

Children and Work



A craft school at the beginning of the 20th century, Croatia

In primarily agricultural societies such as those on the Balkans in the last two centuries, child labour has been an important supplement to adult labour in crop growing and livestock rearing. The actual position of children in rural areas has been far from the idyllic picture. Children would receive their first jobs at the early age of 4-5 (e.g. care of domestic fowls) and, as they grew older, they would be given the jobs of looking after smaller livestock such as sheep, pigs or goats and driving them to pasture. Mothers would teach little girls to cook and prepare dairy products. They would also have the task of looking after

younger brothers and sisters, cleaning the house, working in the garden and fetching water.

The large-scale seasonal works (sowing and harvesting) would require the participation of all able-bodied family members, including children. Such participation was usually linked to long absences from school (in those areas where schools existed). Up until the middle of the 20th century, children from poorer families were compelled to work as hired labour and servants in the countries of Southeast Europe.

In some parts of the Balkans that were under Ottoman rule children were also tar-

gets for slave trade until it was banned in 1860, and again in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the beginning of Austrian-Hungarian occupation in 1878.

In a description of the life of apprentices in Bosnia and Serbia in the first half of the 19th century, Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (1787-1864), Serbian literary reformer, ethnologist and historian, particularly stressed the hard life they led: "Apprentices in our country are... like real slaves. They fetch water, cut wood (in some cases they go into the forest with a horse, fell trees and drag the wood home), make fires, prepare food, wash dishes, bake bread, wash clothes, carry and amuse children and wash them when they soil themselves, clean rooms, stairs, stables and outhouses, look after and groom horses... After they have served in that way for years, another apprentice is taken on and assumes those duties, while the former allegedly starts working, let's say in Sarajevo. The old apprentice goes on foot in front of his master (even from Sarajevo to Constantinople, as is sometimes the case). And when the master dismounts at an inn, the apprentice must walk the horse, take care of it, feed and water it. The next morning, he must saddle the horse again and lead it to his master."

The beginnings of industrialization in southeast Europe in the 19th century were, like elsewhere in Europe, linked to the extensive use of child labour. Children would work for 12 to 14 hours a day in difficult and unhealthy conditions.

Girls of 12 to 14, for example, worked in the first factories in Greece in 1870, while some ten-year olds were working twenty years later. There were boys of 8 to 10 and girls of 6 to 7 working in factories in some parts of that country (Thessaly, Arcadia, Messina) in 1910. In 1874, boys accounted for 37% of the workforce in the spinning mills and 20.32% in the machine works, while girls made up 58.02% in the silk mills and 30.73% in other spinning mills. There was also a high percentage of child labour in the tanneries, machine works and food processing factories in Greece in 1920.

In Croatia, children accounted for 2% of the total workforce in workshops with over

five workers in the 19th century. The first laws to protect workers, including child workers, were passed in the Austrian part of the Hapsburg Empire in the 1880's. But, as was the case in Istria and Dalmatia, those laws applied only to workshops with more than 20 workers, and those were few in number. The first law on women and child workers in Bulgaria, which was passed in 1905, set the minimum age for employment at 12, and that was later raised to 14 thanks to legal adjustments in 1917. and 1922.

In Greece, a law was passed in 1912 allowing children over the age of 12 to be employed, and this was raised to the age of over 14 in 1920. (with the stipulation of a working day of no longer than six hours for those under 14 and no longer than eight hours for those between the ages of 14 and 18, while night work was forbidden, and children under the age of 15 were not allowed to work in mines). The number of child workers in Greece only started to decrease thanks to these measures after 1931.

Minors over the age of 12 were allowed to work in Hungary in 1922. on the basis of the Law on Industry, but they had to have a doctor's certificate and a testimonial that they had completed the fourth class of primary school. The employment of children under the age of 16 was banned in 1927.

In Serbia, the role of poorly paid workers in the crafts, trade, industry, building and transport at the end of the 19th century was reserved for children too. For wages of between one third and one half of what adult workers received they worked the same hours (between 12 and 14 hours a day). A total of 5% of all employees were under the age of 14 in 1910, while 60% of apprentices in the crafts and industry were under the age of 14 in 1912. Laws passed in Serbia and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1910. and 1922. banned the employment of children under 14, set an eight-hour working day as the maximum and banned night work for those aged between 14 and 18. Like elsewhere, however, employers took no heed of those regulations. Thus, a total of 1,827 male workers and 148 female workers under the age of 18 were employed in coalmines in



Girls with distaffs, 1942

Yugoslavia in 1925, amongst whom there were children as young as 12 and 13. In the middle of the 1930's there were 80,000 apprentices in Yugoslavia, who were most commonly used a cheap manpower.

The widespread use of children in all aspects of work in the rural areas and in small workshops remained beyond the reach of those laws and restrictions in all countries of southeast Europe right up to the end of the Second World War.

After the Second World War, children were legally protected by new laws limiting working hours and setting the minimum age for employment (15 in most countries), while banning heavy and dangerous labour and night work and stipulating special measures of protection and additional holidays, etc. Furthermore, laws regulated training in vocational schools and provided strict state control and penalties in the case of their violation. The extension of compulsory primary schooling also had the effect of reducing the number of child workers in agriculture (hence the resistance in some rural areas to state measures on compulsory primary education, as it was feared that

there would be no one to work the land). The modernization of agricultural production has also reduced the need for child workers in the countryside.

"Voluntary work campaigns" were a specific form of the mass work engagement of minors in communist countries. They worked without payment, and the aim was to create awareness of belonging to a "collective". Such campaigns further included ideological teaching "through work" and "the construction of the country". Those whose diligence stood out in such campaigns received the title of "exemplary worker", which was also a key to membership of party youth organizations. Even after the changes in the political systems in the former communist countries of the Balkans, the difficult living conditions compel children from amongst the poorest ranks of the population to start earning their living at an early age, usually outside the legal system. Forcing children to beg, to become prostitutes and criminals represents the most drastic form of child exploitation.

M.R.

Tugomila (Sorry-eyes)

The house of noble Mr. Ritter, a lawyer, was very grand and his spouse was known as a good housewife. She was guarding her staff with a sharp eye. She demanded order so that everyone kept to his or hers duties. Those who would not work, would not need to eat, was her motto. Her soft hands were seldom engaged in hard work around the house, but she would often found herself among the servants checking up on them. And woe to the poor servant who was found idle at that moment. Harsh words she would not utter, but with a cold stare, she would pierce the unfortunate creature who would be covered with cold sweat. On the next occasion, she would fire the poor soul. Since it was a nice household, everybody did their best to please the mistress; however, only Kata the old cook, who had accompanied her from her parents' home after her marriage to Ritter, really loved her.

The very first day for Tugomila (Sorry-eyes) was strictly divided between orders and work. Accustomed to work, the girl easily settles into her new position. But something else made her first days in that house difficult, in spite of her cheerful nature. Because of her poor knowledge of the German language, she could hardly understand Kata the cook and Lizika the chambermaid. On the other hand, she was offended by the coarse kitchen conversations Mato the coachmen led with the other maids. Because she avoided such company, they scorned her for her arrogance, telling her that she was no better than the rest of them. During lunch in the servants' room, when risqué stories and crude words were spoken, Tuga tried to eat her meal quickly to escape the unpleasant company as soon as possible. But they would start to abuse and disdain poor maid, calling her names: "That redneck girl from nowhere, where did she come from?" Tuga, however, paid no attention. She was a hard working and diligent servant and nobody could find a single fault in her work. And because she was a quick and skillful girl, she always managed to have

spare time for her usual and dearest habits, reading and learning.

Jagoda Truhelka, Croatia, (Zagreb, 1894.)

Lucky Blacksmith

My first job that morning was to forge a knife for my master. My master gave me a piece of sickle and I forged a big knife, polished it properly, fixed a handle and delivered it to him.

My master was very pleased. He praised my work and gave the knife to his wife. And his wife, my mistress, wandering where I had learned the blacksmith's trade, went on to show the knife to her neighbors. The entire neighborhood immediately demanded knives just like the one I made and went to find some scrap iron in their attics. So, I got a lot of jobs. All of this came from my first decent job – forging a knife for my master. If I had not forged that knife so well, my master would not have praised me and would not have delivered it to my mistress, and my mistress would not have showed it to other ladies nor would they have come to me with orders for more knives. Therefore, I decided to always work well and decently because that was the way to live a decent life.

That day I got so much work I could not handle it all. I had earned a lot of bread and some eggs, one cheese and I was promised bacon if I could forge a big knife out of a rusty saber.

I lived in that village for two weeks, working from dawn till sunset. I enjoyed the work, since with work I could afford a meal, even a good meal, and a roof over my head during the night. I got more than the plain

Questions

- 9.1. Look into your past and into your literature for examples of children who worked from a very early age.
- 9.2. Has there been more child labour in the villages or in the towns in your country? When you have reached a conclusion, ask yourselves why it was so.

Girls performed even the most arduous of tasks, Eastern Bosnia, 1930 's

bread I received the first day; people brought me cooked meals in the pots, beans and beet, cabbage and potatoes, kohlrabi and carrots – food they prepared for themselves. I did not have to make the knife handles since everyone made his own as children and adults were waiting in a row for me to complete their order as soon as possible.

And so, after two weeks I finished my work in that village. When nobody came with more orders I went to another village. I took a bag of coal, three eggs, one dried cheese, a piece of bacon and three coins with me! I did not earn money, but sold the eggs that children gave me as payment for the knives. I ate a lot of eggs and gave a few in exchange for shelter and sold the rest. I hid my money well and decided not to spend it but to save it for new clothes when the old ones became too ragged.

*Vjekoslav Košćević, Zagreb, Croatia, 1895.
English translation: Miloš Đurđević*



Twelve Hours Work

They started at about 11 p.m. and continued to work until 11 a.m. the next day. Twelve hours they were standing at the anvil, without a break, in a perpetual rhythm, like the water on the wheel. The first short break was due when the bells announced the breaking of the day. They had a loud prayer and then continued to work until breakfast shortly before 7 a.m. They then went home



to fetch the children, or - if they were old enough - the children came by themselves. Their breakfast consisted of dry bread or pap or flour soup, which were cooked on the forge fire. The lunch pap was also cooked there but eaten at home. After the lunch or even before it they weighted the nails on the old lever scale they had at home and then brought them to the warehouse to be weighed there again. Depending on the size of the nails, they made about 1000 pieces a day... In the afternoon they lay down to rest. After only two or three hours they got up again to have supper which was cooked at home. Then they prepared everything neces-

Recommendation

- On the basis of various examples of child labour, show your pupils how living conditions have improved in the course of history.

sary for the next day and went to bed again. A nail maker didn't get more than five or six hours of sleep a day, women with children even less than that. Mothers used to take their small children to the forge where they fixed a kind of small lever to the beam, which moved the bellows. That way the cradle with the baby was swinging in the rhythm of the bellows. The child absorbed the noises of the forge, its restlessness and chill - an also the first want and shortage. Like the adults, the children were pale and weak, and like the adults they suffered from malnutrition.

The unusual working hours - however harmful for the health - seemed to be so deeply rooted that any change was impossible. A blacksmith had to work at night; otherwise he couldn't have attended to his other chores - like preparing firewood for the winter, for example. Therefore he was willing to sacrifice his afternoon rest. Many a diligent worker was working throughout the night and the day: at night he was forging and during

the day attending to his other tasks. It frequently happened that he had no more than three or four hours of sleep daily. Most nail makers therefore looked pail, skinny; they had sunken eyes...

Here and there attempts had been made to change things. In some places, like Zgornji éelezniki, the working hours started earlier in the afternoon and ended towards the morning. That way the blacksmiths could at least get an uninterrupted - if not a longer sleep. However, such attempts remained scarce.

Such pattern of life continued to remain unchanged: it went on day after day, week after week, year after year. A child used to start working at the forge at the age of eight or nine and continued to do so throughout his adulthood, until he died.

(From a book about childhood in 19th century - Alenka Puhar, Prvotno besedilo življenja, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 1982, page 292-293)

Working Children

Children in the rural areas of Turkey join the production process in an early age, and children of low-income families in urban areas also have to work outside home. Since the work carried out by children in rural areas remains within the family, it has never been of legal interest, and although child labour is widely used in small businesses for small artisanal work on a family level in, it has not been made subject to legal regulations. It is a well-known fact that cheap child labour without social security is widely used in various sectors of the economy.

Indeed, according to the 1980 Census, 7.1% (1,347,000) of the working population (19,027,000) is under the age of 15, and 15.4% (2,928,000) is under twenty. 82.6% (1,113,000) of the population under the age of 15 and 63.9% (1,872,000) of those under 20 work in agriculture. The ratio of the female population working in agriculture is 52.9% for the first age group and 53.9% for the latter. While the female population among the children and youth working in the agricultural sector is quite large, the majority of those working outside the agricultural sector are made up of males. The absolute majority of those in the 12-20 age group working outside the agricultural sector (1,289,000) is male (82.9%). According to the same data, 39.7% of females and 22.2% of males in the 12-20 age group are looking for a job, and 39.1% of females and 33.1% of males are employed in the manufacturing industries.

Even though child labour has been used extensively, it has been an issue for regulation only to a limited extent until recently, and that only for the businesses under the labour law. Although the constitution requires special protection for children as it does for the youth and women as regards the working conditions, regulations in this field are clearly insufficient. Despite the fact that the Labour Law No. 1475 frequently refers to the term „children“, it has neither made a clear definition of children nor set the criteria for it, but sufficed itself by setting the lowest age limits for children working in heavy and dangerous jobs, or at night or doing shift-work. The earliest age a child

can begin to work is set at twelve in the General Hygiene Law dated 1930 and the employment of children under that age as workers or apprentices has been banned in factories or workshops and in mines. This limit which falls far below the age of 15 laid down as the age of entry to employment under international agreements, prevents children from adequately benefiting from social services such as education, health etc.

Although the same law precludes children between 12 and 16 from working more than 8 hours a day or at night, there are no controls or sanctions to enforce such provisions.

On the other hand, when we consider that working children are deprived of basic rights and guarantees, it becomes evident that child labour needs further legal protection.

The Apprentice, Qualified Worker and Foreman Act (numbered 2089, dated 1977) enacted to regulate the conditions for working children to a certain extent, has sought particularly to legislate the labour relations with regard the children working in businesses registered by various professional organisations. The law defines an „apprentice“ as a person who enters the service of an employer by signing a service contract and requires that a person has to be over 12 and at least a primary school graduate to become an apprentice. The law which sets forth the mutual rights and obligations governing the relations between the apprentice and employer has also laid down the principles for promotion to the status of qualified worker or foreman. While the same law prescribes the minimum wages to be paid to apprentices and provides for annual paid leave and social security insurance against certain risks (such as occupational accidents and illnesses), it fails to provide an efficient system for controls and sanctions to enforce the regulations it has laid down. Therefore, it is a fact that working children in Turkey are not only deprived of adequate means of socialization, but are also employed in unsuitable and unchecked conditions.

*From Cumhuriyet Donemi Turkiye Ansiklopedisi,
Iletisim Yay., Istanbul, Turkey.*

The Remarkable Boy

I went to see a friend of mine who was trying to make a living with his small foot-lever in the dirty, choking atmosphere of a building resembling a copper saucer, in which there were rooms one next to the other, each engaged in different jobs like producing biscuits, chocolate, paper-wrapped candies, olive oil and soap, as well as small workshops for mending and repairing. He wasn't there. I was just about to walk away when I saw the boy sitting in a fairly big wooden case beside the door. He was eating some bread with cheese and tomatoes. He had dirty, blonde curly hair. His face was darkened by machinery oil, and he had wonderful green eyes sparkling from within...

- Are you looking for the printer guy?

- Yes.

- He just went to cut the papers. He'll be right back.

He turned an empty wooden case which stood beside him and offered:

- Please, sit down!

He was looking at me so sweetly. I sat down. He handed over a piece of his bread. I told him that I wasn't hungry.

- Or is it because my hands are dirty?

- Oh, certainly not.

- You can't keep clean in our job...

I thought he was working as an apprentice for one of the repair-workshops, and asked:

- What kind of work are you doing?

- Turnery, levelling...

- What?

He laughed loudly.

- Everyone is surprised when they hear this. But I'm finishing the twelfth level this September...

- So, can you do everything concerning turnery and levelling?

- Why shouldn't I? My father used to own a workshop. I used to go to school in the morning, and to the workshop in the afternoon.

- Up to which grade have you been to school?

- Up to fourth grade of primary school.

- And then?

- My mother died. We were left all alone with my two sisters. And when my father started to go along with a bad woman...

- You left school. Were you fond of going to school?

He sighed.

- Very much!

- What did you wish to become?

- A captain. To sail in big seas, to sail in wavy, frightful seas. To go to Europe and America. I heard the boats are full of fun while passing the Equator. Is it true?

- It's true.

- And then the statue of liberty in the port of New York. How tall is it? Is it big?

- I don't know.

- Did you read Robinson Crusoe?

- I did.

- How did he manage to live on a lonely island? Do you think it's possible?

- Would be better if it never happened.

- Yes but it does happen. Or maybe the author thought so. But it's a good idea. But anyway, bravo to Robinson. He didn't feel helpless. He was able to do a lot of things. It needs talent not to die, don't you think so? To stay alive!

While he was taking out his handkerchief which was soiled with machinery oil, the marble balls in the big pocket of his worker overalls caught my eye. He noticed. He took them out and made them clatter in his palm:

- Well, he said. Work, work, work... You just get bored. We play with Ateş Ali at break time.

- Who's Ateş Ali?

- He works for the biscuit production plant, downstairs. He's from our neighbourhood. We come to work together, every morning. I don't have a mother, and he has no father. We go to football games and movies together too.

- Which of them do you like best? The marble balls, the movies or the football games?

- The football games. But we can't enjoy them.

- Why not?

- We can't afford the reserved seats. When we give half a buck they let us into *Texas*. But



Rest after a day of hard work

we aren't tall enough to see from there. They haven't thought about children, those who built the stadium!

- And so, you?

- We go to the movies with Ali, usually... On Sundays of course. If my father is home, I run off early in the morning. Right to Şehzadebaşı.

- If he's not home?

- If he's not home I can't run off. Then it's my duty to heat up the water, to wash, and bathe my sisters.

- How much do you earn from levelling?

- Ten liras a week.

- Is that enough?

- How can it be enough with these prices? They give twenty five liras in other workshops, but I can't go.

- Why not?

- The foreman is my father's friend!

- Are you sure there's no cheating here?

- I suspect it too, but he's my father you see? I don't want to think of bad things.

- We talked from here and there for quite a while. I learned that he woke up every morning at five o'clock by the ring of the

bell, he put the teapot on the gas furnace, he washed up the dishes, he bought bread and cheese from the market, he gave breakfast to his brothers towards six o'clock, and boarded the crowded boat full of workers at six thirty at the latest, arrived at the Bridge at seven o'clock and began to work at seven fifteen.

- Well, how will you end up?

- Like what, sir?

- Let's say you've got an opportunity.

Would you like going to school again, and become a captain in due course?

At first his eyes sparkled with joy. Then the sparkle faded away, he just stared at some point.

- Hmm? Would you like it?

- I would, but...

- But?

- My brothers. You can't rely on my father. He'd just go along with some bad woman again...

A vein ached inside me.

- ... it's too late for me. My brother is going to school. The other one is little yet. I'll send him to school when he grows. I guess my weekly allowance will be fifty by then.

He asked suddenly:

- Sir?

- Hmm?

- Will I always be short like this?

- Why? Aren't you growing?

- I put a pencil-mark on the wall before my mother died. I'm measuring now. Still in the same place. Do you think I'll stop growing and carry on as a dwarf?

He was waiting excitedly for my response when a tall, stout man appeared in the hot, dirty light of the corridor full of rattling sounds of machines:

- Ayhan!

His face and overalls were covered with dirt and dust, too.

The child jumped out of the wooden case:

- Yes, master!

- Still haven't eaten?

- I did.

- Well if you've eaten, go and screw cut those pipes!

- All right master...

The boy had already forgotten about me.

He ran through the dirty light of the corridor. He entered the workshop at the corridor's end. I went after him. I watched him in excitement from the edge of the workshop's window. Because he wasn't tall enough he stood on a wooden case turned upside down, and managed the machine from there. As for the machine, it was like a submissive animal under the command of the child, and dropped out gleaming curly iron pieces on the floor.

Orhan Kemal (1914-1979), „Harika Çocuk“ (The Remarkable Boy), pp. 57-62.

In Refik Durbas (haz.). 1999. Türk Edebiyatında Çalışan Çocukların Hikayeleri: Kar Altında Allı Turna (Türk Edebiyatında Çalışan Çocukların Hikayeleri: Kar Altında Allı Turna) (Stories of Working Children in the Turkish Literature). Istanbul: Gendaş, Turkey