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Child Labor, Compulsory Education, and the Women's Movement

Abstract:

This paper explores the connection between child labor, compulsory public education, and the women's movement of the twentieth century. Child labor was a widespread issue within the United States beginning with the Industrial Revolution. In an effort to protect children the women's movement of the twentieth century added the issue of child welfare to their platform. In order to overcome the obstacles of child labor laws being struck down, the solution ended up being compulsory public education. Although children were kept out of the factories, this paper argues that the public-school system really just prepares children to be a loyal and obedient workforce. There is an irony in that the very system put in place to take children out of the workforce just ends up preparing them to enter it in the future.

Keywords: child labor, compulsory education, women's movement

Child labor became extremely common during the Market Revolution in the United States. Children were working with dangerous machinery that sometimes cost them their limbs. Some children were working in mines with little to no ventilation leading to diseases. Children were dropping out of the school system as early as elementary school to work full time. As time went on the issue of truancy (persistent school absences) due to child labor only grew more problematic. This continued until the twentieth century, when the Women's Movement was at its height. Many women believed child labor was an ill that society needed to rid itself of and they took a stand and lobbied for child labor legislation. Although it was a long and challenging road, the hard work of women paid off through the passage of compulsory public education attendance laws. With these laws grew the assumption that school is designed to educate students and to teach them facts. Yet, due to industrial capitalists preventing the passage of child labor laws in the early twentieth century, women advocates turned to compulsory education to put an end to child labor. I argue that although the origins of public school are rooted in anti-child labor

movements, the school system nevertheless teaches children the skills that it takes to be productive in the workforce, just later in their lives.

The first section of the paper reviews the history of child labor in the United States from 1860 to 1930. I give examples of child labor laws and explain that they were deemed unconstitutional by the court system. The second section considers the Women's Movement of the twentieth century and explains the connection between the Women's Movement and anti-child labor sentiment. The third section examines the start of compulsory education laws in the United States and their connection to lowering the rate of child labor. Finally, I review the ideologies implemented by the educational system in the subconscious of students.

The Issue of Child Labor

Until the twentieth century, child labor was prevalent in the United States. During the eighteenth century, the country experienced an increase in the number of factory workers producing household goods. Factory owners hired children so they could save money because kids were passive which protects the employer.¹ There was a hierarchy of employees whose wages varied depending on where they landed in the hierarchy. While children were typically at the bottom, some women were not paid much more.² Both women and children were viewed as a part of Nature, meaning they were exploited for capitalist gain which made it very easy for employers to pay them less.³ Typically, with a low possibility of a better future these children grew up working dangerous jobs and would do so until they were either disabled or dead.

¹ Theresa Pye and Angela Howard, *The Campaign to Eliminate an Evil to Society: Social Feminists and Child Labor Reform, 1880 to 1938* (Texas: ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2010), 12.

² United States, *Report on Condition of Woman and Child Wage-Earners in the United States* (Washington: United States, 1910), 121-215.

³ Jason Moore and Raj Patel, *History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of... the Planet* (California: University of California Press, 2017), Chapter 1.

The Market Revolution was a time in which the rural areas of the United States transitioned into more urban and industrialized areas. The making of goods became much easier through mass production, rather than being produced by hand. Even though the economy improved overall for the middle and upper classes, the working class and poor still faced hardships. This led to the need for the children of the poor and working-class families to work full time jobs to help their parents support their families.⁴ Beginning during the Market Revolution child labor was common, with around 1.75 million children under sixteen working by 1900.⁵ Following the Market Revolution, child labor was still extremely prominent during the Industrial Revolution as well. Children were being forced to work long hours, sometimes up to sixteen, for little pay and in extremely harsh conditions. For example, many young boys worked as “breaker boys” in mines. Coal was needed as a source of energy, but there was a desire by the capitalist society that energy remain cheap, thus the hiring of young children to complete the work.⁶ The child laborers would spend hours crouching over picking out the refuse from the coal. The crouched position caused spinal damage to the young boys and caused them to be bent over as if they were old men. Crushed fingers, and cut and broken hands were typical injuries seen in the coal mines for child laborers. Sometimes even worse a boy could fall down the chute and later be discovered dead, or a young child could be torn apart and killed by the machinery. The inhalation of the dust led to medical conditions such as asthma.⁷ In cigar factories young boys and girls alike were put to work. These factories had dim lighting and poor ventilation.⁸ Children

⁴ John Spargo and Robert Hunter, *The Bitter Cry of Children* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1906), 127-128.

⁵ Spargo and Hunter, *The Bitter Cry of Children*, 142.

⁶ Moore and Patel, *History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of.. the Planet* (California: University of California Press, 2017), Chapter 6.

⁷ Spargo and Hunter, *The Bitter Cry of Children*, 164.

⁸ Spargo and Hunter, *The Bitter Cry of Children*, 135.

were employed in sawmills where dust entered their airways and there were accidents every day because children worked with dangerous machines.⁹ The Industrial Revolution was just the tip of the iceberg; as the years went on more children were hired by business owners in the textile industry, in mines, in factories, and much more.

The conditions that children worked under were extremely dangerous. For example, boys worked in glass factories leading to health problems.¹⁰ The glass factories were built so cheaply that they did not protect from the cold and would be surrounded by barbed wire in an effort to keep the child workers in for the night. The young boys worked hours from the early evening into the middle of the night. In the center of the room would be the furnace that had multiple little doors and in front of these doors is where the little boys sat to work. The young boys stared into the furnace for hours on end causing damage to their sight. These young boys tended not to get the rest they needed during the day whether it be due to family members in the household or the desire to be a real child and play.¹¹ Working in the factories that were poorly made led the boys to be extremely hot, feeling as though they were burning, on the one side of their face that was facing the furnace, but freezing cold on the other side leading to rheumatism — inflammation of joints and muscles. After work these child workers were far from done. They had to travel from the extreme heat of the factory to their homes which were usually a mile or more away. Being out in the cold wearing improper clothes led many boys to become ill with pneumonia.¹² Many young children also worked to make clothing, artificial flowers, and furniture. Young girls were employed in the manufacturing of clothing, specifically felt hats. In

⁹ Spargo and Hunter, *The Bitter Cry of Children*, 164.

¹⁰ Todd Postol, “Public Health and Working Children in Twentieth-Century America: An Historical Overview,” *Journal of Public Health Policy* 14, no. 3 (September 1, 1993): 348.

¹¹ Spargo and Hunter, *The Bitter Cry of Children*, 160.

¹² Spargo and Hunter, *The Bitter Cry of Children*, 160.

these factories the air was moist and hot. Young girls would faint, but as long as it was not all of the child workers that fainted this did not matter, as business was not hindered.¹³ In New York young girls had spinal damage from leaning over sewing tables for such long durations.¹⁴ When working to create artificial flowers child workers were expected to use poisonous chemicals to dye the fabric different colors. This led children themselves to also be dyed as if they were an artificial flower. The poison in these chemicals caused long term health effects, and if a child were to even get a cut, they could have died.¹⁵ In the furniture factories children worked to put together picture frames, which led their fingers to become stiff. Some worked to make paint, and the poisonous chemicals involved lead to children dying a slow death.¹⁶ The lives of these children were expendable to the employer and the use of these cheap commodities allowed employers to profit.¹⁷ Due to the poor working conditions that children were facing, some states felt it necessary to pass child labor laws.

State laws regarding the prevention of child labor were passed, but they were not enforced, and child labor continued to be an issue across the country especially with no federal laws being instated. States, such as Illinois, New York, and Pennsylvania, made laws establishing a minimum age that a child must be to work, but even with these laws parents and employers found loopholes and ways to avoid having to follow them.¹⁸ Although these laws set a minimum age, there was no law requiring there to be proof, so children younger than the minimum were

¹³ Spargo and Hunter, *The Bitter Cry of Children*, 177.

¹⁴ Postol, "Public Health and Working Children," 348-354.

¹⁵ Spargo and Hunter, *The Bitter Cry of Children*, 177.

¹⁶ Spargo and Hunter, *The Bitter Cry of Children*, 176.

¹⁷ Moore and Patel, *History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of... the Planet* (California: University of California Press, 2017), Chapter 7.

¹⁸ Pye and Howard, *The Campaign to Eliminate an Evil to Society*, 10.

still being employed.¹⁹ For example, in New York in 1886 a law prohibiting children under the age of thirteen from working was passed. Then in 1889 a law forbidding children between thirteen and fourteen from working and children who were under sixteen who could not read and write from working. Although these laws had been passed, employers paid no mind and continued to hire young children, and law enforcement turned a blind eye. There were no consequences when it came to breaking these laws which took away their importance.²⁰

The first child labor law was enacted in Massachusetts in 1836. The law gave new meaning to calendar ages.²¹ Prior to the passage of child labor laws, employers based how useful a child would be on their physical appearance and how developed they were mentally since there were no regulations regarding the age of child workers. With age limits set by child labor laws on how young a child could work, employers were more focused on the actual age of child laborers for the first time.²² Children under the age of fifteen that desired to work had to have gone to school for three months the year before seeking employment. By 1842, the state gave school committees the ability to fine those who broke the law and limited the workday to ten hours for children under twelve. The use of the census and the ability to document births made these laws possible to enforce, but due to the lack of support from officials these efforts were not fully carried out.²³ Throughout the New England area states began to pass their own laws that tended to copy that of the Massachusetts statute. In 1840, Rhode Island made it mandatory to

¹⁹ Pye and Howard, *The Campaign to Eliminate an Evil to Society*, 10.

²⁰ Moses Stambler, "The Effect of Compulsory Education and Child Labor Laws on High School Attendance in New York City, 1898-1917," *History of Education Quarterly* 8, no. 2 (July 1, 1968): 202.

²¹ James Schmidt, *Rendered More Useful: Child Labor and Age Consciousness in the Long Nineteenth Century* (New York: NYU Press, 2015), 153.

²² Schmidt, *Rendered More Useful*, 154.

²³ Stambler, "The Effect of Compulsory Education," 205.

show proof that a child under twelve attended three months of school.²⁴ The courts and public were very hostile towards laws regulating child labor because many families relied on the extra income. There was also a traditional view that parents were the ones to hold the power when deciding the best interest of their child. Many of the child labor laws were struck down as unconstitutional and this continued well into the twentieth century.

The Keating-Owen Child Labor Act of 1916 and the Supreme Court case *Hammer v. Dagenhart* are great twentieth century examples of the response to child labor laws on a national level. In 1908 the photographer Lewis Hine was brought in by the National Child Labor Committee—a committee formed by women in 1904 designed to fight for the abolition of child labor in the United States—to show the harsh conditions of child labor. The photos taken by Hine aimed to demonstrate a need for legislation to protect the welfare of child workers, and it worked. In response to the lobbying of Progressives, specifically women,—people of the Progressive party that desired better working conditions, women’s suffrage, and the abolition of child labor among other things—Congress passed the Keating-Owen Child Labor Act of 1916. This act banned the sale of products made by children that worked under conditions that did not meet federal standards, children under fourteen could not be employed, and the maximum workday for fourteen to sixteen year olds was eight-hours.²⁵ By passing this law, Congress meant to deter employers from hiring children as none of the products produced by children under fourteen would be allowed to be transported over state lines. The federal government was attempting to rid the country of child labor through the passage of the law, which angered many employers and opposition followed. Rather than trying to appeal to Congress by attempting to

²⁴ Schmidt, *Rendered More Useful*, 154.

²⁵ Allen Pusey, “Child Labor Law Declared Unconstitutional.” *ABA Journal* 101, no. 6 (June 1, 2015): 72.

block the passage of the law at first, a few southern textile manufacturers went right to the courts.

The major question the courts were asked was whether the Keating-Owen Child Labor Act violated the Commerce Clause, Tenth Amendment, and Fifth Amendment. To combat the law, The Executive Committee of Southern Cotton Manufacturers (ECSCM) chose Roland Dagenhart, an employee of a manufacturing company as the plaintiff in a court case.²⁶ Dagenhart's two sons aged 12 and 14 were also employees of the Fidelity Manufacturing Co. in Charlotte. The argument Dagenhart used was that this new law deprived him of the opportunity to have the added income his sons produced. In a 5-4 decision the Supreme Court decided in favor of Dagenhart stating that production is not commerce and therefore the new law was too far of a stretch of Congress's power. The Supreme Court struck down the Keating-Owen Child Labor Act and determined that the act was in violation of the constitution. This case demonstrates how unwilling employers and courts were to accept the regulation of child labor. With employers and courts being so hostile towards Child Labor Laws, there was a need for a different route to put a halt to the issue. It was the women of the twentieth century who brought the issue of child labor to the forefront of the political agenda and began to push for laws requiring all school age children to be in the classroom through the creation of compulsory public education.

The Women's Movement of the Twentieth Century

In the United States there is a history of women being treated as inferior, and although this was not true for every culture, it tended to be more common to see women treated as less

²⁶ Pusey, "Child Labor Law," 72.

than men. Women were thought to be the housewife, with the tendencies to be caring and loving, creating a household that is desirable for men and doing the work of raising the children.²⁷ It was more about men and creating better lives for men that was the dominant train of thought leading into and during the twentieth century.²⁸ It has been said time and time again that “well-behaved women seldom make history”,²⁹ and this could not be any more the case than of the women of the twentieth century. During what came to be known as the Progressive Era, groups of women started to stand up and speak out on the injustices that they and others had been facing all their lives. The years of following along silently had to finally come to an end, and many women made a name for themselves because of this.

One battle that women chose to fight during the Women’s Movement of the twentieth century is that of child labor. The National Child Labor Committee began in 1904, and members of the committee proposed investigative studies into the employment of children.³⁰ With the support of President Theodore Roosevelt, Mary McDowell and Lillian Wald were able to conduct a mass investigation into child labor from 1907 through 1916. The results of the *Report on the Condition of Women and Child Wage Earners* were shocking.³¹ The investigation looked into the cotton industry and found that thirty-three percent of employees were girls younger than sixteen. The largest percentage of both boys and girls working was in Mississippi and South Carolina. The southern states had the most relaxed laws regarding child labor. The report exposed child labor in northern states as well. In New Jersey and Pennsylvania laws required a minimum age for child laborers, but these were not enforced. After the report, the Department of

²⁷ Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (PM Press, 1975), 17.

²⁸ Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 17.

²⁹ Laurel Ulrich, *Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), xiii.

³⁰ Pye and Howard, *The Campaign to Eliminate an Evil to Society*, 15.

³¹ Pye and Howard, *The Campaign to Eliminate an Evil to Society*, 16.

Labor decided that legislation was a necessity.³² In 1912, President William Howard Taft signed a new bill into law establishing the United States Children's Bureau, making the Bureau the first national government office to be solely dedicated to the welfare of children throughout the country. The Children's Bureau worked to educate women on things such as caring for infants, and although the Bureau did not directly aid in the fight to abolish child labor it was still a step in the right direction to help protect children.³³ In 1916, the National Child Labor Committee succeeded in their efforts even further with the passage of a federal child labor law which came to be known as the Keating-Owen Child Labor Act of 1916. When this law was struck down as unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1918 the National Child Labor Committee fought for another piece of legislation in 1919. Known as the Child Labor Tax Law, it imposed a heavy tax on the net profits every year of employers that used child laborers as a way to deter the hiring of children. From 1919 until 1922 the law remained standing, and the National Child Labor Committee used this time to expand its agenda to include the entire sphere of child welfare.³⁴ Child welfare includes things like education, the family, and how children fare in society. Women were not just attempting to end child labor, but to better the lives of children overall. The United States Children's Bureau gained more money in 1918, and with the help of women's organizations attempted to improve child welfare.³⁵ These efforts were successful in that more states now had child welfare divisions and many created committees dedicated to the betterment of childcare that were willing to cooperate with the federal government. These new divisions and

³² Pye and Howard, *The Campaign to Eliminate an Evil to Society*, 16-18.

³³ Diana Gildea, "Transformations of Working-Class Families," *Women, Work, & Power in Binghamton's Long Twentieth Century*. Manuscript.

³⁴ Stanley Lemons, "Social Feminism in the 1920s: Progressive Women and Industrial Legislation." *Labor History* 14, no. 1 (January 1, 1973): 89.

³⁵ Lemons, "Social Feminism," 89.

committees led to job opportunities for women that had not previously been available.³⁶ Women organizations also lobbied for “children’s codes” that would “embody all laws relating to children: work, guardianship, age of consent, juvenile delinquency, care of the handicapped and mentally retarded, child support, and school attendance.”³⁷ Between 1921 and 1924 the number of states that adopted children’s codes went from seventeen to twenty-nine. When the Child Labor Tax Law that had been passed in 1919 was declared unconstitutional in 1922, Florence Kelley led women to lobby for a new amendment to be passed that would allow Congress to pass laws regarding child labor. Known as the Child Labor Amendment it was backed by a plethora of women’s organizations.³⁸

The Child Labor Amendment was an extremely controversial piece of legislation. The provisions of the amendment stated “Section 1. The Congress shall have power to limit, regulate, and prohibit the labor of persons under 18 years of age. Section 2. The power of the several States is unimpaired by this article, except that the operation of State laws shall be suspended to the extent necessary to give effect to legislation enacted by the Congress.”³⁹ The controversy surrounding the Child Labor Amendment centered around the mass amount of power that it would be giving to the federal government. Supporters of the passage of this amendment believed it would give the necessary power to Congress to pass legislation to hinder child labor without the legislation being deemed unconstitutional. Debates regarding the passage of this amendment were led by progressive organizations headed by women.⁴⁰ The debate lasted about

³⁶ Lemons, “Social Feminism,” 89.

³⁷ Lemons, “Social Feminism,” 89-90.

³⁸ Lemons, “Social Feminism,” 90.

³⁹ Joan Aldous, “The political process and the failure of the Child Labor Amendment.” *Journal of Family Issues* 18, no. 1 (1997): 75.

⁴⁰ Pye and Howard, *The Campaign to Eliminate an Evil to Society*, 53.

fifteen years, and supporters of the amendment continually argued that even if child labor rates decreased, the future of children could change rapidly with the introduction of economic hardships.⁴¹ There was much opposition to this amendment, as citizens were extremely wary about giving so much power to the federal government. Many citizens believed both the federal and state governments should practice a more laissez-faire attitude when it came to businesses and their practices. This attitude really showed through, as not enough states were willing to ratify the Child Labor Amendment and it was never passed. Women were going to have to figure out a new way to protect children when it came to their place in the labor force. Women pushed for compulsory public education for child laborers in an effort to take children out of the workforce.⁴²

Compulsory Public Education

Until the mid-nineteenth century public schooling was not as readily available to most children of the poor or working class as it had later become. Public schools first started to appear in 1635, but many families were unable to afford sending their children to school. Private schools were attended by the wealthy children whose parents could afford it because they did not need the extra income of a child to run their household. The founders of public education convinced the wealthy that free public education was going to benefit everyone with things such as a decreased crime rate and a more skillful workforce. These efforts were so successful that public education lost its controversial nature.⁴³ Even with the newfound need for public education not many children of the working and poor classes attended.

⁴¹ Pye and Howard, *The Campaign to Eliminate an Evil to Society*, v.-67.

⁴² Diana Gildea, "Transformations of Working-Class Families," Chapter 3.

⁴³ Michael Katz, "Public Education as Welfare," *Dissent* 57, no.3 (2010):52-56.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century truancy rates in the United States were extremely high, specifically among children of the lower class. Working class families tended to need an extra income that came from their child in order to take care of their family's needs. This led to an increase in the number of school aged children working full time jobs rather than attending school.⁴⁴ School age was considered to be ages five to sixteen until 2007 when the age was raised to eighteen. In the year 1900, the percentage of white children aged five to nineteen enrolled in school was just 51. The percentage of minority students enrolled in school was even lower, for example, Black children of the same ages enrolled in school in 1900 was just 28 percent.⁴⁵ In an effort to raise attendance rates in schools, states began passing compulsory education laws. These laws combated child labor and forced children to spend the time they would have been working in school.⁴⁶ Compulsory education laws were able to kill two birds with one stone: they lowered the truancy rate and lowered the child labor rate.

The first state to enact a compulsory education law was Massachusetts, in 1852. The law required all of the towns to offer elementary schooling and if parents refused to send their child to school, they would be fined or even have their parental rights taken away.⁴⁷ Other states began to follow Massachusetts' lead, and passed compulsory education statutes as well. An 1883 compulsory education law in Illinois made the school age between eight and fourteen and mandated twelve weeks of attendance per year.⁴⁸ Although compulsory education laws were passed during the nineteenth century, these laws were not enforced, which meant child labor still

⁴⁴ Pye and Howard, *The Campaign to Eliminate an Evil to Society*, 11.

⁴⁵ Thomas Snyder, "120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait," *National Center for Education Statistics*, January 1993.

⁴⁶ Stambler, "The Effect of Compulsory Education," 189.

⁴⁷ "Compulsory Education Laws: Background," Findlaw, June 21, 2016, <https://education.findlaw.com/education-options/compulsory-education-laws-background.html>.

⁴⁸ Schmidt, *Rendered More Useful*, 157-158.

was a major issue. In New York City, compulsory education laws are credited with increasing the number of students registered for elementary school by approximately 340,000 students and the number of students that graduated high school by approximately 5,400 students between 1898 and 1917.⁴⁹ The compulsory education laws passed in New York include the 1894 law requiring all children aged eight to twelve to attend school full-time and the 1903 law extending school age to include children up to sixteen years old.⁵⁰ The noncompliance associated with the mandated education laws came from parents that relied on the extra income of their children and employers that relied on the cheap labor that the children provided.

During the 1920's the country faced a time of social change, and ideas that once seemed taboo were being accepted by more Americans; for example, the idea that children should attend school rather than work full time jobs. This allowed most states to combine compulsory education and child labor laws to set a minimum age for children to work and included specific rules regarding school grades and other educational regulations. In order to make sure these laws were followed, positions such as attendance officers were created. Those that held this job investigated the truancy rates at schools from elementary to high school and would report students in violation of the laws to police.⁵¹ A major push for enforcement of compulsory education laws came with census taking. The census would reveal the identities and amount of school age children that were truant. These children could then be reported to a higher authority and fines could be given out to the families in violation of the law.⁵² State governments also made strict restrictions on which children could receive an employment certificate. Restrictions

⁴⁹ Stambler, "The Effect of Compulsory Education," 189-190.

⁵⁰ Stambler, "The Effect of Compulsory Education," 190.

⁵¹ Stambler, "The Effect of Compulsory Education," 199.

⁵² Stambler, "The Effect of Compulsory Education," 205-206.

included minimum ages and a minimum amount of consecutive school days children must attend. This forced students to stay in school for longer durations since being allowed to work depended on it.⁵³ As time continued, and the attitude of the courts shifted from hostile to compliant when it came to child labor laws the decisions of the Supreme Court further enforced these laws. For example, the decision in 1944 in the Supreme Court case *Prince v. Massachusetts* allowed states to hold the power to mandate school attendance and control of the regulation and prohibition of child labor, taking away the power to decide whether a child would attend school from the parents and furthering the enforcement of compulsory education laws.⁵⁴ This allowed states to force families to comply with the compulsory education laws and gave the states the power to implement punishments for not following the law, and parents could not argue. The eventual enforcement of compulsory education laws was able to lower the rate of child labor in the United States by keeping children busy in school.

Child labor began during the Market Revolution and continued until the twentieth century. The extreme conditions that young children were forced to work in led to the fight for child welfare during the Women's Movement of the twentieth century. Women fought hard for the passage of child labor laws, but they were constantly struck down as unconstitutional. With child labor laws being struck down there was a need for another route to bring children out of the factories, so women turned their efforts toward lobbying for compulsory education laws. For example, when Helen Marot was employed by the Neighborhood Workers Association of New York City to investigate child workers, the conditions under which they were working led to the creation of a Child Labor Committee that lobbied for the creation of compulsory public

⁵³ Stambler, "The Effect of Compulsory Education," 207-208.

⁵⁴ *Prince v. Massachusetts* (United States Supreme Court January 31, 1944).

education laws.⁵⁵ Through the passage of compulsory education laws, the issue of child labor started to be controlled. It took many years, but when these laws began to be strictly enforced young children were too busy to be working the dangerous jobs they had been previously. By recognizing child labor to be an ill of society, women during the twentieth century paved the way for government officials to come up with using compulsory education to decrease the rates of child labor throughout the country without the laws being struck down.

Ideologies of the Educational System and how it Prepares Children for Labor

Public education being established as a right for all children afforded many new opportunities to children who would have been forced into labor. Keeping children out of factories was a top priority to the women of the twentieth century, and compulsory education provided a constitutional solution. With children out of factories and in the classroom, a whole new world opened to them. Children were (and still are) able to learn about so many topics, such as, math, science, English, and much more. This leads to further opportunities in the future for educated children which could mean a better job with a better salary, rather than being stuck working a low paid job in extremely dangerous conditions for their entire lives.

Although the origins of public school are rooted in the control of child labor, the educational system has come to be used to prepare students for the workforce. Being in school teaches children from an early age, the technical and cognitive skills that are profitable in the workforce.⁵⁶ During the mandated school years, students study topics such as math, science, English, and history. These classes discipline students to be on time, follow the instructions of and not talk back to a superior, and not to question the information being given to them. Learning

⁵⁵ Stambler, "The Effect of Compulsory Education," 197.

⁵⁶ Emily Rauscher, "Educational Expansion and Occupational Change: US Compulsory Schooling Laws and the Occupational Structure 1850–1930," *Social Forces* 93, no. 4 (June 2015): 1399.

to be on time at an early age aids in the cheapening of work in the capitalist system, as the clock really measures the value of the work being done rather than money or the quality of the work.⁵⁷ Teachers tell students that two plus two is four or that ice melts to turn into water, and although these two statements are true, students are taught to just write this down, memorize the facts, and reproduce the answers over and over again without even knowing what they truly mean.⁵⁸ This occurs every day and helps to turn students into the perfect work force—obedient, loyal, passive—as none of the students think to question where the teacher received this information. Education, in the words of Paulo Freire, has become a “banking” system,⁵⁹ meaning teachers are putting information into students heads the same way one would deposit money at the bank. The educational system is just filling students’ heads with information that will make students the perfect passive agent in the world, rather than a transformer with creativity that questions why things are how they are.⁶⁰ The employers of the workforce need students to be taught from an early age to not change the way the world works, but rather to fit in with how it already is. Due to this, the educational system is preparing children to become an intellect worker rather than an intellectual.

At first glance, the words intellect worker and intellectual do not seem to be all that different, but Paul Baran (1988) makes the distinction clear. An intellect worker works on just the task in front of him/her, and is usually the “faithful servant, the agent, the functionary, and the spokesman of the capitalism system.”⁶¹ An intellectual would be focused on not just the task

⁵⁷ Moore and Patel, *History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of... the Planet* (California: University of California Press, 2017), Chapter 3.

⁵⁸ Paulo Freire and Myra Ramos, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1970), 71.

⁵⁹ Freire and Ramos, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 72.

⁶⁰ Freire and Ramos, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 73.

⁶¹ Paul Baran, “The Commitment of the Intellectual,” *Monthly Review* 39, no. 10 (March 1, 1988): 51.

at hand, but how this task relates to other parts of the world. As the school system has developed since the progressive era, there has been more of a focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) classes over art or music classes. Schools are instilling in students to continue in their education whether it be a trade school, college, or university in a major related to STEM. For example, there is a higher demand for pushing students to engage in STEM classes to prepare students to enter the workforce in engineering beginning in elementary school.⁶² If education teaches students STEM classes from as early an age as elementary school, then it urges them to continue on in STEM classes as they move into higher education. This system leads to a world full of intellect workers focusing on the one field they studied. Capitalists desire this system to employ these students in the future, because it keeps the employers higher in the hierarchy of employer and employed. Intellect workers are trained to just get the job in front of them done, keeping them working under the employer that hired them in the first place. This is what the educational system is preparing students for in their future.

Economists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis argue that the school system prepares children to enter the workforce in their book *Schooling in Capitalist America* (1977). They argue that the educational system in a capitalist society such as the United States, is designed as a way to produce the future generations of blue- and white-collar workers. This argument is based on a few key points: 1) that capital is controlled by establishments other than education, 2) the educational system then permits this control by instilling the idea that economic success is based on individual success, 3) there is also a hierarchy within schools that is similar to that of businesses that students will one day work for, therefore, 4) the educational system is producing

⁶² Ninger Zhou et al. "The Influence of Toy Design Activities on Middle School Students' Understanding of the Engineering Design Processes," *Journal of Science Education and Technology* 26, no. 5 (October 2017): 481–493.

the ideal workforce that will be prepared for the specific positions the students will one day take in the capitalist society.⁶³ Joel Spring (1987), an education professor at the University of Cincinnati, takes a similar stance when it comes to the public-school system. He argues that the educational system appeases corporate businesses and prepares students to work. What is unique to Spring's argument is the idea that education separates students by social class, recommending higher education to the upper- and middle-class students and the poor class to lesser trade schools.⁶⁴ This idea of school being used as a platform to separate students illustrates the deep-rooted ideologies found within the educational system. It is hard to rationally analyze the ideology that school prepares students for the workforce being under this train of thought, and this is what allows this ideology to continue to be a part of society.⁶⁵ Students are not only prepared to one day become a part of the workforce but are being told which role they will be playing in that workforce at early ages. This reinforces beliefs that students should remain in certain socioeconomic classes, and whether they should pursue higher education to receive better jobs. The educational system helps to keep the capitalist system in motion. There will always be students who are taught to become the lower tiers of the labor force and students taught to become the higher tiers of the labor force, ensuring that all the roles are filled so that the country can function properly.

⁶³ David Kamens, "Book Reviews: Bowles, Samuel and Gintis, Herbert. *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life*. New York: Basic Books, 1976," *American Educational Research Journal* Vol. 14, No. 4 (Autumn, 1977): 500.

⁶⁴ Franklin Parker, "Short Reviews : Education in the United States: An Historical Perspective Gerald L. Gulek Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1986, *The American School 1642-1985: Varieties of Historical Interpretation of the Foundations and Development of American Education* Joel Spring White Plains, NY Longman, 1986," *Journal of Teacher Education* 38, no. 6 (November 1987): 61–63.

⁶⁵ Barbara Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America" *New Left Review* 181 (May 1, 1990): 100.

There is no specific answer as to why these progressive reforms led to such regressive outcomes. One argument could be that the women reformers wanted so badly to protect the welfare of children, and they knew that being a part of the workforce under the dangerous conditions was not keeping these children safe, so they found a way to convince employers that children needed to be in school rather than work. Then over time, the educational system grew to be a machine that teaches children how to become skilled workers in the future. As time has gone on the workforce has gotten more competitive and the tasks given to workers have become more difficult and require knowledge to complete. Due to the years of education, the tasks that once took more than one child to complete can now take one older skilled laborer. The school system creates the future workforce and begins to teach the skills needed to students beginning at a young age. The employer's benefit from the skilled workers and profit off of their work keeping employers' content and children out of the dangerous working conditions in the factories.

Child labor was a social ill throughout the United States from the Market Revolution into the twentieth century. Children were being employed at ages as young as five and being forced to work 16-hour workdays in extremely dangerous conditions. Seeing how detrimental working was to child welfare, women of the twentieth century took it upon themselves to fight for regulations for child laborers. Women brought the issue of child labor to the forefront of the national agenda and paved the way for the federal and state governments to pass laws putting an end to child labor. The governments used compulsory public education laws to force children under the age of (now) 18 to attend school full time. This prevented school aged children from getting a job during school hours, limiting the rate of child labor as now children were busy with

their studies. Compulsory education laws were then combined with child labor laws to set a minimum age of employment and stricter restrictions on the workday of children. These laws helped prevent child labor in the United States. The establishment of public education for all children allowed the educational system to implement certain ideologies in the minds of students. The school system teaches students to be loyal, obedient, task oriented, as well as other traits that create an ideal future workforce. George Orwell (1946) states “political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness.”⁶⁶ Education is thought to have been designed to teach students facts and skills that would benefit them in the future, but the true origins of public education lie in anti-child labor movements—misinformation that covers up of the true meaning behind public school is a common practice to hide intentions. It is ironic how women fought so hard to remove children from the labor force, but the solution to this problem ended up being an institution that uses its platform to prepare children to one day enter the workforce.

⁶⁶ George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language,” *The New Republic* 114, no. 25 (June 24, 1946).

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