs to be qualified. Self should not be taken to mean that anything individualistic emerged as an ideology among young Japanese. Rather, any virtue observed in Japanese society must be set in family values. Indeed, the profiles suggested earlier by Figure 1 may well have reflected families' preferences for how children ought to be brought up, educated and trained as well as their attitudes about the appropriate age for children to join the labour force.

15 These special arrangements are discussed in Mitsuo Osada's recently published book, *Komori gakkō no jisshōteki kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1995), pp. 325-333.
16 Precisely, the proportion of those who attained some degree of literacy was 39 per cent for Kyoto (of the 1,398 conscripts considered) and 45 per cent for Osaka (of a total of 2,709). Calculated from *Sōtei kyōiku chōsa* for Kyoto Prefecture, 1910, and for Osaka Prefecture, 1911.

In this respect, it is interesting to consider nine of the 22 case studies assembled by the government's Industry Department for a chapter on the match industry in 1902.[17] All the cases concern families who lived in slums or poor neighbourhoods in Osaka and Kobe, two areas where child labour appeared to be particularly concentrated. Most families surveyed had some members working in the match industry, and the nine chosen for in-depth analysis had at least one child between the ages of 5 and 11 years.

These nine cases reveal, first, that most children aged 12 or over and four out of five 10- and 11-year-olds were working, but none of the children under 10 was working away from home in paid employment. Secondly, if the husband earned 50 *sen* a day or over, the largest earnings in the sample, none of his family members was working. When, on the other hand, he earned only between 30 and 35 *sen* a day, usually either the wife or an adolescent child worked to supplement the family income. In one family, a 14-year-old girl was employed, whereas in another family, a 13-year-old girl stayed home to look after her younger brothers and sisters while her mother worked in the match factory (at 12 to 13 *sen* a day). Thirdly, only when the wife could not make a living wage did children aged 10 or 11 go to work. For example, in one family the husband was often unemployed and his wife was in poor health, so that the older children, aged 22 and 17, had to earn much of the household income. In other two cases, where the husband was sickly and even when he could work he only earned from 23 to 25 *sen* a day, it was the wife who worked as well as the children aged 10 and 11. Nevertheless, despite these extremely precarious circumstances, *none of the children under 10 in these three families was in paid employment*. This does not necessarily mean that those young children were in school, although it is likely that most were as primary schooling was close to universal by 1905. In one case, a 9-year-old boy had been withdrawn from school, probably because he had to mind his younger siblings at home. Other cases have been recorded of working children who had an opportunity to learn at night schools that were provided by match-manufacturing companies.

The nine cases happened to be families with both parents present, but this should not be considered to have been the norm in the slums of Osaka and Kobe at the turn of the century. On the contrary, as officials in the welfare department of the Osaka Municipal Office found in a survey report in the 1920s, many slum-dwellers either lived alone or in families where the male breadwinner was absent or too ill to work.[18] There may have also been cases where children, having lost both parents, were admitted to orphanages. Under such conditions, one may predict that more children, say, under 12 were forced to work. Although no other data exist for urban slum areas, this is borne out by looking at 283 rural (or proto-industrial) families from four Yamanashi villages in the 1879 census (those with at least one child aged between 5 and 11).[19]

A preliminary analysis of this proto-industrial sample reveals, first, that the proportion of families with children aged 5-11 working was not substantial (only 8 per cent). The probability of having a working child in that age group, however, varied considerably according to whether both parents were present or not. In the 221 families where both parents were present, the proportion of working children remained as low as 4 per cent; instead, in 62 households where one of the parents was absent, the proportion of working children soared to 22 per cent. Many of those 62 families were listed as not forming separate households. Other factors such as landholding and the mean size of the family workforce also had some discernible effects, but *no factor had as much influence as the absence of one parent*.

17 MAC, *Shōkkō jijō*, Vol. 3, Ch. 4, 1903. Of the 22 households surveyed, two are female-headed, one by a widow and the other by a single mother. The rest are families with both parents present. It appears that investigators deliberately excluded single-member households and most single-parent families.

18 Tamai, forthcoming. For a useful overview of the poverty problem in modern Japan, see Chubachi and Taira, 1976.

19 For an analysis of age-specific workforce participation patterns based on the original returns of the 1879 Kai census, see Saito, forthcoming a.

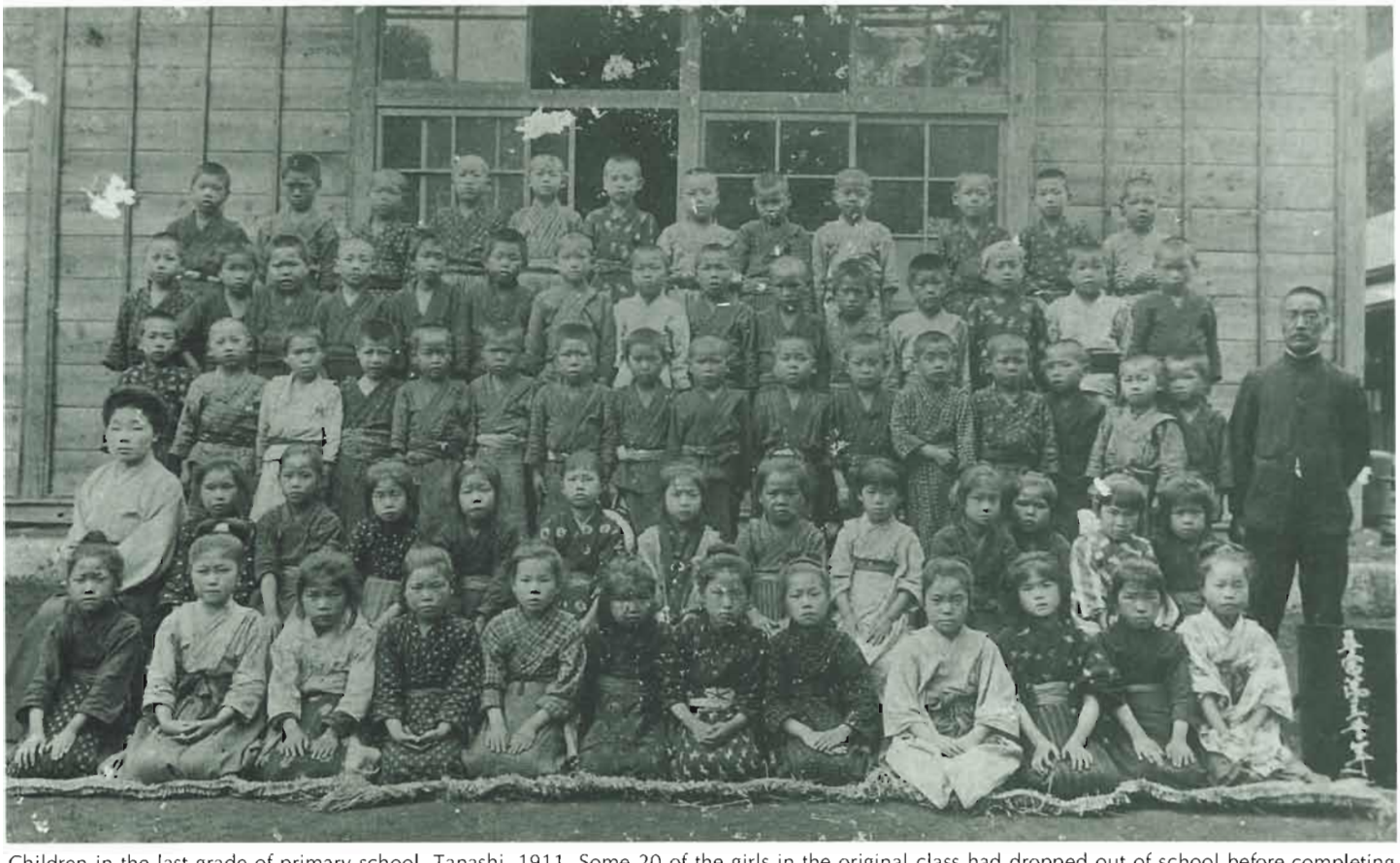
All this seems to suggest that the pattern of early starting in Figure 1, presented earlier, corresponded to such cases, while the late-starting pattern was for 'normal' families. In other words, the single most important factor was whether or not the family could stay on the normal course of the family life cycle.[20] When the head of a peasant family died, for example, the remaining members might have to sell most of the family assets. Then, in all likelihood, they would drift towards an urban slum, unless they were fortunate enough to be taken in by relatives. In either event, however, all members of what remained of the family would have to work, including small children. For poorer families, even the loss of the mother may well have resulted in small children's engagement in the labour market, since the mother was the 'cornerstone' of such a family economy. Indeed, as a 1919 survey report on child labour in Osaka City put it, most labouring children were those suffering for want of parental 'affection and attention', which actually meant that most of them had at least one parent who had either died or abandoned the family.[21]

However, there is no evidence that single-member and single-parent households increased in the underclass society during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. On the contrary, a study carried out in Tokyo in the first two decades of this century shows that family formation increased in slums and slum-like communities of in-migrants despite an accelerating tempo of urban growth.[22] It is interesting to note that even in Osaka, the 'Manchester of the East', the municipal office urged paupers to marry as part of its policy on poverty alleviation, the assumption being that, for the poor, family formation was the key to 'getting by'.[23] The overall pattern of children's entry into the labour force, therefore, must have remained that of late starting throughout the period in question.

Some Conclusions

By way of concluding this chapter, it may be useful to set the work experience of Japanese children in the industrialization process against that of British children in the industrial revolution. The first impression one probably has from the accounts in the previous sections is that Japan's industrialism did not lead to the extensive use of child labour. This inference is strengthened when the Japanese experience is compared, for instance, with the situation in the British cotton-spinning industry, the *locus classicus* for the exploitation of child labour in the industrial revolution. There, as many as 20 per cent of the workforce in 1816 were children under 13, and 7 per cent were under 10.[24] Another measure for such a comparison is age-specific participation rates of children in paid employment. On the face of it, more Japanese than British children joined the labour force. Take the 10-14 age group. Thirty-two per cent of the Yamanashi girls in this age group, for example, were working. The corresponding figure for England and Wales in 1851 was a little lower (20 per cent), but the regional variation was extremely wide, ranging from 8 to 51 per cent.[25] If Hugh Cunningham is correct in his interpretation that low activity rates for under-14-year-olds in agricultural counties implies, not a lower supply, but instead a lower demand creating widespread rural unemployment among children in that age group,[26] then the contrast between the two cases should probably be reversed: the level of 10- to 14-year-old children's involvement in the labour market was higher in Britain than in Meiji Japan. Indeed,

20 In the Japanese context, it meant a stem-family life cycle pattern. It is interesting to note here that of the 22 poor households of Osaka and Kobe (see n. 17 above), there is only one case where the husband's mother was co-resident, a characteristic stage of the stem-family life cycle.
21 Osaka Municipal Office, *Rōdō chōsa hōkōku*, No. 3, 1919, p. 174.
22 Nakagawa, forthcoming.
23 Tamai, forthcoming.
24 Nardinelli, 1990, p. 109.
25 This is also confirmed by looking at two parish-level cases, where it is also shown that changes over time could take place in contrasting directions. See Saito, 1979. Some aspects of labour supply behaviour of the poor in this period are discussed in Saito, 1981.
26 Cunningham, 1990.



Children in the last grade of primary school, Tanashi, 1911. Some 20 of the girls in the original class had dropped out of school before completing compulsory schooling, leaving 43 boys and only 24 girls.

a recent work on British child labour, based on budget data, sets out more directly comparable figures. According to Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries, the mean age at first participation in the workforce in the period 1817-1839 was 12 years or lower — in sharp contrast with 13.4 years for the Yamanashi children of Japan. At the other end of the spectrum, children of British factory workers in 1787-1816 started on average to earn as early as 9.9 years of age, which declined to 8.3 years in the post-1816 period, whereas in Meiji Japan the average even for pauper boys was 10.8 years.[27]

Secondly, even in a proto-industrial setting, not many pre-adolescent children were in employment. This does not necessarily mean that children were kept at home as 'treasures' of the family. Most under-12-year-olds were expected to help their parents in the fields as well as around the house. In comparative terms, however, they were generally 'late starters' in supplying their labour to outside markets unless they lost a parent or familial support. This finding does not fit the image of the typical family in a proto-industrial economy, usually portrayed as a work group in which all members had to contribute to the family subsistence, including children, whose labour contribution was indeed regarded as a 'vital necessity'.[28] But the fact that in proto-industrializing Yamanashi few children under age 11 were found in the labour force suggests that their upbringing and education — whether or not in the form of formal schooling — were more valued than their meagre incomes, and that the deficit must have been made up for through the labour of their mothers as well as their elder brothers and sisters. In such a society, one may predict that married women and adolescent children were fully occupied, and this is exactly what the Yamanashi census and other case studies show. Moreover, what we have seen in the sample of poor families in the cities of Osaka and Kobe also fits in with this pattern. Virtually all the married rural women combined their domestic duties with productive activities. Even in the productive sphere, they were not confined to farming, but often took up jobs associated with the cottage industry as well. Grown-up children, too, were expected to contribute a substantial proportion of their wages to the family budget. Indeed, girls in spinning mills or silk filatures regularly sent as much as one third of what they earned back to their parental home.[29]

Finally, a few words are required about the role of state education. It is not incorrect to say that education was instrumental in removing Japanese children from the industrial workforce. But, at the same time, one should not overemphasize the role played by *compulsory* education. It is true that the Meiji government made every effort to enforce school attendance, which resulted in rising enrolment rates. However, families did sometimes withdraw their 10-, 11- or 12-year-old children from primary schools to send them to textile mills even after virtually universal enrolment was attained. This tendency was particularly marked for girls as the textile sector grew in the early decades of this century. Clearly, contrary to what today's experts on the Third World sometimes assume, compulsory education was *not* the only policy instrument for removing children from the labour force. On the other hand, literacy seems to have long occupied an important place in the Japanese family's priorities. As we have seen, the proportion of children who could read in the early years of industrialization was always higher than the rate of primary school enrolment. These children must have had access to some form of instruction outside school, or they may have taught themselves while working. All this suggests that a somewhat different family strategy was employed in peasant family economies, and this continued to be the principal strategy of the families during the early phases of industrialization in Japan. This strategy was different from the one observed in a number of Western European countries, and particularly Belgium, where married women tended to withdraw from the labour market when real wage levels started to rise, while children continued to work.[30]

27 Horrell and Humphries, 1995.
28 Kriedte et al., 1981, p. 55.
29 For women's work and working hours in the peasant family economy, see Saito, forthcoming a and b.
30 Cunningham, 1995, p. 6.

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THE WORKING CHILD IN COLOMBIA SINCE 1800

by Cecilia Muñoz Vila* [1]

The countries of Latin America have thus far failed to extend social and economic well-being to all of their people. Large numbers of the poor are exploited, paid low wages or unemployed. Child labour is widespread, both the result of poverty and its cause. Children in impoverished families work in the informal sectors to contribute to household incomes, but in very low productivity jobs. The easily available child labour force, moreover, inhibits adult workers from exerting additional pressure on the formal sector for higher wages and better benefits. In this chapter we will focus on the case of Colombia, exploring in historical perspective the relationship between child labour and the household economy, urbanization processes, education policies and child labour legislation.

A Brief Historical Sketch

A rapid glance at the political, social and economic development of Colombia will help place the information on child labour in its broader historical context. The Republic of Gran Colombia, founded in 1821 at the end of the War of Independence, lasted only until 1830, when Nueva Granada (Colombia), Venezuela and Ecuador became independent nations. The transition from a colony to a republic meant replacing the Spanish hierarchy with a Creole government. Although there was an attempt to create a nation of free citizens, the slave and native populations continued to occupy an inferior position and remained for years under the yoke and protection of landowners and the Catholic Church.[2]

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1 This chapter is based largely on a study entitled 'El niño trabajador: una constante a lo largo de dos siglos', carried out in 1994 by the author together with Ximena Pachón and Jerónimo Castillo for the UNICEF office in Bogotá, Colombia. See also Muñoz, 1980, 1985 and 1993; Muñoz and Pachón, 1991 and 1996; and Muñoz and Palacios, 1977.

2 The discussion of the history of Colombia from the early Republic through the 1920s is drawn mainly from Molina, 1974.

The Liberal and Conservative parties originated in the mid-nineteenth century and would dominate the political stage for decades to come. From the ranks of the Liberal Party, which included freed slaves, Indians, artisans and former soldiers, came a call for change in the privileged situation of the élite who controlled the nation's politics and economy. The Liberals pressed for a more democratic management of power and broader access to administration, land and trade. They also made a bid to secularize education, which was still controlled by the Catholic Church, and to institute agrarian reforms. The Conservatives, whose membership included landowners, slaveholders, high-ranking bureaucrats, clergy and military leaders, sought to maintain the privileges inherited from the colonial era. Reforms achieved by the Liberals, such as the establishment of reservations for indigenous groups, the abolition of slavery and the liberalization of tenant-landowner relations, ultimately benefited the country's large landowners by adding to the supply of inexpensive labour needed to expand production on their haciendas.

Attempts by the Liberals to bring about social change drew a sharp reaction from Conservatives. In 1880, General Rafael Nuñez came to power, ushering in a period of so-called *Regeneration*, which would last approximately two decades. The new Constitution of 1886 created a unitary republic, the authority of regional militia was curbed by the formation of a national army, and universal suffrage was established. However, power was still concentrated in the hands of the president to the disadvantage of the legislative branch. Catholicism was again declared the official religion, and education returned to the realm of the Catholic Church.

Rafael Uribe Uribe, the foremost exponent of liberal thought at the time and a staunch opponent of dictatorship, pronounced an ultimatum: either the government made substantial reforms to expand individual liberty and freedom of thought, education, association and religion, or war would be declared and these rights would be obtained by force. The War of a Thousand Days ensued, which had devastating effects in rural and urban areas alike, and necessitated a long period of national reconstruction (1904-1922). During this phase, the modern sectors of the economy grew stronger, and there was a new awakening among labour and craft associations, which culminated in political upheaval and serious social strife during the 1920s.

The Liberal president Alfonso López Pumarejo (1934-1938 and 1942-1943) enacted a series of reforms that clearly enhanced the role of the state. Freedom of thought and religion were instituted, government intervention in the national economy was defined, large estates were expropriated, lands were redistributed, taxes were increased, and a labour code was promulgated guaranteeing workers the right to strike.[3]

Beginning in 1948, Liberals and Conservatives engaged in deadly conflict abetted by the police and military forces. The countryside was devastated in what became known as *la violencia*, and migration to medium-sized cities and Bogotá increased sharply. In spite of a boom in exports, real wages plummeted and land values collapsed. Liberal guerrilla forces became more powerful. However, fearful of the extremist reform ideology of the guerilla commanders, leaders of the Liberal Party decided to support a military coup by General Rojas Pinilla in 1953.[4] During his populist regime, institutions for agricultural development and finance were created to support the peasant sector. Rojas Pinilla was defeated in 1957, and a military junta took control of the country.[5]

The National Front, established in 1962, governed the country for the next 16 years, with power alternating between the Liberal and Conservative parties. Carlos Lleras Restrepo (1966-1970) was the third President under this system of shared power. An emi-

3 Tirado Mejia, 1989a.
4 Tirado Mejia, 1989b.
5 Tirado Mejia, 1989c.

nent economist and historian, he believed in the presidential system and exercised firm leadership, limiting the powers of cabinet ministers and creating a number of decentralized agencies to modernize the government and rationalize public spending. Leftist revolutionary movements grew and social conflict increased, nevertheless, during his administration.[6]

Another attempt at social change came during the presidency of Alfonso Lopez Michelsen (1974-1978). Tax benefits were established for less-advantaged sectors; national savings tripled; exports increased and diversified; and public investment was increased substantially, with new plans for health, education, housing, construction and road improvement. However, guerrilla factions gained strength during this period, as did the drug mafia.

Poor Children and the Household Economy

Considerable documentary evidence, though few actual statistics, suggests that child labour has been a constant in Colombia since the early days of the republic. Many of the heroes of the War of Independence were children under 16, and children fought alongside adults in the conflicts that subsequently shaped the nation's history. Besides serving as soldiers, children worked in a wide variety of other occupations. An 1804 census listing of Indians in San Juan de Ciénaga shows that all children between 8 and 14 years of age worked as labourers and fishermen.[7] According to comments in litigations involving Indians, kidnapped or stolen children were taken to other regions and hired out as domestics.[8] Orphanages often received requests for children to work as servants in the homes of the rich.[9] In the cities, authorities conducted house-to-house searches to locate fugitive Indians and return them to their communities. Reports of these pursuits contain information on Indian girls 8-14 years of age who worked in Bogotá as servants and spinners.[10]

Brief chronicles from the mid-nineteenth century reveal that children of tenant farmers or sharecroppers and children of slaves began agricultural work at an early age and toiled on haciendas during harvest time to increase their parents' productivity. At mines in Antioquia, young children helped their parents to pan for gold. Children of artisans began to work at eight years of age.[11]

The young age at which children started working can also be inferred from an 1870 census, which classified the population according to occupation. Out of a total population of approximately 2.9 million of whom 721,000 were between the ages of one and seven years, the 'non-working' population consisted of approximately 780,000 children, 60,000 students and 20,000 vagrants. More than two thirds of the inhabitants, including logically a large share of children, were economically active: 796,000 were farmers, 522,000 (mostly women) concerned with running households, 320,000 artisans, 22,000 servants, 40,000 miners, 27,000 merchants, 17,000 cattlemen, 15,000 manufacturers. The rest filled various other occupational roles.

In the late nineteenth century, settlers and their families lived by subsistence farming on small and medium-sized plots, selling their produce in nearby towns and cities.[12] Children worked on small tobacco farms in the Santander and Bolivar departments, and on coffee plantations in Cundinamarca, Tolima and Antioquia. The movement to settle the Antioquia, Caldas and Valle departments not only changed the coffee-growing system radically, so that at one point 57 per cent of total production came from farms with fewer than 20,000 trees, but it also represented the beginning of a greater involvement of children in

6 Silva Lujan, 1989a and b.
7 A.H.N. Colonia, Caciques e Indios, Tomo 9, Rollo 9/78, Folios 768-788.
8 A.H.N. Colonia, Caciques e Indios, Tomo 16, Folios 1009-1703.
9 A.H.N. Beneficencia, Tomo 1, Folios 611-669.
10 Ibid., Folios 606-611.
11 Triana, 1966 and 1967.
12 Melo, 1992.

Young coffee vendor, 1923. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, settlers and their families lived by subsistence farming on small and medium-sized plots, selling their produce in nearby towns and cities.

the accumulation of capital,[13] invested later (especially during the First and Second World Wars) to stimulate the nation's industrial sector. At the turn of the century, children were still an important part of the agricultural labour force on farms of every size. They were involved in the production of coffee, tobacco, cotton and food crops, allowing parents to increase their productivity as tenants, sharecroppers or day labourers hired for piece work. Since the 1950s, children have picked cotton for agribusinesses and played a key role in family-based production on peasant farms.[14]

Table 1 - **Working children (12-14 years) as a percentage of the economically active population, Colombia, 1951, 1964 and 1973**

	1951	1964	1973
Boys	3.2	4.8	5.7
Girls	2.6	5.1	6.2

Table 2 - **Working children (12-14 years) as a percentage of all children (12-14 years), Colombia, 1951, 1964 and 1973**

	1951	1964	1973
Boys	27.6	29.7	28.2
Girls	10.9	7.9	14.0

Table 3 - **Main occupations of children (12-14 years) as a percentage of all working children (12-14 years), by gender, Colombia, 1951 and 1964**

	1951		1964	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Agriculture	65.0	30.2	60.0	53.6
Manufacture	1.9	0.6	3.6	2.3
Service	10.9	63.5	8.9	31.9
Trade	2.0	2.8	2.4	9.2
Other	20.2	2.9	25.1	3.0

From the middle of the twentieth century, it has become more feasible to follow patterns of child labour through census data, in spite of the widely recognized problems of the definition of child labour and generalized underreporting. Census data of 1951, 1964 and 1973 show an increase in the percentage of children reported as working, with a marked growth in the share of work performed by girls (Tables 1 and 2). By 1964, girls had taken over many of the formerly male jobs in agriculture (Table 3), whereas their share of work in the service sector had declined. Both boys and girls were engaged in manufacture and trade more frequently in 1964 than in 1951.

Urbanization and Children's Involvement in the Informal Sector

The population of Colombia grew at an unprecedented pace in the 1950s. Mortality rates declined significantly, while fertility rates remained stable. The 1951 census showed a rural population of nearly 4.5 million people; by 1964, rural inhabitants had reached 8.4 million, and by 1973, 9.3 million. The agricultural sector accounted for 40.5 per cent of all economic activity in the 1950s, a share that would decrease to 23.5 per cent by the mid-1970s. The occupational structure changed completely, with only 35.2 per cent of the population employed in the primary sector by 1978, as opposed to 55.5 per cent in 1951. Nevertheless, the agricultural output of peasants and small farmers, supported by their families, remained substantial.[15]

Demographic growth in Colombia's four major cities (Bogotá, Medellín, Cali and Barranquilla) was particularly rapid in the 1950-1970 period. Their populations increased

13 Bejarano, 1973; Palacios, 1983; Triana, 1965.
14 Muñoz and Palacios, 1978.
15 Ocampo, 1991.

Hoisting bricks for a few *pesos*, this young boy is a poignant reminder of the dramatic situation of child labourers in Colombia earlier this century.

from about 1.5 million in 1951 to 3.5 million in 1964 and 5.6 million in 1973. If these four cities are considered with the other eight principal cities, a similar growth pattern is seen. From 2.1 million in 1951, the population of these 12 cities jumped to 4.8 million in 1964 and to 7.4 million in 1973. The percentage of the population living in urban centres climbed from 39 per cent in 1951 to 52 per cent in 1964 and 59 per cent in 1973.

However, urbanization was not accompanied by a parallel process of industrialization. Growth of the manufacturing sector was moderate, going from 17.5 per cent of economic activity in 1951 to 22.9 per cent in 1978. The proportion of the workforce in this sector increased at a similar pace during the same period. As a result, marginal or unproductive work became a vital alternative in the cities. Most of these jobs were in the trade and service sectors. The labour force in the tertiary sector rose from 28.7 per cent in 1961 to 42.5 per cent in 1978.[16] Just as a major gap emerged between the peasant and capitalist economy in the countryside, so did a divergence between capitalist industry and small factories and businesses in the informal sector of the city, representing a huge urban pre-capitalist economy. By the 1970s, the many sectors of the informal economy had substantially increased their contribution to the gross domestic product, employing more than half of the labour force. Workers in the informal sectors use primitive production techniques and are poorly compensated for their work. Small factories and cottage industries employ more manpower than medium-sized or large industries in Colombia. In some departments, there are 10 times as many informal-sector jobs than there are formal-sector ones. By the mid-1980s, according to the National Department of Statistics, 55 per cent of the population in the 10 most important cities worked in the informal sector.

Economists constantly refer to Colombia's dual economy,[17] and there is a growing recognition that the two sectors (industrial/artisan or modern/informal) are more complementary than competitive. Considerable industrial output is thought to be absorbed as inputs by the artisan sector. The growth of many large industries was based on contracting out work to small cottage industries to expand production, often for export. Most of these small production units employ fewer than five people, but they frequently use family members, including children, to increase productivity, thereby compensating for a lack of capital. Various government administrations have tried to support small industries of this type; in the 1970s, President Lopez Michelsen even spoke of Colombia as the Japan of America.

An analysis of how demographic, economic and social factors are related to child labour in the major Colombian cities[18] shows that an increase in industrialization (growth of the secondary sector) is accompanied by a decline in child labour within the sector. Industry's demand for skilled labour, coupled with a large supply of unskilled labour, places children outside the salaried job market and at the level of sporadic or seasonal helpers in marginal and subsistence activities, particularly within family units in the trade and service sectors. Child labour in recent decades in Colombia has been more a function of urbanization than of industrialization, not only because of children's participation in the urban informal sector, but also because children, and especially girls, have increasingly replaced the adult labour force in the countryside, filling the jobs left by adults and young males migrating to the cities in search of work.

The informal sector — which is more elastic, less protected, more labour-intensive and less capital-intensive than the formal sector — tends to rely on children as a readily available source of additional labour. Children's work allows adults to maintain ties with micro-enterprises where productivity per unit is extremely low. Viewed as a whole, how-

16 Ibid.
17 Bejarano, 1973, 1994; Kalmanovitz, 1982; Ocampo, 1991; Tirado Mejia, 1975; Urrutia, 1979.
18 Muñoz and Palacios, 1978.

ever, these enterprises provide indispensable support to production, distribution and consumption in the modern sector. Poor families and their children gain very few advantages from their contributions, which tend to benefit the formal sector. In a dualist capitalist economy, therefore, children become assets for the formal sector. They also facilitate the growth of the informal sector of the urban economy, which in turn needs output from the formal sector. Children broaden networks to support the distribution of formal-sector products. With few opportunities for formal-sector employment, parents in poor families seek survival in the vast informal economy, often with essential support from the work of their children.

Educational Policies

After independence, the new republic tried to convert its young into educated, useful citizens instilled with Christian ethics and prepared to be good soldiers. Legislation was adopted establishing schools in religious parishes and convents, and providing for educational reform especially at the primary level.[19] Although practice did not keep pace with plans,[20] Colombia took steps to organize a public school system and began slowly to educate its population. Official documents show that in 1833 the country had 378 schools, with 10,499 students.[21] In 1836, near the end of President Francisco de Paula Santander's term (1832-1837), his government reported 1,000 schools, including both public and private institutions, and a school population of 26,070 pupils.[22] The reforms of 1870 lent the force of their enthusiasm and republican mystique to promoting public education. A vigorous approach to public instruction was evident in the broad debate on education and in the rapid and sustained growth of primary schooling. "If only 22,000 children were attending school by mid-century, this figure had reached 60,000 by 1870 and 70,000 by 1874. By 1876, there were 1,464 schools in Colombia with 79,123 students. According to official reports, this represents an increase of more than 327 schools and 27,177 pupils compared with the figures for 1872".[23]

During the nineteenth century, despite impressive progress in education, Colombia remained an essentially rural society, and the schools that were founded operated primarily in cities and towns. The skills required to find work continued to be taught mostly at home, in small workshops or on plantations where children entered the labour force at an early age. The doctrine of Church on Sundays and a sermon from the pulpit rounded off the child's education. Vocational schools trained future craftsmen and labourers, and rural schools taught peasants. In the early 1900s, a significant proportion of the education sector was associated with the immediate needs of the labour market. Popular education was seen as the way to give children from poor families "special knowledge, making them useful as peasants and workers, which are the positions they will always occupy".[24]

In the 1950s, enrolment rates among the school-age population rose to almost 50 per cent and would rise even more sharply during the National Front (1962-1978).[25] The state primary schools that sprung up to accommodate the burgeoning school population were far better equipped in urban than in rural areas, and so perpetuated rural-urban disparities in education. Legislation unified primary schooling in Colombia in 1963 by making five years of

19 A.H.N. Ministerio del Interior, Tomo 41, Folios 062-065, Tomo 541, Folio 378.
20 A.H.N. Relaciones Exteriores, Tomo 20, Folios 722-723.
21 A.H.N. Ministerio del Interior, Tomo 541, Folio 378.
22 Colmenares, 1966, 1989; Fundación para la commemoración del bicentenario del natalicio y el sesquicentenario de la muerte del general Francisco de Paula Santander, 1990.
23 Jaramillo Uribe, 1982a and b.
24 Muñoz and Pachón, 1991.
25 Helg, 1982.

Table 4 - **Percentage of children enrolled in primary schools, by department, 1847-1985**

Departments	1847	1873-1874	1912	1918	1938	1965a	1985b
Antioquia	2.2	5.4	8.8	10.2	10.1	59.0	79.7
Atlántico	2.2	2.0	4.5	5.0	5.7	53.7	85.0
Bolívar			2.8	2.8	5.5	48.5	74.9
Boyacá	0.9	2.0	3.8	4.4	5.8	56.2	81.2
Caldas	(1)		8.7	10.0	9.5	62.2	79.2
Cauca	1.9	2.3	5.6	4.5	8.3	58.9	70.7
Cundinamarca	1.5	4.6	4.6	5.0	7.3	68.7	84.2
Huila	(2)		3.8	4.1	5.6	61.5	75.8
Magdalena	1.0	3.5	3.2	3.4	6.4	36.6	70.7
Nariño	(3)		5.7	6.2	8.2	49.4	77.4
Norte de Santander	0.9	3.1	3.8	4.1	5.6	61.4	73.2
Santander			4.3	4.5	5.1	62.4	80.9
Tolima	1.4	1.6	3.9	5.0	6.0	64.9	74.8
Valle del Cauca	(4)		8.3	8.7	8.3	62.5	88.7

Sources: Urrutia, 1979. Data for a were taken from the *Anuario General de estadistico,* Tomo II Culturales, DANE, and for b from the preliminary results of the 1985 census.
(1) Caldas was part of Antioquia;
(2) Huila was part of Tolima;
(3) Nariño was part of Cauca;
(4) Valle del Cauca was part of Cauca.

elementary education compulsory in urban and rural areas alike. The rapid expansion of primary school enrolment in recent decades is evident in Table 4.

An emergency plan was adopted in 1967 to resolve a lack of space for nearly 700,000 primary school pupils. Schools were ordered to operate on an intensive schedule that reduced the number of class hours per week in order to free teacher hours, which could be dedicated to other children. 'Complete schools' or 'unitary schools' were introduced in rural areas. With flexible regulations and adjusted hours, they allowed students to complete the five primary grades under a single teacher. Double shifts were instituted at some schools, with one group of students attending in the morning and another in the afternoon. The main goal was to increase capacity, and the consequences of giving students half a day off were not taken into consideration. To resolve the problem of space for children living in rural areas, a programme known as 'Schools for Rural Development' was begun in 1970, which enabled students to attend the five primary grades and the first segment of secondary vocational education in a work-study programme.[26]

In 1979, to mark the International Year of the Child, a school census was conducted in Bogotá under the supervision of this author and Carlos Becerra, with support from UNICEF, the Ministry of Labour and the District Department of Education. Covering 822 elementary schools in the capital city, the census found that 77.8 per cent of the children interviewed were employed in or outside the home. It showed child labour to be the norm among low-income households of the city. It also revealed that school attendance and employment were not mutually exclusive, as a high percentage of children who did attend school spent the other half of the day working. The types of work carried out by these children ranged from unremunerated domestic chores to more difficult activities, demanding

26 Lebot, 1975.

greater effort and risk, for which some remuneration was received. These earnings effectively increased family income or at least reduced household expenses.[27]

Specific Legislation on Child Labour

In the 1920s and early 1930s, as a result of the political and social movements of the time, there was an upsurge in social legislation, including laws protecting children in the workplace:

- *Statute 48/1924* made it legal for children over the age of 14 years to engage in any type of work. Children under this age were permitted to work, but only during the day, for no more than six hours and at jobs not detrimental to their health nor endangering their lives. The Statute expressly prohibited night work in mines, oil refineries, bakeries or in activities requiring the use of lead, phosphorous, mercury, arsenic or explosives. The fact that this Statute provided for special allowances to cover medical and dental care for poor children in schools and factories suggests that there were many children working in factories.

- *Statute 79/1926* required children under 14 years to present a certificate of primary education and authorization from the chief of police to be allowed to work. As previously, the statute granted children 14 years and over permission to work, again provided the job was not detrimental to their health and did not endanger their lives or involve more than eight hours a day or six days a week. Children between 12 and 14 years were authorized to perform light work, on the condition that it was appropriate to their age and did not preclude school attendance. The law prohibited boys under 15 and girls under 18 years of age from working on the streets or in public places, and all children under 18 from working in industries or activities detrimental to their health.

- *Statute 26/1927* dealt with public education and established norms for the issue of school certificates allowing children to work. Parents or guardians were prohibited from hiring out children under 12 years of age who had not completed their primary education. Plantation or estate owners on whose property more than 20 school-age children lived were required to provide a facility for a rural school.

- *Statute 9/1930* prohibited children under 17 years from working where alcoholic beverages were served or at night as driver's assistants. Children under 14 years were not allowed to work in government-owned or private industry, on ships or in agriculture.

- *Statute 129/1931* approved ILO Convention No. 5, adapted several months after the Organization's creation in 1919, prohibiting work by children under 14 years of age in industrial undertakings.

After this spate of legislative measures, no new child labour legislation was adopted until 1946. Statute 83/1946 added a number of new regulations relating to child labour. It prohibited school-age children from working if this substantially reduced their time for study and leisure. Children under 12 years were not allowed to undertake strenuous labour or work that was detrimental to their health or morals or endangering to their lives. What constituted strenuous or detrimental work, however, was not clearly defined. That definition was largely left up to the employer. After this statute was passed, there was again a long legislative silence on the issue.

In 1979, with the celebration of the International Year of the Child, child labour was again perceived as a social problem. There was a revival of legal concern for children, sup-

27 Aldana, Amezquita and Becerra, 1983.

Young miner, about 1950. A law passed in 1924 made it illegal for children to work in mines at night, but did not prohibit them from spending most of their waking hours underground. Although more comprehensive legislation was subsequently passed, it was largely unenforced.

ported by studies conducted at the time and resulting in Statute 20/1982, which excludes children from specific occupations that are detrimental to their morals or health[28] and reiterates the need for an educational limit at which children can enter the job market. Nevertheless, children over 12 years of age continue to be allowed to work within the family. The Statute also calls for a maximum six-hour work day and 36-hour week for children, paid vacations and the minimum legal wage.

Previous child labour legislation consisted mainly of guidelines on working conditions and prohibitions. In some cases, the law was general enough to make evasion easy. In others, it was specific to the point of giving the impression that law makers were trying to regulate child labour where it did not exist (for example, in modern and complex industry), while ignoring the domestic, street and family nature of this phenomenon. Although more comprehensive legislation has now been passed, efficient enforcement mechanisms have yet to be designed and put in place. Child labour legislation seems to have been largely ineffective: whenever poor families need to increase their productivity or level of subsistence, they continue to rely on children's work.

It is difficult to explain why there was such a lack of legislation for so many decades. More puzzling still is the apparent indifference of social scientists and economists to child labour problems. Census data relating to child labour in 1951, 1964 and 1973, for instance, were not analysed until 1978 and then only partially used in the formulation of the 1982 legislation. This neglect cannot be attributed to society's attitudes towards children, for, as we have briefly shown, children's education and protection have been given a great deal of prominence in Colombia since the nineteenth century. Undoubtedly, behind social action and inaction lie powerful interests, even though it is unclear who benefited most from, or was harmed most by, restrictions on the use of child labour. Some of the jobs children were prohibited from performing were those that foreign enterprises had established in mining and agriculture or in the modern sectors of the economy. Because of the legislation, entrepreneurs achieved better quality in their production by using skilled labour. Adult workers kept stable salaries thanks to the restrictions on the supply of labour. And, finally, the informal sector and the peasant economy both benefited from the enhanced availability of child labourers.

Some Conclusions

The available literature and documentary evidence suggest that child labour has been present throughout Colombian history, but with a number of characteristics totally different from those observed during the period of industrialization in European countries. In the colonial period, Indian children were exploited outside the reservations supposedly providing protection. Black slave children commonly laboured alongside their parents on plantations and in mines.[29] They later became fishermen and farmers in the *palenques* (settlements founded by runaway slaves). Children in villages and small towns have always performed a variety of agricultural[30], artisan, service, extraction and production activities.[31] Throughout this century, parents and other adults in rural areas have employed children for domestic work, farming, harvesting, grazing and marketing. Children have worked in coal mines and panned for gold.[32] In urban areas, they have performed burdensome

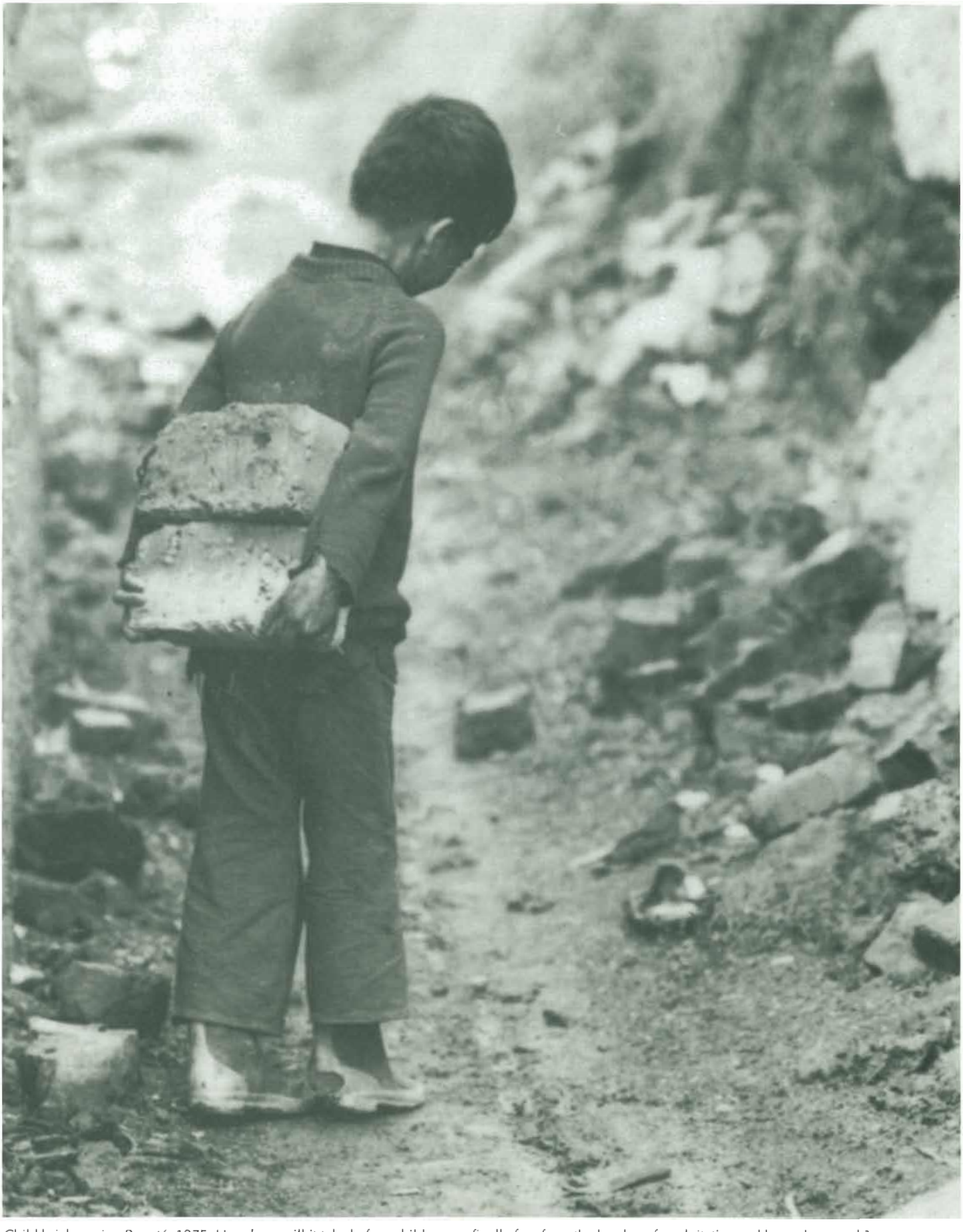
28 The law bars children from employment in occupations that require handling toxic substances or explosive, inflammable or caustic material; that are conducted at extreme temperatures, in a polluted environment, with insufficient ventilation, underground or underwater; that involve exposure to noise levels exceeding 80 decibels; and that require the use of radioactive substances, luminescent paint, x-rays, ultraviolet or infrared rays or high-voltage electrical current.

29 A.H.N. Relaciones Exteriores, Tomo 20, Folios 737-813

30 A.H.N. Republica, Tomo 10, Folios 15-33, 82-87, 882-887.

31 Triana, 1966 and 1967.

32 Salazar, 1990; Salazar et al., 1994.



Child brick carrier, Bogotá, 1975. How long will it take before children are finally free from the burden of exploitative and hazardous work?

household chores in place of mothers, and they have been employed outside the home as labourers or domestics.[33] Children have been engaged as helpers or apprentices at small workshops specializing in wrought iron, forging, mechanics and the repair of electrical appliances. They have been employed as clerks or assistants in shoemakers' shops, bakeries, butcher shops, carpentry workshops and construction sites. Children have toiled in stone quarries and sand pits, as scavengers in garbage dumps, and in prostitution. They have worked as gardeners, packed bags at stores, guarded cars and sold lottery tickets and newspapers. They have taken part in all types of activities, sometimes as family helpers and other times as hired hands, apprentices or self-employed labourers.[34] Children have long contributed directly to the growth of the agricultural sector and indirectly to the industrial sector through their work in the urban informal economy.

These findings prompt a few final comments on the ideology of child work. If we recognize that it is through work, thought and language that mankind has transformed the environment, for better or for worse, we have to conclude that work is an important component of the human identity. Why then should we prohibit children from working? We know that the material, economic and social conditions generating the need for children to work, on the one hand, and the vulnerability and exploitation of children, on the other, were the two principal reasons for the several attempts made in Colombia to abolish or at least to regulate and reduce child labour. We also know that, historically, the protection and the rehabilitation of children in Colombia had both legal and practical links with work. Work has been associated with punishment, depreciating its intrinsic worth, and it has been linked with poverty. Abandoned children, orphans and street children who have been institutionalized often produce goods and services under the pretext of discipline and training and without recognition for their efforts.[35] Perhaps it is time that we make an effort to change our negative perception of children's work, translating its unrecognized value, like that of women's work within the home, into positive values associated with cooperation as well as into monetary value. If we do not, we are implying that their work is without worth. How can we so easily erase the value assigned to work, and indeed make work invisible and even non-existent? How can this process be explained? Was it the conversion of work into a commodity? Was it the monetary value of work inherent in capitalistic societies that deprived it of its human value? How have we all become so confused that we are unaware of the true value attached to our work?

The author must apologize for concluding with so many unanswered questions. From a scientific point of view, however, we do face more questions than answers, more descriptive studies than explanatory ones. Perhaps the questions we have left pending will serve as a useful reminder of the impossibility of reaching definitive 'truths' in human or social research. Explanations have changed so many times throughout history, and are so very much influenced by the scientific framework and ideologies of the moment, that surely even our own answers must remain provisional and inconclusive.

33 Muñoz and Pachón, 1980.
34 Muñoz and Palacios, 1978 and 1979.
35 Muñoz, Pachón and Castillo, 1994.

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