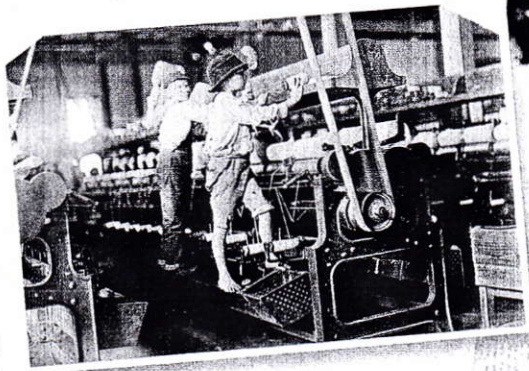


A very sad phenomenon: Child Labour

Unfortunately child labour is not a new phenomenon. In the past children were often used for labour to various degrees. Before the Industrial Revolution most of them had to work in the fields, whereas during the Industrial Revolution they worked in factories in the cities where they had moved with their parents. Their families were extremely poor and had no other alternative. In some cases children started work when they were very young, between the ages of 4-7 and they worked up to 12 or 16 hours a day. They were given little money and most of them worked in dangerous conditions (some of them were so exhausted that they fell asleep during work, and they were beaten, mutilated or even killed). Often they were employed as house servants or sold small things in the streets. Those who were less lucky had to work as prostitutes. In many of his novels Charles Dickens described children (working in factories, mines or cleaning chimneys).



Something started to change at the beginning of the 19th century, when a number of laws were created to control the working hours of children, but in most cases they were not successful (1.7 million children under the age of 15 were still working in American industries in 1900). Today, especially in developed countries, there are laws that control the minimum age of workers and consequently child labour has decreased. In many countries child labour is illegal and children under the age of 14-16 are not allowed to work. Things have also changed thanks to better working conditions, the arrival of universal schooling and children's and workers' rights.



But child labour still exists in poor countries (158 million children between 5 and 14 are exploited all over the world according to a survey carried out by UNICEF). Just like in the past these children receive little money and have to do boring, repetitive work. The main reason for child labour continues to be poverty. In some cases families have no other source of income, so children are essential for their survival. For this reason some people are convinced that boycotting items produced through child labour will only make these children look for harder or more dangerous jobs. Giving them some education and helping their families with training and job opportunities could be both the solution to this problem and make the economy in their countries more competitive.