

AWL conference 1-2 March 2003

Policy passed: Child labour

Child labour

1. That millions of children are enslaved (whether by direct force or through poverty, wage-slavery and the workings of the market) in work which is often unhealthy and arduous for exhaustingly long hours, is a disgraceful crime against children and a scandalous indictment of capitalism.
2. We demand the universal banning of all child labour. We simultaneously fight to win social provision to free children from the burden of wage slavery.
3. We simultaneously support the working children's movements, including many of their specific demands (e.g., right to equal pay, right to organise).
4. Under socialism there will be more room for society to experiment. Children will be able to participate in social production in a more extensive way and in a way that promotes self-worth, breaks down the barriers between the adult's and child's world. But, with production organised for social welfare not profit, such participation would be part of a varied education.
5. Under capitalism child labour has followed a general pattern: one of super-exploitation in terms of wages and conditions; it has been about the use of children's "special abilities", malleability and so on. Socialists should be clear and definite about why we oppose the wage-enslavement of children and support measures to end it. We should give this special emphasis alongside our general opposition to sweated labour.
6. Legislation to limit child labour and introduce (gradually) full-time education in the west has been proved to be progressive although seriously marred by such things as the extensive use of physical and psychological violence against children. The labour movement should organise in those areas where such legislation has failed to protect children. For instance we want the unionisation of homework. And we want to rebuild the welfare state so that children are not forced to become carers.

Under capitalism there is some room for children to be more involved in social production. We should demand, as part of our fight to create a better, better-funded, more rounded education system for all children, that the state education system offers those older children and young people who want it work experience under union supervision on union negotiated rates of pay, linked to both technical education and to general education which allows them to reflect on that experience.
7. We should approach the working children's movements with tact. We make solidarity with them. And we do not support the sacking of 14 year olds by multi-nationals in order that they can appear to be better employers.

In such a situation we do not abandon our opposition to the wage-enslavement of children, arguing instead for providing positive alternatives for working children, e.g., free, public, properly-resourced, interesting, enjoyable, non-violent, respectful, democratic and compulsory education for all children funded by taxing the rich, the work to be allocated to adults with trade union rates and conditions, nationalisation under workers' control.
8. We emphasise the demands and campaigns which cut against the general conditions under which child labour takes place i.e., minimum wage, right to organise trade unions, free full time education with state grants for school students, global ban on corporal punishment, welfare provision.