

CHILD LABOUR-THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

Child labour is perhaps a term whose mere mention brings about a sense of disgust in our minds. It makes us imagine the plight of poor children in the third world countries. Pictures of undernourished children working under unhealthy working conditions, and that too for paltry wages and inhumanly long working hours fill up our mind. When we are given to understand that these kids are almost never going to be associated with education or for that matter even the bare essentials of life like healthy nourishment, our concern changes to distress. When we realise that the bare minimum things like healthy food, work, some rest, education and a little entertainment, are very much a luxury to these underprivileged kids, we are prompted to act and act fast. Not surprisingly, the western world has unilaterally slapped sanctions on those industries of the developing world that do employ child labour.

Nobody can doubt the intention behind this move. But this is only one side of the story. The other side is even darker. The developed countries have forced the developing countries to adopt stringent labour laws or be out of business. Child labour is now banned in almost all third world countries.

But, has the situation changed? Have the God's lesser children been rescued from the mess they were in?

The answer is quite the contrary and a very disappointing 'NO'. I'd like to ask everyone concerned here, what is the most fundamental right of a human being?

Everybody would agree that the answer is the right to survive, and survive at any cost.

Alright, the sanctions and the stringent laws did manage to limit child labour, but they did nothing to improve the condition of the kids. The industries employing them were forced to down shutters. The carpet factories of India, the baseball factories of Pakistan and jute mills of Bangladesh have all either shut shop or are in such a process. Not only did this move harm the economies of these countries, it made the kids' situation even worse. At least before, they somehow managed to feed themselves and their families and therefore survive! But even that option has been taken away from them. What can a child do with education if he has an empty stomach? What good is it to him?

To show one's concern for such an issue is appreciable, but one must realise that stringent laws and sanctions are not the only way to look at the subject. We, in our attempt to improve the living conditions of our fellow earthlings should not go out and do something that snatches the very right to live from them.

What we should be trying to do is arrange for an equal distribution of wealth, resources and opportunities for all the residents of this world irrespective of territorial boundaries.

Hadn't the same prosperous western countries been better off had they economically supported the same industries and at the same time, helped to improve labour conditions prevailing in the units? We should have legislated to make it mandatory for child employers to arrange for the proper education and nourishment of the children employed.

This way both purposes would have been served.

Unfortunately, this idea seems to have very few takers in the appropriate lobbies. Well I'm no economist or a politician, but whatever I've put down in this article is just a reflection of how I feel this very sensitive issue should be handled. Let me assure you that there are many more who agree just as much. All I'd say is that frame up your own views on this subject.

Make sure that next time you find yourself in the midst of a campaign that wants you to boycott

items that have been made skilfully and with a lot of painstaking effort by the underprivileged children, you give a second thought before joining it. If you still find that you want to go for it then go for it.

If you decide otherwise, it would be the first step. I'd consider it as my victory if you go ahead and do your bit to improve the living and working conditions of those unfortunate kids.

PLEASE DON'T TAKE THEIR WORK AWAY FROM THEM UNLESS YOU CAN ARRANGE FOR THEIR SURVIVAL.