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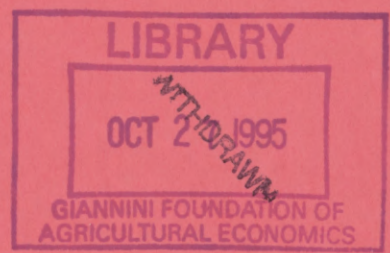
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POPULATION AND LABOUR POLICIES PROGRAMME

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THE EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN
IN THE "INFORMAL SECTOR";

SOME PROPOSITIONS FOR RESEARCH

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Preface

This paper is one contribution to a volume on the economic roles of children, which is due to be finalised in the course of 1980. The volume includes papers covering theoretical, methodological and empirical aspects of child work, from the points of view of anthropologists, sociologists and economists. Among the subjects treated are socialisation processes, labour market structure, household behaviour, institutional constraints, patterns of inequality and exploitation, and techniques of data collection and analysis. The discussion is illustrated with much empirical material, particularly from South Asia and West Africa, but also from South-east Asia, South America and elsewhere.

The volume is not designed to reach general normative conclusions. While much child work has undoubted deleterious effects on both individual and societal development, clear policy recommendations cannot be made unless we understand the sources and economic contributions of such work, and its relationship - positive or negative - to socialisation and education. The objective is then to contribute to such an understanding, by assessing the nature and usefulness of existing knowledge about children's participation in economic activities, and by pointing to the directions in which research is desirable and feasible.

Gerry Rodgers and Guy Standing

Introduction

The problem of child labour, especially in the "informal sector" of underdeveloped urban economies", is difficult to research. The task becomes almost impossible if a traditional approach using sample surveys of representative groups is used. The Year of the Child has made the subject fashionable, but one has the impression that children's work plays a more significant, perhaps even fundamental, role in the economies of Third World countries than has been appreciated up to now. While there is a wish to uncover and thoroughly understand the problem, there is a lack of empirical information. This paper treats children's work from an economic standpoint i.e., the specific role of children in systems of production and in the reproduction of the labour force in an underdeveloped urban environment. Particular emphasis is placed on activities often termed "marginal" even though they are widespread and essential to dependent economies. Following on from this, we will show how research methods should be revised in a more qualitative and anthropological direction than those normally used to study adult employment.

Research Problems

Many previous studies contain information on child labour. Although this is generally nonspecific, it nevertheless frequently provides a useful picture of the periphery of the problem; such data include:

- schooling and school attendance
- apprenticeships
- unemployment amongst school leavers
- population age and sex structure.

There are numerous studies on the "informal" sector. Amongst these it is sometimes possible to find information on children's economic activity but, as this subject is not usually the main focus of the research, the data are incomplete. The majority of studies do not include any information at all with the exception of some work on apprenticeships. A brief survey of the literature on Africa, for example, yields no data. It is as though the problem of child labour

does not exist for those engaged in work on the "informal"¹ sector though they frequently recognise statistical differentiations based on sex, ethnic or national origin, length of establishment and many others. Where age is a variable, it is treated in groups (15-20, 20-25 for example) which does not clarify the situation with regard to children. This is all in the face of a problem whose extent is universally recognised and whose existence has been testified to in numbers of articles.

This, then, is the current situation which, intuitively, must constitute an urgent problem but for which investigative techniques are lacking. There are several reasons for this:

1. It has to be recognised that, in the end, it is in no-one's interest to tackle the problem.

At the highest level, governments are usually careful to avoid investigation into certain questions, including various forms of oppression (residual slavery, violent initiation rites). It is likely that investigation into children's work will be viewed with the same reticence, at least if it is treated in terms of exploitation. There are two possible government attitudes towards the subject but they both have the same result: either child labour is illegal in which case the authorities prefer to turn a blind eye to the fact that it exists or, there is no specific legislation and a "laissez-faire" policy which relies on a certain conspiracy of silence. These negatives attitudes is made all the more easy because juvenile activities tend to be concentrated in a sector whose main characteristic is the avoidance of all official control. A typical example of state resistance to investigations into child labour is given in a report by the London-based Anti-Slavery Society on the work of girls in the Moroccan carpet industry (1978). While admitting that some abuses existed, the Moroccan government tried to minimise their extent, arguing that because child labour was illegal, it could not be as widespread as was maintained. In a reply to the Society delivered on the 14th January 1976, the Ambassador to London said:

.... it must be pointed out that the failure to observe certain aspects of the legislation by some employers should not lead to the hasty conclusion that such practices are widespread, the publication of which could only damage our country which has made considerable efforts to remedy specific cases. (our transl. A.S.S. 1978)

¹ For the doubtful accuracy of terms such as "informal" sector or "unstructured" sector, cf. below.

In the end the Moroccan government asked the Society as well as the ILO and UN, to keep the report secret. In spite of this it was published (the report's contents will be taken up later on). It is probable that this type of non-cooperation, which finds a powerful supporting argument in the legitimate preservation of state sovereignty, will be reinforced in the coming decade.

International Organisations, such as the ILO and the World Bank, obtain their funds from member states and are thus obliged to approach the delicate question of children's work with an eye on the susceptibilities of the countries concerned; this can sometimes appear contradictory. It should be noted however that the major part of the financing of these organisations is contributed by only a few of the richer countries. Again, two possibilities are available: either the developed countries, who are not directly concerned with the problem, support and encourage inquiries into child labour or, in the interests of preserving good client relations with the countries in which child labour is used, they do not consider the subject a priority. It is difficult to estimate the current situation with regard to these alternatives, though the fact that the ILO has initiated a programme on children's work should be seen as positive and the pressure being exerted by international public opinion should not be allowed to fade away.

Descending the ladder of involved organisations or groups it is likely that hostility, or at least a degree of non-cooperation, will be encountered from children's employers. Later in the chapter we will show how difficult it is to define this employer population because of the overlap between family lineage units and productive units. Whoever they are, those who use child labour know very well that the practice is disapproved of in the law or unwritten social rules. For research to be successful, the interviewees must see that it is not against their own interests to reply honestly and fully to the questions put to them. If this confidence cannot be achieved, they may well suspect the advent of new legislation and stricter controls and will evade answering awkward questions.

To this note of caution a further subtlety should be added which is prompted by observations we made in Africa during interviews with

a variety of people on the situation of children working in garment or metal workshops. A very frequent response was that these were not child workers but apprentices (and it was only after more forceful questioning that the interviewees would admit that the apprenticeships were sometimes extremely long, provided relatively ineffective training and were highly profitable for the employers). This is important because, while Western countries tend to define an individual on the basis of demographic criteria (e.g. age, sex), this is not universal. In the case cited above the young workers were viewed in terms of their social status (apprentices) and not in terms of their age.

Finally, a word about the children themselves. It would be an illusion to maintain that, subjectively, the children have anything to gain from an inquiry into their economic activities when these are necessitated by unemployment in the family, the threat of future unemployment and an inadequate collective income. Such circumstances may lead children to carry out small-scale tasks in a more or less informal atmosphere. Exploitation and the ideological considerations that accompany it, should not be confused; working could impart a significant element of self-esteem to a child. It is almost certain that, a priori, many children are pleased to be able to work. This raises a final obstacle which has its source in the researcher himself; the researcher may be inclined to ethnocentrism and socio-economic observation may be replaced by moral prejudice. This is especially true if the investigator is convinced that the work being observed is ethically unacceptable in which case communication with the group concerned would almost certainly be biased.

All the obstacles thrown up by various groups, can and must be overcome by applying appropriate methodologies. For example, it is probably advisable to avoid official channels; to use flexible interviewing techniques; to devise a system of reinterpretation or translation of responses; to extend the investigation to include everyone concerned with the child. These points will be developed later. It can be noted here that the difficulties which have been raised are, in fact, a bonus in that they compel the use of new and appropriate methods.

2. A relationship between children's work and women's work is often postulated; this can be useful but it is also risky. The constant availability of cheap labour that is a necessary condition for the survival (and sometimes the prosperity) of a large number of small-scale activities, aligns these two groups. In addition, because the work of both often carries no social recognition, it is not paid for in keeping with the surplus value it represents. However, such analogies tend to obscure some fundamental differences because children, in their own view, are not a homogenous group who are able to make themselves heard or put forward their own demands.

If the Year of the Child and Women's Year are compared (with the various reforms and research springing from the latter) it is clear that there are two major differences in the exploitation of the two groups:

- a. Children do not constitute either a movement or a political force capable of initiating or controlling studies on their own situation. It is unquestionably the existence of such a movement on an international scale, that has produced such an abundant literature on the exploitation of women in their domestic enclave.
- b. The wide criticism aimed at the somewhat paternalistic and condescending approach to Women's Year, is infinitely more relevant to the attitudes surrounding the Year of the Child. Moreover it is clear that, whatever the hypotheses and proposals put forward by researchers and experts working on children, they can be sure of silence from their subjects. Progress in research on child labour tends to be held back because children are regarded as "protected" beings and not as responsible individuals. Nevertheless, it goes without saying that any programme advocating the radical and immediate eradication of children's work will run up against opposition from the children themselves, at least in the non-salaried sector.

A consequence of the difference described above is that children are not the subjects but the objects of study and this marginal position on the field of enquiry has certain specific methodological implications; notably an ethnocentric temptation with strong moralistic or Eurocentric overtones. This temptation can only be overcome by using investigative methods in which children play an important role at least until

they become an organised social group. There have in fact been instances of social struggle during which a leadership structure was created that was quite capable of initiating its own programmes: the Soweto students are an example.

A final point is that women's status is permanent whereas that of the child is temporary; this simple fact makes follow-up of child studies difficult.

3. The last set of obstacles, but by no means the least, is difficulties of definition. The question of children's work in the "informal" sector leads us to spend a little time on the complexity of the three terms - work; children; "informal" sector. Some of the following reflections are general and well-known and some refer to the particular sector of the economy called, in our opinion erroneously, the "informal" or "unstructured" sector.

a. Work defined at the most general level as a simple exertion of physical or intellectual energy is a somewhat unclear and indiscriminating concept. For example, we are not accustomed to considering school work, domestic activity (such as fetching water) or the assistance given by an apprentice, as belonging to the same economic sphere. The first question which presents itself is then - at what point should a child's activity be called work? As an initial step a certain number of discriminatory criteria such as the following, should be applied:

paid work/unpaid work
productive work/non-productive work
full-time work/intermittant work

In order to get out of the rut of definitions that are too subjective, we would advocate studying the question of work on the basis of whether or not it constitutes exploitation. It is in fact this idea which has motivated the establishment of a study programme on child labour. The notion of exploitation can accomodate original concepts and hypotheses and an examination of the concrete mechanisms behind the work of children, instead of being restricted to a simple descriptive account. We will return to this point

again but we suspect that the terms "employment" or "work" will often only be euphemisms for exploitation. The complexity of the concept at work applied to children can be better appreciated with the help of the following example. In technical colleges a great deal of time is generally spent on making various objects as part of the requirements for officially recognised technical apprenticeships and courses. These objects may then be sold to agents or at sales organised by the college authorities.¹ In a single productive activity there is thus exploitation of children's work but at the same time, an absence of exploitation. The implication of this observation is that a definition of work should not only be related to the activity itself but to its economic and social context. In certain rich countries, this is beginning to be recognised and demands have appeared for remuneration of housework and even for studying.

- b. The term child is difficult to define objectively. From the outset it should be remembered that childhood is a recent invention, at least if it is understood in terms of the consequences of being boxed into different life stages. It is unlikely that this kind of definition is applicable to productive activities because it was developed in a different context.

The word "child" can have several limits according to which of the following criteria are taken:

biological (puberty)

legal (schooling legislation and labour laws)

custom (status in the domestic unit, for example)

The basis of these boundaries is mainly a chronological and non-qualitative criterion i.e. age. However, the adoption of a universal age criterion comes up against many obstacles:

- variations from one society to another

¹ Catholic clergy and various "charitable" associations have always made a specialty of this type of exploitation under the guise of good works, i.e. using a more or less unpaid work force drawn from disadvantaged children: orphans, refugees, the handicapped for example.

- the danger of a Western perception of the age above which a child becomes an adult
- geographical variations (rural/urban) and differences according to social milieux
- differences in age limits according to the sex of the child
- the methodological difficulty of follow-up; each child, by definition, passes beyond whatever limit is set.

It may be thought that schooling should carry a certain weight in possible definitions; in our opinion this is not entirely justified because of the artificial prolongation of schooling as a palliative for unemployment or as an abstract political objective. For the moment, we do not propose any particular age criterion. As with the problem of a definition of work, that of age must be approached in a different way. We suggest that investigation be turned towards an examination of the adaptation of the observed activity, to the biological or social situation of the child. At all costs, ethnocentrism must be guarded against: to view all the work of all children as monstrous and a black mark against underdeveloped countries, cannot help to advance research. It is easy to imagine that, in the view of those from underdeveloped countries, the institution of a fixed retirement age in Western societies probably seems no less absurd.

- c. Finally, the terms "informal" or "unstructured" sector pose many problems; there is an abundant literature on the subject. These are the terms commonly used to describe all small scale activity with little capital, a relatively large labour force and organised in a non-capitalist way. This definition is far from satisfactory because it risks obscuring the relationship between different economic spheres through putting forward the idea of a dualistic organisation of society. In a former study, we proposed a hypothesis which described this sector as "superexploited" in economies dominated by transnational capitalist companies. This hypothesis allows an organic rather than descriptive definition of the activities in question. If this conception is valid, then the

exploitation of child labour is seen as a permanent process of surplus extraction from the sector. We will return to this later.

A fundamental point here is that those activities which are called "unstructured" are, in reality, usually highly "structured". Even though many studies show the dependent and exploitative relationship between the "formal" and "informal" economic sectors, this observation and the empirical evidence supporting it, are usually ignored. Nevertheless it is very important to know whether children are included in the networks which span the two sectors and to identify their employers. At the time of completing this text a newspaper article, referring to the work of children in Asia, offered an example of the way in which children's activities may bridge the two sectors: "Finally, many illicit street vendors of fruit and miscellaneous objects, and newspaper sellers, have to account for their earnings at the end of the day to unscrupulous businessmen who exploit them." (Viratelle, 1979). The most common fault found in purely descriptive studies is the failure to identify the centres of power and capital accumulation and a too-hasty characterisation of petty activities as improvised and independent. In our opinion, the "unstructured" sector is in fact structured in two ways:

- through its submission to the dominant capitalist mode of production
- through the existence of organised groups at its centre.

From this standpoint many small scale urban enterprises employing numbers of children as shoe-shine boys, newspaper sellers, car washers and even beggars observe certain rules which, although not necessarily obvious, are nonetheless strict: admission into trades, territorial rights, redistribution of earnings are some examples. This does not mean that there should be attempts to invent structures where they do not exist, but the theoretical and methodological orientation must be maintained and of an inventory of the modes of organisation underlying activities which are apparently unconnected and improvised should be established. We were able to observe the existence of structures within the so-called "unstructured" sector in the second largest city in

Senegal, Kaolack. Young people transport clients in motorcycle taxis from one point to another in this very spread-out city. To an observer, this looks like a fragmented, small scale activity. Not at all. Officials or others purchase the vehicles (often putting themselves into debt) and rent them out to the young people daily. The youngsters themselves are organised into fiercely competitive "garages" who require payment for admission and who are protected to varying extents by the local authorities.

Finally, we recall certain characteristics of petty urban activities that have emerged from previous studies (cf. for example, Bienefeld and Godfrey, 1975 from whom we have taken the following). In general, petty so-called "informal" activities:

- produce, at low prices and under heavy competitive pressure, value for large-scale concerns (piece work, sub-contracting and client-credit for example);
- provide, still under the same competitive conditions, goods and services for wage earners in the modern and public sectors and for the urban poor, thereby contributing towards lower wage rates; it is clear that, in less industrialised countries (or where industry is export-oriented), the prices of "informal" sector products are much lower than imported manufactured goods even when both have the same use-value.
- incidentally play the role of a "reserve army" and thereby exert a further indirect pressure on salaries in that they relieve the modern sector of the burden of job creation.
- often operate in fragmented markets where capital is not interested in investing.

The consequences of these characteristics on the question which interests us here is clear: cheap and even unpaid labour is an indispensable element in the survival of many petty activities because of the high degree of competition. It is in this sense that a prior scientific and non-empirical definition of the so-called "informal" sector is necessary for a more profound analysis of the role of children within it.

However, an identification of the relevant trades, in order to focus research comes up against several difficulties.

- should investigation be limited to urban areas or, bearing in mind the similarity of tasks, should rural and semi-rural areas be included?
- the overlap between domestic and productive units: for instance, where "informal" productive activities are controlled by and organised around a lineage, it would probably be useless to try and determine whether a child's work arose from the household or from the enterprise.
- children work under two distinct arrangements: more or less independently or, for another individual or group who provide in exchange lodging, food and perhaps money. Both these situations must be expected and must be taken into account in the methods of investigation adopted.

To conclude this discussion of the obstacles which cannot be disregarded when examining the question of children's work in the small-scale production sector, we want to underline the fact that, in our view, these difficulties will not be overcome by initiating vast projects. The urgent and essential tasks are to create theoretical systems and to identify research themes; if this is not done there is a risk that in ten years time we will still be facing insoluble problems of definition. We will continue with a brief review of these two tasks.

Theoretical Problems

1. Sources of Child Labour

The work of children in the small-scale production sector must, in our view, be approached through its specific and organic aspects: on the one hand child labour is one of the essential mechanisms of non-capitalist but capital dependent economies, and on the other, it plays a special role in the extraction of surplus value and in price formation.

Turning our attention to the potential pool of juvenile labour, we find two phenomena.

The first of these is rural to urban migration. The dismantling of subsistence economies and the advent of export-oriented plantation agriculture, has caused a considerable increase in urban populations. Children have been deeply involved in this process because their agricultural work was no longer secure following destruction of the delicate equilibrium between subsistence and commercial production. In addition, the birth rate has not dropped. Statistics show that urban populations are relatively young, a consequence of the rural exodus of young people. Children arriving in the cities alone are usually accommodated by families who themselves are confronted with urban unemployment: putting these unproductive and costly individuals to work is thus a primary objective of the family with whom they live. This must be seen in the more general context of urban poverty, itself a product of accelerated rural-urban population drift. If several members of a family are unemployed, the income contributed by a child is by no means negligible, it may even be indispensable. The position of girls in this type of situation is particularly revealing: school is a useless luxury, apprenticeship would offer nothing and the main objective is for girls to be in good employment before marriage, especially with a view to providing their own dowry.

The second phenomenon is premature school leaving. Everyone agrees that, to some extent, education systems have failed since the 1960s, a result of their lack of success in teaching basic skills and in opening the way to a job which justifies the years spent at school. Very few policies have been able to stop the massive wastage of schooling that can be observed in most African countries from the primary level upwards. In the hope of learning a productive trade and in the frequent absence of institutions specialised in and adapted to the multiple "informal" activities around which urban employment revolves, young people rejected by the education system turn towards small businesses and self-employment. Thus it is felt that apprenticeships offer the most appropriate solution to the failure of the education

system to pass on basic skills. This does not mean that apprenticeships do actually lead to the desired qualifications and competence. On the contrary, apprenticeships seem to be above all a convenient no-man's land untouched by legislation, where the small entrepreneur is in undisputed control of his apprentices, of what he teaches (or does not teach) and of the length of the apprenticeship.

2. Economic Use of Children

It is here that, in the productive system being examined, everyone becomes involved: the state, which does not take financial responsibility for training; the child's family, which does not have the means to meet the high costs of a schooling which, in any case, has no evident advantages; the small businessman, of course, or the contractor (who may be a member of the family), for whom the children are an inexhaustible source of cheap, even free, labour. Everyone agrees that the strength and durability of the so-called "informal" sector resides in its low prices, thus an extremely cheap work force is an indispensable condition for its survival. It is important to note that if, all things being equal, illegal "apprentice" labour (and that of children in general) were to be instantly and completely stopped, many small production units would be doomed to immediate closure because they operate on the basis of minimum margins and cannot survive without cheap labour. Apprenticeship, seen as an unpaid labour contribution, plays an organic role in the formation of low prices in and the maintenance of a small scale, pre-capitalist production. In the end, apprenticeship itself aggravates competition in the heart of the producers' camp and a priori each boss must look askance at his apprentices when the time comes for them to set up on their own. This explains a point mentioned above, i.e., artificial prolongation of the apprenticeship period, and the fact that many apprentices complain that they are not taught their trade properly. To complete the vicious circle, the use of children for secondary and unspecialised tasks constitutes the first excuse given by bosses for not paying them. In the formal sector apprenticeship found mainly in artisanal and industrial activities, is usually more strictly controlled with regard to age, work conditions and methods of payment.

It is true that apprenticeship is not the whole story and it only covers the older age groups. Nevertheless, in as much as it demonstrates under- or unpaid work (sometimes even paid for by the apprentice) we think it entirely relevant to the subject of children's work in general.

The London-based Anti Slavery Society's report on girls' labour in Morocco's carpet industry (A.S.S. 1978) gives a particularly cogent example of the economic use of children and in addition, it vindicates our view of the so-called "informal" sector. The principal findings of the report are:

- (a) The background to girls' work in Morocco is "the economic reality which is that of dependence", as emphasised by the introduction¹ to the French text (pp. 964-966). According to this introduction Morocco's economy "is still that of an underdeveloped country without an industrial infrastructure and which supplies the West with agricultural products, staple foods and items manufactured under sub-contract; of course, the lower the salaries the higher the profits for foreign companies and local intermediaries, avid partners in an unequal distribution". The introduction adds that "the increase in the number of children being exploited" is accompanied by a variety of other factors also revealed in the report, i.e., the decline in school attendance "which currently leaves half of rural children without schooling"; inflation; labour legislation which only "serves to hide corruption and despotism".
- (b) There is active or passive complicity of the State in the exploitive conditions, viz:

Passive: the public authorities seem to tolerate flaunting of the legislation and surveillance mechanisms are ineffective ("Work inspectors very seldom call and generally expect to be paid for their silence" [p. 56]); legislation for the protection of minors only reaches the fringes of these activities (in "handicraft co-operatives and apprenticeship schools" women and children are

¹ Quotations in (a) only are translations from the Introduction to the French edition of the A.S.S. report.

not "salaried workers in the sense of the current Moroccan labour legislation" and this is admitted by the government [p. 46]).

Active: "Government policy is to give all possible aid to exporters of rugs: wool is imported duty free ('temporary importation') on condition that it is exported in the form of rugs. Export duty and certain taxes are waived" (p. 7). State workshops do not always respect the law: "Though government-owned factories generally conform with the law in regard to recruitment and in most respects set a high standard, the maalema survives in a few state factories as well as in most of those in the private sector." (p. 57). The maalema system will be described below. Finally: "More than half the working force of three state centres was made up of children under 12. In this respect the state does not abide by its own legislation, for even apprentices under 12 are illegal." (p. 9).

- (c) There is a hierarchy of control encompassing even small scale carpet production enterprises: a number of small workshops may belong to a single owner who is sometimes foreign; marketing, particularly in Europe, is in the hands of large Western companies; small workshops sometimes sub-contract, and are therefore totally dependent on modern marketing channels. This reveals the highly structured nature of the carpet industry even when carried out on a small scale. Reduction of labour costs seems to be a constant preoccupation of businessmen: "Most Moroccan manufacturers consider that Morocco is now in first place for North African rugs and many did not hide the fact that low labour costs made Moroccan rugs highly competitive. In Iran, for instance, legislation forbids the employment of children under 14 and this has considerably raised the cost of Persian rugs." (p. 7)
- (d) Families existing on a subsistence income are eager to find work for their daughters. The latter do not complain because of bad living conditions at home. Workshops are often located near bidonvilles (shanty towns) or poor districts. The report also points out that "Parents play into the hands of the factory owners in their desire to see their daughters bringing in even a small sum of money." (p. 10).

- (e) Traditional social relations are present, readjusted in an exploitive capitalist-type context. This is a very important aspect. Recruitment and dismissal is often in the hands of female intermediaries (maalema) who receive a salary from the employer; the latter thus remains within the letter of the law but does not know the age or the wages of the girls employed. The maalema acts as supervisor and pays the children whatever she likes (usually on a piecework basis). This paternalistic system benefits from all the advantages of work done at home but under conditions of raised productivity. The report describes the maalema system as "a relic of the old craftsman-apprentice structure" (p. 11). Of the state rug-making centres visited by the Society, "conditions were worst in the two centres using the maalema system" (p. 10).
- (f) Recruitment methods, working conditions and wages are often deplorable, although the investigators maintained that government establishments were better (p. 9). Engagement of little girls from the age of 8, incredibly long working hours (up to 72 hours per week), very little or no paid holiday, meagre wages (by the piece) or none at all for apprentices, undernourishment and overwork.
- (g) There is confusion between co-operative and industrial operations on the one hand and apprentices and wage workers on the other. In the first place, the co-operatives are not groups of producers but "undertakings run by the state on commercial lines with the workers receiving some sort of remuneration for their work" (p. 47). This system encourages the extreme variations found in working conditions and wages. In the second place, it was difficult to distinguish between "schools of apprenticeship" and "craft centres with apprentices" (p. 47) - the former often function in the same way as the latter.
- (h) Finally, it is important to note that the Anti-Slavery Society visited the factories/workshops twice, in 1975 and again in 1977: between the two visits the team "found that the situation, far from having improved, had worsened" (p. 6). This is, then,

clearly not a problem which can be solved by recommendations only. We thus return to the dependent status of under-developed countries vis-à-vis international financial and commercial networks.

We have here a particularly clear example of the methods used to exploit juvenile labour. The report also tends to refute a generally held opinion which maintains that children's work in industry as it occurred during the last century in Europe, is not being repeated and that the problem is, rather, in the "informal" sector. Even if, to stretch a point, carpets are considered to be "craft" items there is nevertheless a complete range of production unit sizes and working methods are sometimes closer to those of a factory than a small workshop.

Some time has been spent on this report for two reasons. Firstly, because of the difficulties already described, it is almost unique in its field. Secondly, the descriptions and analysis it contains are exemplary and the implications have ramifications far beyond the particular case of the Moroccan carpet industry. The identical role played by children for sub-contractors in certain Asian countries, is well known. It is regrettable that the situation described by the A.S.S. remains an isolated document in this field.

3. Specific Characteristics of Child Labour

Children's work possesses a variety of characteristics within the framework of its economic role in the heart of the "informal" sector. In brief, we can note the following:

- (a) Labour supply is plentiful because of continued high birth rates and high rural emigration. This places children in an intensely competitive environment with low bargaining power over the conditions imposed on them.
- (b) Children do not have a "right to work" and this makes the juvenile work force easy to manipulate. The length of time in employment and its regularity are determined by the unpredictable ebb and flow of orders and markets. The small businessman or trader can underemploy a child if production threatens to drop.

- (c) The illegality of much children's work makes their dismissal easy. Political and trade union organisation, the only chance they have of improving their situation, is difficult because of their age, entrenched paternalistic exploitive systems and lack of social recognition of children as producers.
- (d) The unspecialised nature of the work children do means a wide variation in the kinds of tasks they are given, which also depend on of the production methods. In addition, certain tasks are technically well suited to children and are highly profitable from the point of view of the employer; this is the case of the "little hands" in the tobacco and match industries of the Indian peninsula.
- (e) Finally, some juvenile activities are particularly well-adapted to clandestine and illegal operations because of children's physical and psychological characteristics: agility, running and hiding, the ability to keep quiet or to mislead for example. Although somewhat tainted by a degree of subjectivity, these points should not be ignored in a study of the particular tasks in which child labour is concentrated.

It is not claimed that these few reflections encompass all the theoretical economic questions relating to child labour. It is hoped that they show in a modest way, how these questions can be approached. While there is little doubt that exploitation of children's work in the Third World appears to be concentrated in the so-called "informal" sector, it is necessary to identify the practical consequences and try to precisely locate children's specific niches in underdeveloped economies.

Research Themes and Methodological Tools

1. The Need to Disaggregate Different Types of Children's Activities

The small-scale or productive and commercial activities of children should not be treated as if they were a homogenous group.

- (a) We give here a number of elementary distinctions which must always be observed:

- girls' work/boys' work

- age (e.g., less than 12/12-16 years)
- permanent/intermittent work
- independent work/for a group or individual (in terms of remuneration)
- work with a training component/unskilled work

(b) A theoretically more fundamental disaggregation must be directed towards different modes (or forms) of production and to the particular modes of exploitation associated with them.

(b) 1 Work in the domestic unit must occupy a separate category as, to the extent that it does not fall within the modes examined below, it is not in itself an object of exploitation. If exploitation is defined in terms of the appropriation of all or part of the product of the labour of others, there must necessarily be a product. In its narrow sense (in practice domestic and productive activities frequently overlap) domestic work is the division of tasks within the family unit and is accompanied by redistribution of earnings amongst the various members. It is essentially reproductive, servicing family members who are part of a workforce employed elsewhere. If exploitation is present it is indirect. We freely admit that this point is perplexing; if the domestic work of a child is taken over by a servant (of the same age perhaps) the economic characteristics of the same work change.

(b) 2 There is also a quasi-slavery category, that is, not only appropriation of the work of the child but also of the child him- or herself. The existence of such social relations, which are also to be found in activities serving capitalism, is facilitated by ownership rights over children by their older relatives. This is a phenomenon typically found in child prostitution. This category of exploitation, as well as the next, cannot be explored without studies of the networks which support apparently independent activities.

(b) 3 A third mode of exploitation which we shall call quasi-feudal, is based on a dependent personal relationship between the child and his/her employer. This is another instance where

traditional social relations are used by capital; the child supplies labour within a paternalistic relationship in exchange for which the employer (who could be a parent) offers protection, lodging and food. Craft and small business apprenticeships would come into this category. The use of low paid or unpaid labour is, as we have already said, the condition for the survival of the majority of small scale urban enterprises. However, this is an inherently contradictory form of exploitation; the creation of value, subsequently sold by the production unit, amounts to theft of the child's surplus value; however, children's work is not socially recognised and cannot be freely sold on the labour market. It seems to us that it is correct to talk in terms of "superexploitation" because the juvenile labour force is not paid at the same rate as adults doing the same work, thanks to the maintenance of quasi-feudal dependency. In this category of superexploitation, child-created value is essentially extracted from the absolute value added, that is, through protracted working hours. A characteristic of craft-type production is the low capital investment in equipment in relation to the volume of work undertaken. It follows that a profit will only be made under two conditions: a long working day and low wages. It should also be noted that superexploitation can be found in large-scale capitalist enterprises. When this is the case (we have given an extensive example above) there is every reason to suppose that, even if work organisation is capitalist, the social relations of production are quasi-feudal (this is doubly true in the case of children because they are not usually in a position to sell their labour to the highest bidder).

(b) 4 In contrast to the preceding categories, commercial activities can extract value created in another location. These activities, very often undertaken by children, include street vending, a variety of trading, door-to-door sales etc. Within this category, distinctions can be made according to the individual who receives the proceeds: either the child works for an adult to whom he/she pays part of the proceeds, or the child works independently. The latter is probably much less common, over long periods at

least, than certain observers maintain. In order to clarify this point, research should seek to identify the commercial networks. It is possible that appropriation of sales proceeds can take the form of protection by an official or anonymous institution. The illegal character of some so-called "marginal" commercial activities naturally favours the development of protection rackets and their existence should always be allowed for.

These typological suggestions are not complete. In particular, we have excluded all activities which do not fall into the small-scale urban sector, such as agricultural work or those directly and integrally absorbed into capitalism. We simply wish to insist on the necessity of introducing relevant distinctions between various children's activities, not as a function of subjective empirical categories but in relation to a theoretical and economic position. Rodgers' and Standing's paper (1979) is, on this point, more rigorous and exact than our own proposals.

In summary, we would like to strongly emphasise that, in our view, child labour is, in general, characterised by the convergence of inherited social relations and an exploitation, of which the ultimate gains whatever the intermediate processes, serve the dominant capitalist mode of production.

2. Research Themes

In this section some lines of research will be proposed which it is hoped will help in tackling the difficult problem of child labour.

- (a) We strongly advocate a study of child labour in Europe from the beginning of the industrial revolution to the end of the 19th century. Possible misinterpretation of this proposal must be immediately pre-empted. Such a study should absolutely not seek to make comparisons through structural analogies or strained parallels with today's Third World, thereby reducing the problems of the latter to mere historical phenomena. On the contrary, an analysis of child labour in Western societies in the last centuries must be oriented towards a better understanding of the specific mechanisms operating in underdeveloped countries. During the whole

of the period of industrialisation of Western countries, the exploitation of child labour had two aspects. Firstly, in the absence of protective legislation, there was unconstrained use of this workforce in non-capitalist activities in the face of the decline of these activities and in an attempt to block their transformation. Secondly, there was direct, intense and cynical exploitation of children by capital itself (mostly in factories and the textile industry). If however these two aspects were to be directly applied to present-day underdeveloped countries, we would find that public enlightenment, and the use of advanced technologies based on a high organic composition of capital (the relationship in terms of value between equipment and the wage bill), are leading to a weakening of the role (if not the number) of children working in industry; the type of exploitation experienced by children in the 19th century Europe is, in the present world, being confined to sectors which are difficult to modernise (e.g. crafted carpets or packaging of "beedi" cigarettes)¹. It would therefore be a waste of time to try and prise out a direct appreciation and understanding of current systems of child exploitation from studies of European societies up to the last century. Having said this, such a study could help in understanding the following processes:

- The genesis and development of the birth rate in relation to economic processes; in particular the stage of accumulation at which the birth-rate began to decline and the different types of industrialisation to which family renewal strategies corresponded.
- The role of children in capitalist accumulation, in the formation of surplus value and in the domestication and proletarianisation of the peasantry, victims of the rural exodus.

¹ It would be truer to say that these types of industry are not interested in modernisation in as much as cheap labour has an intrinsic advantage for them. To take the two examples given: it may not be by chance that patterns on crafted carpets are not uniform or that "Beedi" packets are conical - if production were mechanised, these characteristics would probably disappear.

- The significance of the introduction of compulsory schooling and legislation on hours of work and child labour; in particular, were mass schooling and the reduced productive role of children two outcomes of a single set of conditions, or did school contribute to the disappearance of child labour?
- A study of demographic data in relation to the economy; in addition to the fertility changes already mentioned, the characteristics of the mortality and marriage rates corresponding to different stages of economic development. The hypothesis underlying this suggestion is that the high turnover of the juvenile workforce, itself related to high mortality and/or early marriage, allowed superexploitation of children even beyond the physical minimum necessary for reproduction of the workforce.
- the development of thought on the place of the child in social groups.

If care is taken not to fall into the trap of Eurocentrism, and only on this condition, this type of study will yield invaluable material which could speed the development of interpretive schemes of child labour in the Third World, and would discourage subjective or moralising approaches.

- (b) Any even modestly comprehensive research must include an analysis of all proposed or existing policy intervention as well as a detailed study of legislation in force from the point of view of both its nature and efficacy.

Recommendations for total and world-wide suppression of children's work date from long ago. In practice, however, we have not come anywhere near this objective - indeed we are retreating further away. In our view, there is no better condemnation of policies than the facts. Thus an analysis of the implicit and proclaimed aims of policies would be of considerable interest. In this way the somewhat vague and idealistic question "what type of legislation?" would be replaced by the more realistic one of "why is there no legislation?" or if it does exist "why is it not applied?"

In this way the tenacious legal/moral position normally adopted towards this subject, will be revealed as an obstacle in the way of more scientific studies based on objective facts. Similarly, the question of whether it is children's work itself that is an anomaly or the way in which it is exploited, can be resolved. Another question presents itself here: is it possible to attack child labour without changing the economic and social systems harbouring it, especially the dependent relationship of such systems vis-à-vis capitalist economies? It would also be possible to measure the efficacy of legislation which does not correspond to the productive forces involved and to examine the difficulties experienced in applying international recommendations. Finally, this study would be able to test the relevance and consequences of certain more general strategies officially aimed at improving economic structures: Does rural development aggravate rural emigration? Does industrialisation in the name of capital modernisation contribute to unemployment? Is the promotion of "dynamic" artisanal activities ultimately a cause of superexploitation of children? Such strategies rarely seem to be assessed on their results. It would be a salutary exercise for a research programme on the work of children to break with these practices and permit itself to be one object of study.

(c) Data collection must be in reference to established hypotheses on the economic role of children in the countries studied. The following points and the next section will demonstrate that rejection of an empiricist approach, which entails almost random collection of information, has methodological implications. Following on from the hypothesis put forward here, data should be collected on the subjects given below.

(c)1. Migration i.e. the release of labour from rural environments: conditions of origin, size, modalities, family strategies.

(c)2. Effects of family structure on children's work (i.e. not only the inverse): role of direct antecedents, kin, the extended family; competition or reciprocity between parents and children. Enquiries should not stop at the formal parents but also include organic lines of descent.

(c)3. The networks, circuits and hierarchical channels that host the exploitation of children's work. The necessity of including this point has already been stressed. Data must aim to identify: power and decision-making centres, financial circuits, the routes along which earnings are channelled and the beneficiaries of these earnings, the links between small non-capitalist enterprises and their suppliers, distributors and the state.

(c)4. The children's origins, length of time working, schooling and qualifications.

(c)5. Working hours and conditions and the annual variations, related to the economic imperatives of production and distribution.

(c)6. The types of task allotted to children in relation to learning skills and the degree of responsibility they are allowed.

(c)7. The level and type of remuneration: negative (apprenticeship fees, gift on finishing a course), zero or positive, and compared with what an adult would receive for the same work. This information must take into account all elements relevant to the cost of the reproduction of the labour force.

(c)8. Mortality, specific illnesses, relative susceptibility to parasitic and viral attacks, undernourishment, the risk of work injuries. In order for the results of this part of the inquiry to be useful, these questions should also be directed towards the adult population who worked during their childhood. The main aim here is to establish whether, and under what conditions, exploitation of children involves excessive physical demands and a significant reduction in life expectancy.

(c)9. An assessment in terms of value (with its monetary equivalent) of the additional product accruing to employers as a result of using child labour. There is no point in pretending that this would be easy but, using the methods proposed below, it would be possible to design indirect measures and make estimates.

(c)10. Juvenile activities that are hidden and that traditional types of inquiry tend to ignore; domestic work, illicit street

trading, trafficking (prostitution for example). Here, more than for any other aspect of the problem, the application of a new methodology seems indispensable.

(c)11. Finally, the ideological positions of different groups with regard to children's work. Those of children themselves: self-esteem, fatalism, submission or rebellion to authority, expectations, perception of work in general, attitudes towards wages, interest in tasks, awareness of differences in working conditions.

Before going on to discuss investigative tools it should be noted that most of the proposed research themes require data that are not necessarily numerical. The choice of themes is guided by the theoretical relevance of the information, but this does not exclude purely scientific enquiry; the choice is simply based on priorities ordered according to our analysis of the causes of children's work.

3. Investigative Tools

We will begin with some contra-indications:

- (a) Direct quantitative assessment of the number of children at work is, in our opinion, totally unhelpful and misleading. The information obtained through this method can only reveal declared employment and not the clandestine, illegal and occasional workforce which is, without doubt, where the core of the problem is to be found. If in spite of this, it is necessary to have a measure of the numbers of children involved, this would have to be obtained through cross-checking and approximations from indirect sources such as the distribution of jobs between the "formal" and "informal" sectors; rural-urban migration; school attendance and school leaving; apprentice registration; housing, consumption and income of domestic units, etc. A combination of these sources should lead to a more satisfactory and controllable set of figures than direct enumeration. The theoretical problems connected with identifying the juvenile population at work must be resolved before attempting to establish a representative sample.

- (b) Another trap to avoid is that of exaggerated empiricism. This is characterised by an unending multiplication of questions in the absence of a system of hypotheses; a wish to reduce all the factors studied to numbers, a claim to be exhaustive and the adoption of preconceived, descriptive typologies into which all observed variables are squeezed willy-nilly. Such dogmatism carries an even greater risk i.e. the consideration of only those individuals who exemplify preconceived norms and the rejection from the sample of all that is not easily identifiable and observable.
- (c) Within the same area of discussion, it is proposed that the use of only long and closed questionnaires be rejected. Investigative tools are not neutral. Surveys on the "unstructured" sector have often been carried out with questionnaires containing over 100 vital questions; what is more, interviewers tend to be paid for on the basis of numbers of questionnaires completed. Lastly, there is the problem of non-response. At best, non-responses are measured and it is possible to calculate the response rate to each question; however, non-responses are often simply ignored in the final statistics much as non-voters are ignored in official elections. With regard to refusals to respond, there are grounds for believing that there are a great number of these but that they are hidden because another individual agrees to answer the questionnaire instead. This results in considerable bias in the representativeness of the sample, always supposing that this was well-selected in the first place. With regard to children's work, it should be remembered that employers have nothing to gain (and perhaps feel that they have much to lose) through cooperating in enquiries concerning their young employees. An even more serious distortion introduced by the kind of tampering described above, accompanied by a blind faith in the results of the questionnaire, is the exclusion of the reasons for non-response or refusal to co-operate. Thus a programme of data collection on the work of children can expect to come up against a double difficulty; firstly, for the general reasons given above but also because of

the low reliability of the information likely to be obtained on such a delicate question.

- (d) We come to the problem of who should be interviewed. Our previous discussion has shown that we should be prepared to contact a wide range of people. If exploitation of the juvenile workforce is enmeshed in a strong hierarchical structure, this should be exposed and information should be obtained from all the participants (employers, biological and/or surrogate family, employment, purchasing and distribution organisations, administrative bodies and government). It goes without saying that the enquiry methods must be adapted to the groups in question, a point to which we will return later.

Children at work (and adults who worked during childhood) should make up the core of the sample and the types of investigation envisaged would include their direct involvement in the planning, administration and use of the studies. On the basis of this commitment we can graduate from outside recommendations to demands from the children themselves. This is an aim which the ILO should be eager to pursue. In our opinion, studies that view the child as an individual who is, above all, irresponsible and in need of protection bear the unacceptable (and impractical) imprint of paternalism. To take a similar case; it is well known that exclusively masculine attempts to analyse and attack women's oppression in the West entailed the take-over and re-interpretation of women's demands, with the ultimate effect of intensifying the very subordination it was purporting to attack. If this analysis is correct then it is clear that it is even more relevant to the case of children. The ILO should seize the opportunity presented to it by international concern over this question and let the children themselves speak.

- (e) Rejection of the quantitative and empiricist methods, traditionally employed in research on the Third World, need not present practical difficulties and may, on the contrary be an advantage. The approach taken in this paper has led to the proposal of essentially qualitative empirical material and analytical tools but all

quantification is not excluded. With this in mind, investigations must observe a certain number of ground rules:

(e) 1. Complete coverage of the population should not be attempted instead there should be an analysis of a small group of individuals chosen for their theoretical rather than numerical credentials. Selection would thus focus on an activity where child work is assumed to be frequent and organically essential to the creation of value. A thorough examination of a single activity is greatly preferable to vast surveys that try to encompass all the problems of an entire region.

(e) 2. Adopt whenever possible, indirect or semi-direct interview methods in order to evaluate the various items listed above. In this way unexpected information can be dealt with and the interviewee can respond indirectly, perhaps while talking about other things, to the questions put forward. The greater the resistance to the enquiry (and there is likely to be considerable resistance in the case of children's work) the more appropriate this method.

(e) 3. Attempt to introduce anthropological methods that have proved themselves over a long period in the rural sector, into the urban, small-scale activities environment. An anthropological approach rests on a fundamental principal: expect to give, and lose, a lot of time. More precisely this means that, when there is no shared identity between researcher and researched, it is better and not much more expensive, to use participatory interview techniques which require long contact with the selected groups (cf. Devauges, 1977 and Salem, 1979, who have employed this method). It is not recommended that payment be according to interviews completed because this tends to diminish the quality of the information collected. Treatment of the results yielded by an anthropological type of enquiry combines modern (computers) and traditional (manual, content analysis) methods.

(e) 4. Establish interpretative systems for free responses, the inevitable accompaniment to the anthropological method. In fact,

such responses do not always reflect reality but can be interpreted according to certain codes. For example, if a child replies that he/she wishes (or does not wish) to work, this information would have to be analysed (and the gap between the information and his/her precise feelings) according to whether the child is alone or with his/her employer, parents, an official etc. and according to his/her perception of the reasons for the interview. Thus a decoding system must be developed always remembering the risk of ethnocentric interpretation, as well as the need for an extended interview (even re-interviews) and cross-checking between different assertions during the interview. Another example, for which a decoding system would be required, is the dissimulation of employers who, sensing that they are involved in proscribed or morally unacceptable social relations, tend to say that they employ children in order "to do them a favour" (cf. Charmes, 1977). This type of claim should be assessed in combination with other information (attitudes of parents, children, authorities, social group) and should contribute towards the formulation of interpretive keys. In general, the variety of interviewees will permit comparison and cross-checking of sources. In particular, individuals who directly exploit, in their social relations, the labour of children talk of the subject in a devious manner which can only be truly assessed in the light of the experiences recounted by others (distributors, the state, and, of course, the children).

(e) 5. The anthropological method can be usefully combined with other approaches; analysis of legal texts and governmental declarations; administration of questionnaires to enterprises to discover sources of primary products and labour as well as their destination, turnover, fiscal constraints, gross and net revenues and structure of the workforce; enquiries amongst families with regard to migratory history and the position of each member vis-à-vis productive employment, reconstruction of family genealogies; and studies of multinational company investments in different sectors of Third World countries.

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Selected Publications of the Population and Labour Policies
Research Programme¹

1. General Material on the Research Programme

ILO: World Employment Programme: Population and Development - A progress report on ILO research with special reference to labour, employment and income distribution (Geneva, February 1979), 2nd edition, Reference WEP 2-21/PR.5. (*)

This report includes a full bibliography. It available in French and Spanish as well as English.

2. Books and Monographs

M.G. Castro, L.M. Fraenkel et al: Migration in Brazil: Approaches to Analysis and Policy Design (Brussels, Ordina, 1979). (***)

W.J. House and H. Rempel: The Kenya Employment Problem (Nairobi, Oxford University Press, 1978). (***)

A.S. Oberai: Changes in the Structure of Employment with Economic Development (Geneva, ILO, 1978). (**)

G. Pyatt and A. Roe: Social Accounting for Development Planning, with special reference to Sri Lanka (Cambridge University Press, 1977). (***)

M. Rasevic, T. Mulina, Milos Macura: The Determinants of Labour Force Participation in Yugoslavia (Geneva, ILO, 1978). (**)

G.B. Rodgers, M.J.D. Hopkins, R. Wéry: Population, Employment and Inequality: BACHUE-Philippines (Farnborough, Saxon House, 1978). (***)

G. Standing: Labour Force Participation and Development (Geneva, ILO, 1978). (**)

G. Standing and G. Sheehan (eds.): Labour Force Participation in Low-Income Countries (Geneva, ILO, 1978). (**)

M. Todaro: Internal Migration in Developing Countries (Geneva, ILO, 1976). (**)

¹ Availability code: * available on request from ILO, Population and Labour Policies Branch; ** available for sale from ILO Publications; *** available for sale from a commercial publisher.

3. Recent Working Papers in print¹

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- WEP 2-21/WP.30 Labour policy and fertility in developing countries
- by Ronald C. Ridker and Olivia Schieffelin Nordberg,
February 1976.
- WEP 2-21/WP.31 Effects of household structure, size and household income on
expenditure patterns
- by M.T.R. Sarma, February 1976.
- WEP 2-21/WP.32 Demographic change and the size of the government sector
- by A.C. Kelley, February 1976.
- WEP 2-21/WP.33 The education and employment of children: A comparative study of
San Salvador and Khartoum
- by Peter Peek, March 1976.
- WEP 2-21/WP.34 Demographic factors in government expenditure: An international
comparison
- by René Wéry, March 1976.
- WEP 2-21/WP.35 Demographic effects on tax shares during economic development
- by Bruce R. Bolnick, March 1976.
- WEP 2-21/WP.36 Desired fertility, income and the valuation of children
- by Chen-Tung Chang, March 1976.
- WEP 2-21/WP.42 Women's participation in economic activity as a strategic factor
of change in fertility: The cases of Mexico and Costa Rica
- by Andras Uthoff and Gerado Gonzalez, November 1976.
- WEP 2-21/WP.43 A re-examination of the concept of economic dependency
- by A.C. Kelley and J. Lillydahl, November 1976.
- WEP 2-21/WP.46 The impact of population growth on land, labour and productivity
in rural Korea
- by Yunshik Chang, Kap Hwan Oh and Hae Young Lee, February 1977.
- WEP 2-21/WP.48 Population, employment and poverty in the Philippines²
- by R. Wéry, G.B. Rodgers and M.J.D. Hopkins, February 1977.
- WEP 2-21/WP.49 Demography and distribution
- by G.B. Rodgers, February 1977.
- WEP 2-21/WP.50 Labour force participation in historical perspective:
Proletarianisation in Jamaica
- by Guy Standing, March 1977.

¹ These working papers are available free, while stocks last, from ILO, Population and Labour Policies Branch, CH-1211 Geneva 22, Switzerland.

² Also available in French and Spanish.

- WEP 2-21/WP.51 Demand for education in the Philippines
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