



Children's schoolwork is a neglected area both in science and politics

Children's Schoolwork: Useful and Necessary

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The paper suggests that child labour in a modern industrial world is slightly anachronistic. It ventures the radical ideas, that if children were paid for their school work, there would be no need for gainful work after school hours, and this would be logical because school work and our mode of production are inherently connected (system-immanent). I am in other words suggesting that, theoretically/historically, children's school work is corresponding to traditional manual child labour under previous modes of production, and has replaced it as the, logically, only useful kind of child labour - seen from the point of view of a modern capitalist mode of production (or post-capitalist, post-industrial etc.). Of course, gainful work of children is widespread even in modern European societies, being important for some parents, for many children (for better or worse) and for particular sectors in the economy (mostly marginal, small scale). Basically I want to explain this anachronistic situation with reference to questions about responsibilities for children/childhood. The main contradiction is that while parents have kept the responsibility for children, they have been deprived of the benefits accruing from children. No wonder, thus, that fertility has plummeted this century and that children are exposed to larger risks of pauperisation.

Introduction

It is the main thesis of this chapter that children have always been working, but the nature of their obligatory work has changed in accordance with prevailing modes of production. This view, which will be substantiated theoretically and historically, thus

purports to convey an apparent historical discontinuity in children's work with a sense of continuity. Only a comparative perspective, faithful to the idea of equivalence of meaning, is able to do justice to a diversity of children's work, while claiming that basically merely its forms and contents have changed.

Despite all complexities, I want as far as possible to follow this simple idea. The simplicity of the idea lies in its attempt to continuously understand children's work as a part of any economy's division of labour; to perceive children's work as a common problem under various societal and economic circumstances; that is, not to let the problem be disturbed by time and place - following the comparative recipe of Marc Bloch: "*The unity of place is only disorder; only the unity of problem makes a centre*" (Bloch, 1934: 81; translated from the French by Skocpol, 1994: 89).

The Austrian socialist, Otto Felix Kanitz, wrote three quarters of a century ago about working class children in Vienna, that they had to perform three kinds of work: besides schooling, which he defined as "*societally necessary work in terms of physically and psychically qualifying oneself - a work which is and remains necessary in any society*", they had to do regular wage work and work in the household of the home (Kanitz, 1970: 30; my translation). Kanitz has captured two important points: on the one hand the suggestion, that children's school work is necessary work, and on the other hand that several forms of work may be co-existing. The latter is particularly true in periods of societal transition. As to the former, Kanitz is underlining that children's work load did not cease, nor did it necessarily recede, as their dominant work eventually was performed in school. He was merely indicating that the composition of children's forms of work were changing, and that one of them - school work - was on its way to becoming the dominant one, while manual work was gradually withering. This contention is important because it forces us to understand children's obligatory activities in their relationship to prevailing economies.

There is nothing sensational about the idea of co-existing forms of economies in transitional periods. This issue has been taken to task by many historians and economists, perhaps most forcefully by Marx, who in particular dealt with remnants of feudalism during capitalism's initial phases. In these phases struggles are going on between forces and interests pertaining to each of the involved modes of production. This historical fact was not, however, able to hide that one of them was more and more dominant, while the other eventually lost its importance, even if pockets of it might survive in archaic or anachronistic forms. It is my proposal that a similar picture pertains to the problem of children's activities: one form, school work, is eventually gaining importance - in fact, this has begun long time ago in the so-called First World - while other forms may survive as niches in modern economies, although they quantitatively may assume high figures and loom large in the daily life of many children.

I suggest that children's school work - as a presumptively considerable contribution to modern economy and an important practice by children - is a neglected area in both science and politics. Its negligence has - and already had for a long time - a number of

consequences, which need to be illuminated in politics and scrutinised by social scientists. These consequences are to do with not merely a recognition of the work done by children, and thus an act of fairness and a cultural signal to them that they need not be seen as a gradually growing economic liability due to their assumed uselessness; they are to do with a number of other issues, such as our failing motivation to have children, children's larger exposure to relative pauperisation, and a long term problem with old age security.

The current research and debate on child work

The analyses and debates on child work - or child labour - as they are currently conducted have an almost exclusive focus on working activities outside school. In fact, schooling is analytically and politically seen as child work's opposite activity, an often much longed for alternative option, which historically was and still in Third World settings is largely out of reach for huge numbers of children, at least as the dominant children's activity.

Child labour has a very long history - in all likelihood it is as long as human history itself. The discussion about it as a political issue attracting moral and political interest is much younger - let's say two centuries, as the exploitation of children through their forced labour became conspicuous, both in scope and gravity. Since then it has been on the agenda, although the stage for its being of particular concern has moved from a western past to a southern and eastern present.

Children's work and labour is an issue of utmost importance, and the study of it is one which deserves much attention and great respect. For reasons of sheer gravity, this is first of all the case in contemporary underdeveloped countries, and many lessons are to be learnt from these arenas - in terms of understanding both economic development and children's agency. This is, however, not the arena I want to address in this chapter, where I will by and large substantiate my analysis with Europe as a background - past and present.

In Europe (and in other parts of the developed world) the discussion about child work is lively. The issue is still suitable for arousing debate among representatives of different interests, as it became clear a few years ago, when the European Union legislated for it and stipulated a new age limit for children's permit to work for money outside school and home. By and large, however, the debate about child work in Europe is now a days different from what it was historically. The reasons for the change in approaching the issue are partly that it does not have the same importance in quantitative terms as it once had, and partly that its dangers are far from being as grave and serious as previously, although both exploitation and big risks to children's health are still too numerous. As a reality for tens of thousands of children in Europe, child work remains

significant to study, also in terms of children's placement in the division of labour, their motives for acquiring and accepting the terms of work and salaries. Many lessons are to be learnt from child work, also in terms of adult society's attitudes to children and children's own status as participants in the fabric of society.

My questioning parts of the research on child work is therefore not a denigration of the importance of the reality itself, nor of its significance in terms of results. My inspection of this research branch merely points to one or two queries: its potential failure to an appropriate understanding of its - and working children's - position in modern economy, and its, in my view, mistaken assessment of children's extra-curricular work in terms of a historical continuity.

When Cunningham (2000) in a recent and interesting overview of research in child work concludes that child work nowadays, understood as wage work outside school and home, is a marginal phenomenon, I cannot but agree with him; on the same terms his suggestion that an 'adulting' of work has occurred is likely to be right. However, the perspective chosen in this chapter suggests that Cunningham's conclusions are problematic, because he as practically everybody else indicates a continuity in child work - he appears to bring forward the message that child work in principle means the same thing as it always did, even under completely different economic circumstances, and thus makes it justified to ask the same questions to it. As already proposed, I want to bring in school work as children's new, and 'system-immanent' work, and by doing this a range of new perspectives will be launched and new questions to traditional child work concepts asked.

The significance and position of schools in modern society

In a remarkable statement made by the authors of The Fifth Family Report to the German Parliament it was said, that "*The expenses to the educational system are of the same immediate importance to society and economy as expenses to infrastructure in traffic because of the superior consequences a qualified labour power potential has as an instrument for fundamental economic policy. Thus, these expenses cannot primarily be accounted for in terms of an element in equalising family burdens*" (Bundesministerium, *The Fifth Family Report* [...], 1994: 291; my translation from the German).

Equalisation of family burdens is an ingrained and important element of German family policy, as in many other countries, but in Germany it is a very explicitly debated issue. Its meaning is first of all to alleviate families with children for the direct and indirect expenses to upbringing of children. As such, incomes to families with children in these terms are accounted for and added to disposable incomes - whether calculated in cash or kind - for these families and their members. When the Report, as quoted, contends that expenses to schooling cannot be understood as a part of equali-

sing family burdens, the interpretation is that such expenses cannot be seen as expenses which in particular favour families with children - or merely children; on the contrary, it is argued that expenses to the educational system is of equal importance to society as a number of other expenses which are generally understood as contribution to the common good - such as expenses to traffic, the military, research, central administration etc.

This recognition of the educational system as a responsibility which has to be shared by all taxpayers is not exactly sensational, but it is seldom made as explicit as in this quotation. It is moreover a view which many governments hesitate to hold in public because of the economic consequences it potentially entails. Even if the bulk of educational expenses is indisputably a public responsibility or liability it is not uncontested terrain. In the first place, its scope and amount varies from country to country, indeed from municipality to municipality; secondly, it remains an item which is open for financial negotiation, and thirdly, we keep making the observation that a number of smaller expenses are assumed to be the responsibility of parents. In the public debate, moreover, the view is not at all unusual among non-parents that they unjustly are paying to children through school budgets.

Concomitantly, the position is not unheard, but remains controversial, that parents deserve to be compensated for their burdens and sacrifices for bringing up children - exactly for the same reasons: they make invaluable contributions to the labour force and in the end to rescuing pensions and care for an eventually numerous elderly population.

Both views reflect the growing differentiation of society in modernity. They are signalling that children are not a common and public responsibility, on the contrary, but they also convey the message that an unacknowledged and not reciprocated accept of a sole parental responsibility may be causing harm in the long run. Even in the short term it is being recognised that a growing poverty rate among children has to be dealt with as a part of any government's programme, given that these modern trends may be predicated parents' difficulties in making ends meet when they have children in their household.

The views are not new as such, but the novelty is their emergence on the political agenda, although with great reluctance because of their potential budgetary consequences. By and large they are therefore sought contained as a social policy or a family policy issue and not at all an issue to do with transfers or distributive justice between generations. The exception is the quoted German report which brings up the issue as a systemic one. But while advances thus are made so far, one view appears to be missing either because of the risks it is carrying or because it is simply not brought to anyone's consciousness, namely the view that children themselves may be contributors and thus in the end claims makers through their role in the educational system. In a historical perspective, this was in fact the position children held previously: they could as contributors make claims on resources in the local economy which they were a part of.

What I have been saying about the educational system and parents' role is meant to serve as a marker of the framework and the scope within which children's modern obligatory activities must be seen. I want in particular to suggest that children's school work is the continuation of former times' manual work done by children. In order to make this argument transparent, I have to deal with the change of contexts within which children's work is performed. In particular, I want to highlight the notion 'system-immanent' work. In doing so I will also be hypothesising that children's activities and childhood in general are intrinsically embedded in historical and societal changes.

Childhood, modernity and societal differentiation

I believe it is uncontroversial to suggest that children back in history always had some kind of practical role to perform, that was conceived of as a contribution to the survival of the family or locality. It is interesting for instance that the etymology of 'proletarian' is 'proles', which means a child, and that a proletarian was a roman pauper, whose services to the state only occurred through his children. More importantly, but in all brevity and without wanting to trivialise the matter, it is likely that - leaving aside gender roles of girls and boys - children in hunting communities were preoccupied with hunting, that children in fishing villages were dealing with activities related to fishing, that in agriculture they were obliged to do agricultural work etc.

Historians may be tabling more, but not very much, evidence to this effect. One reason for this lacunae in our knowledge is suggested by Ariès. When he in his famous statement contends that "*In medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist ... awareness of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes the child from an adult ... was lacking*" (Ariès, 1962: 128), he mediates to us not only that insight about generational differentiation is hardly existing, because it did not exist in reality, but also that children and their activities were enmeshed and embedded in the community in which both parents and children lived and worked. One is therefore, I trust, justified in proposing that the work-divided differentiation was low - in any case the nature of what children and adults did was the same, even if the activities were adapted to their bodily capacities.

When, to follow Ariès, childhood was 'invented' - and he points in particular to schooling as an important marker in this process - the way was paved for a growing attention to what children did. Historians' descriptions of child work in the 19th century is sufficient for us to realise at least two things: one, what children actually did - and they did, details aside, manual activities, as they had always done until this time; and two, even if they largely shared kinds of activities with adults, it had become conspicuous what they did - some, but far from all, began to be alarmed of what was

understood as an assault on children's bodies and minds. This reflected a new consciousness about children, as suggested by Ariès and many others. But it was not merely a new consciousness about children, also about the family and economy. As Brunner says, "*Only in the 18th century the word family penetrates the German everyday language and achieves this particular emotionality which we connects to it*" (Brunner, 1980: 89; my translation from the German). More surprising is it, perhaps, when Levine is saying, "*what to do with the economy has been a problem since we first became aware that we had one. Our awareness of the economy is, however, a fairly recent development*" (Levine, 1995: 12).

The three quotations from Ariès, Brunner and Levine all point in the same direction and have great import for our purpose. They all speak of a lacking awareness of respectively childhood, family and economy. I do not read this as if it merely took some social constructionism - or more precisely: mental creativity - to establish childhood, family and economy. The fact was rather that incipient modernity - by means of a growing differentiating due to changing requirements of production - did away with the thus far dominant unit of production, namely the household, what the Germans call 'das ganze Haus', i.e. the extended household or an estate, as the case may be. This was not a site for the intimate family as we know it today, nor were children a segregated group; and what Levine calls the economy was the household, or to use the Greek term: the oikos. I prefer this Greek term for comparative reasons. Oikos can be used as a common, a generalised concept for a variety of economic organisations - for households based on community or Gemeinschaft-cooperation in a locality in the past, as well as for what we might call a societal household. In principle all processes take place in any form of oikos: production, consumption, circulation, division of labour and reproduction, and in all forms it is important to 'economise'. While, thus, in principle nothing has changed in terms of functions to be performed - because all forms are human forms - dramatic changes have taken place in the way the oikos is organised. In the old oikos, the relationships between different functions were transparent, there was no separation between production and reproduction in the sense that those who produced were identical with those who reproduced, which meant that nobody was able to be a free rider in the system or evade responsibility for common concern. This implied a practical enforcement of a generational contract or covenant. In principle, although far from always in practice, children knew they were secured their upkeep, but also that they had to work from an early age and in addition were expected to take care of their parents as they became old. In a modern fiscal welfare state, one might argue, everything is done to prevent a free riders problem - as a matter of fact, however, the lack of coincidence between production and reproduction has created the impression of a system in which these essential activities have nothing to do with each other; the decisions to either produce or to reproduce have been relegated to two different levels. In pre-modern society there was at least some connection between demand for labour power and rates of fertility; this is not the case today: there is merely a connection between fertility rates and parents' own considerations in this regard. In other

words: in the modern oikos, fertility is beyond the control of the captains of industry (to their great relief, probably) and for politicians an untouchable issue.

If this picture of the pre-modern society sounds too idyllic, it is not intended; I know perfectly well about misery and conflicts for a variety of reasons, but this is not the point here, as I merely want to portray the principles of the system. In the same way I intend to portray the principles of the modern oikos. The processes are the same, but it functions in a dramatic different way due to a high degree of differentiation and division of labour as a result of new demands of the now dominant mode of production. The family as such, which previously was one of the core elements in the old oikos, has been severed from the sites of production, which merely needs individuals from the family as employees. The sites of production, on the other hand, do not produce any children - a task which remains a family business. It is however a business which does not, as previously, entail any gains in material terms; on the contrary, the traditional fertility motivations have completely disappeared - children do not work to the advantage of parents and parents are not dependent on their children for old age provision. Thus, it is no wonder that fertility levels have plummeted during the 20th century.

Most important of all for our purpose, children and their time use were not made redundant. Contrary to the view of those who envision children in modernity as useless, they gained in the wake of modernisation, and as an indispensable element of the modern oikos, a new importance. Their time and activities were required and therefore colonised by the new mode of production and consequently they moved 'en masse' into the universally established sites for modern child work - the schools. Schools became children's new work place, they became the place where children were obliged to spend most of their time during childhood - and increasingly so as the century progressed. Schools became the new surroundings for children to perform their system-immanent work. But since the system had changed, so did the work that was immanent to it.

There is a logic in this. In pre-modernity - and there is no reason here to argue about the timing of the change, because the development has taken place in all countries which have reached modernity - children's system-immanent activities were, as mentioned, manual in nature. This was logical in societies or under an oikos, whose dominant forms of production were manual functions. Working children of course had to perform with their hands - both while they were children and also as a preparation for adulthood.

The new, the modern oikos is based on quite different instruments. Literacy and numeracy have as such been with us for centuries, but for vast majorities of the population only embryonically; from the 19th century, however, they became increasingly a necessity for the modern oikos and thus eventually also for the masses who lived in modern society. The new instruments thus were not primarily one's hands but symbols, letters, numbers, digits and similar abstracts, which had to be learned not merely by an elite,

but by each and everyone in society. Ability to read and write was not merely of importance as a cultural device, for achieving competence as a democratic citizen or for being able to read the bible; in fact, there is evidence that, before it became an economic necessity, it was perceived as a threat to the social and cultural order. From now on, it became an indispensable asset as a production factor, and it was therefore a logical step that also children in their childhood had to deal with this symbolic world; indeed it was - due to its system-immanent nature - logical that children were asked and demanded to use the lion's share of their waking time in schools.

This logic was acknowledged in all countries; of course the timing of its beginning and its end varied, but the nature of the process and its incessant direction were unmistakable and thus strong evidence for the hypothesis that children and their capacities were strongly demanded. In the most advanced countries the process had practically been accomplished by the beginning of the 20th century measured by the attendance rate, which gradually at the close of the 19th century converged towards 100 percent. The implementation of what one could term mass-schooling was by and large perfect.

System-immanence, continuity and discontinuity

It is worthwhile to deal more with the notion of system-immanence. The notion suggests that there in any system or mode of production there must be a logic which connects its main parts if it is to function without tensions and to the satisfaction of most of its people. If this sounds too functionalistic to somebody's taste, I want to add, firstly, that I am not scared by functionalism, secondly, that I do not by that intend to say that all systems are strong enough to secure a smooth system-immanence; however, if a correspondence between crucial elements is not achieved, one has to take conflicts into account - whether one is aware of them or not.

The question of children's work is a case in point. It is fully possible to find different kinds and forms of child work simultaneously; in fact this was clearly found in history and is found in different parts of the world presently. In previous eras of history one always has found, as mentioned, some schooling, but the further one goes back in history the less encompassing it was in terms of children's participation. It has however been steadily growing, which gives us the right to talk about schooling as an embryonic children's activity. In present days' Third World, we likewise experience a simultaneity of school work and manual work, but we also perceive a conflict exactly between those who want to use children's manual capacities and those who are pressing towards schooling. The reasons for this conflict is obviously that the popular demand for children's schooling, although perhaps in principle desired, is not strong enough vis-à-vis the demand for their help for survival. Until a certain turning point in the process of modernisation, manual work will in these countries remain system-



It became logical that children were asked and demanded to use the lion's share of their waking time in school (foto Sonny Plasschaert)

immanent despite the fact that schooling normatively and culturally are eventually recognised as desirable for children.

Presently, in western society, we have long ago come to the other end of the process. We still find both forms of child work, but given the fact that all children spend all their statutory time in school without noticeable truancy, we have a right to suggest that this has not only become the norm, but also expresses a demand from the prevailing economy. Children's manual work outside schools is still with us to a varying degree from country to country, but it is as a matter of fact a marginal or a residual phenomenon. The hours spent weekly by children on school work outnumber with a very large margin the hours spent on manual wage work.

If one, thus, is to think in terms of continuity and discontinuity, it is my suggestion that neither schooling nor manual work represent a continuity, despite the fact that both forms are continually present in any - or almost any - society. It therefore does not make much sense to state in quantitative terms how much time manual work children are performing now compared with what was the case previously. Neither does it make sense to let it appear as if manual work has always been with us, as if manual work today has an equivalent position, status and significance as it had hundred or two hundred years ago. If this is suggested by research, I believe it is a wrong track. Even worse, the fact that this work actually has receded dramatically over time is unfortunately by many, even insightful, observers taken as a sign of children's growing uselessness, because they are counting merely children's manual activities.

Similarly, it would be meaningless to suggest that children's usefulness has increased because their time spent in school has increased dramatically. As a measure or an account of children's activities one has to compare children's amount of system-immanent activities, which is likely to be impossible as more than an approximation. One has in other words to compare children's manual activities in former time with children's school activities nowadays, because both are system-immanent activities. In either case, of course, one might add additional activities to reach a total, such as the embryonic school work previously, and the residual manual work presently.

In following this line one will be faithful to suggestions from comparative research, namely to seek to achieve equivalence of meaning, or as Erwin Scheuch has formulated it: "*Similar indicators in different countries may be interpreted as functionally different, while different indicators may be interpreted as functionally equivalent*" (Scheuch, 1969: 173, my translation from the German).

This important insight is not new to comparativists. One might consult for instance researchers from the French Annales school, like Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, or look into the work by Barrington Moore and Karl Polanyi. Let me here quote what Dalton wrote in his introduction to a collection of Polanyi's papers: "*Every society studied by anthropologists, historians, and economists has an economy of some sort because personal and community life require the structured provision of material goods and services. This is the minimal definition of economy which calls attention to similarities among economies otherwise as different as those of the*

Trobriland Islands, an Israeli kibbutz, a twelfth-century manor, nineteenth-century Britain, and the present-day economy of the Soviet Union. These very different economies have in common that they make use of natural resources, technology, division of labor and, frequently, practices such as external trade with foreigners, the use of markets, and some form of money. But the specific institutionalisation of these features may vary radically among economies" (Dalton in Polanyi, 1971: 33).

What Dalton here explains about the similarity of quite different economies is parallel to what I am arguing about similarities of different forms of child work; school work and manual work are the meaningful forms to compare because they share a common function, meaning or significance for the economies or oikos in which they are embedded. If one were - to paraphrase Dalton - to suggest "*A minimal definition of child work which calls attention to similarities among economies otherwise different*", one might propose that child work in any oikos is related to (a) its production system, (b) its division of labour, (c) its labour forms, (d) its circulation system, (e) its scope and range of activities, (f) its system of claims and rights to resources based on (g) obligations to work; finally, that there is (h) a congruence between productive and reproductive systems, and (i) between main investors in and main beneficiaries of children (see Qvortrup, 2000). As we shall see, this is not for all elements the case in the modern oikos, a fact that cannot remain without consequences.

School work in the diachronic division of labour

It seems to me that among researchers as well as in public there is an agreement about the suggestion that children in earlier parts of history - whenever we want to make the caesura - were in fact useful, that they had a constructive and contributing role within a pre-modern oikos. Since this is not the case as far as children's school work is concerned, there is still a need to deepen this analysis of children's obligatory activities in the modern oikos. I am not in a position to come up with conclusive or completely convincing evidence, but some additional thoughts might help substantiate the thesis, that as far as children's usefulness is concerned, nothing has in principle changed.

There are a number of theoretical and philosophical arguments in support of assessing children's school work as useful; I have dealt with them elsewhere and do not want to embellish them here (see Qvortrup, 1995; Qvortrup, 2000). Instead I would like to augment my discussion about the fit between children's school work and modern economy.

I have already mentioned the changes of children's work in terms of manual and mental work and stressed the fact that mental work as performed in schools inheres with modern economy's need for symbolic communication. There is another aspect which is characteristic for the modern oikos, namely its differentiation based on a widespread division of labour. We know a number of such divisions of labour in terms of gender,

occupation, region, education etc. Are school children a part of modern society's division of labour? I have suggested that their activities are a part of what one might call the diachronic division of labour, which in my view is a distinguishing feature of modern economy.

This concept entails a difference to pre-modernity, since at that time there was increasingly - the further we go back in time - a synchronicity between production and consumption. In marxian terms production of use values was prevailing during former modes of production. Eventually, as divisions of labour were extended, production of exchange values became the predominant form, which also implied that the time which passed between production and consumption took longer time, because a number of new links in the chain of production was added.

Hardly any product or consumption good has not been imagined and subjected to creative design in terms of its been formed; it has passed through many stages in terms of research and development, involving various experts on several parts, until it finally reaches one of more production halls, where its composite parts are put together and the goods is being subjected to sales promotion, which in turn is seen as a necessary element in most goods' way from idea to consumption.

This diversity and diachronicity being a characteristic feature of our modern oikos raises the question as to children's - and in particular school children's - role in the process. Does, in other words, children's school work represent a necessary link in modern society's diachronic division of labour? This is the crux of the matter; at the same time, it is hard to answer the question. So far, we are bound to limit ourselves to speculations.

As we saw above, there is unanimity about the important and indispensable role of schools in modern society. The public purse spends considerable amounts of money investing in schools and children's education; teachers' salaries are a part of such investments, and some countries, such as Germany, as we saw, begin to recognise that parents are justified in being compensated for their efforts, sacrifices, and opportunity costs in contributing to reproducing the labour force in modern society. All these developments took decisively off a century ago or so, as mass schooling became effectively implemented and hardly anyone was objecting to the demand that children's educational place was in the school. But was this really a mass movement of children from useful activities to useless activities? Was it justified to suggest that children's enormous investment of time was nothing but a consumption of resources made available, inclusive teachers' insights transferred to them? Does it make sense at all to suggest that children's energy, creativity and competence was worth nothing in the final equation, and thus on these grounds justified that they be eclipsed from our imagery as valuable contributors to accumulation of knowledge and as claims makers on disposable resources?

If my thesis is sound, it means that we have not in reality experienced - as Cunningham suggest - an 'adulting' of work (Cunningham, 2000, pp. 410 and 425), because children

in fact has continued their work obligation, indeed it has been expanded because it is now a universal claim that children work in schools, whereas previously not all children did work, although many worked much more. Forms and contents of children's obligatory involvement have changed considerably, but they continue their duty to be actively involved in the system-immanent work.

The irony is that what we apparently are appreciating as children's real work in modernity is their wage work, which takes place after their system-immanent school hours. The irony lies in the fact that this work is not systemic; it is not a universal claim - as school work is - on the contrary, it is rather incidental and dependent on a number of other factors that are not as such supported by any legal demands. I do recognise that this work has considerable significance because of what it means for children; for what it means in terms of contributions to family economy and at least for children's status and consumption options; for what it may mean for certain niches in even a modern economy. These and other questions have been excellently demonstrated by much valuable research on these matters - and there is no doubt that this research must be continued.

Because of its placement in the modern oikos in terms of its most characteristic features, it is hard to come to any other conclusion than this work is becoming gradually more and more a marginal and residual activity; it is not system immanent; it belongs to the remnants of previous modes of production.

My attitude to this work is ambivalent. On the one hand, given the fact that children's school work is not recognised for what it contributes and not rewarded accordingly, child work after school hours can be understood as children's legitimate objection to not having their system-immanent work acknowledged, and thus it is fair enough to demand their wage work as a right to be extended, and to have their salaries increased and working conditions improved.

On the other hand, the logic followed in my arguments so far forces me to suggest that children's school work should be adapted to the modern oikos, including its being recognised as an indispensable input in the modern fabric and thus rewarded accordingly. That would at least make some of the after school child workers in shorter supply - irrespective of their being demanded by some niches in the economy. School reforms might also be needed so as to making schooling an attractive and meaningful endeavour for children.

Let me add, in passing, that I do not here care to think of the forms and amounts of rewards for children's school work and to whose bank accounts it should be credited. This is not the point here. The point is rather that children's work has been colonised or confiscated by the modern oikos, the state, from either parents or children themselves without compensation or reciprocation. This had a number of implications.

One of them was that parents had to reconsider the idea to have more than a few children, who were no longer an asset to themselves. While in the pre-modern oikos, the flow back of advantages of having children was of direct benefit to parents, this in

the modern oikos became a benefit to the whole society, and not merely parents or the locality, but nevertheless parents remained in principle the sole responsible providers of children. The changes in oikos meant a split between two important practices, namely production and reproduction, which hitherto in history had always been closely linked. By separating the two, children's role was ignored. That is in other words: the modern oikos declines to assume any responsibility for reproduction.

Another consequence was children's increasing exposure to economic hardship. All statistics tell us that families with many children belong to the poorest groups in society; thus, parents actually do serve children - or, if you like: their unborn children - well by not producing no. three, no. four etc. of them. We also know, that even now - with so few children as is the case in Europe - children's likelihood to be poor is relatively high compared with that of other age groups. Parents in other words act rational by reducing fertility.

As already suggested, production and reproduction have always been closely linked practices in any oikos until our modern one. Can this be re-established? In 1937, the American sociologist Kingsley Davis maintained the thesis that: "*the declining birth-rate has resulted from a ripening incongruity between our reproductive system (the family) and the rest of modern social organisation ... the kind of reproductive institution inherited from the past is fundamentally incompatible with present-day society*" (Davis, 1937, p. 290). Davis' pessimism rests on an acceptance of a split between the family - as a reproductive system - and what he calls the rest of modern social organisation, i.e. our productive system. There are two obvious facts, I believe: a. the family (in whichever form) remains our reproductive system; b. the family never again resumes the role of becoming an important ingredient in the producing part of a modern oikos. What is not, however, so obvious, is, that the 'rest of modern social organisation' remains without a responsibility for reproducing a new labour force. In fact, its failure to assume a continuation of this role was the major historical 'faux pas' in the transformation from the old to the new oikos. There are two ways in which this responsibility can be resumed: either parents are fully compensated for their outlays to raising children, in terms of money and time, for instance; or children are rewarded for their contributions to reproducing a modern labour force through their school work, which obviously is an interest for the state and the economy, much more so, indeed than for the parents.

Nobody knows for sure, if this would lead to an increase in the birth rate or in case, how much. But if this is the case, and I do not exclude this, the cure for the last negative consequence of the falling birth rate is well under way, namely the crisis in our pension system. This crisis can effectively be remedied, in my view, only if sufficient children are in place to take over production from those who are leaving the labour market so massively as it is the case now.

I am mentioning these three important consequences of our lack of recognising children's school work, because I want to indicate how deeply embedded this particular kind of work is in our modern oikos. It further underlines its system-immanent natu-

re. In comparison, children's work after school has by far not such far-reaching implications, however significant it is for some children, for some parents and for some niches in even modern economy.

What about child labour in the Third World?

Since I am not an expert on child labour in the Third World I hesitate to draw conclusion from my arguments to the situation in these parts of the world. My assumption is, however, that the framework of my analysis can - *mutatis mutandis* - be used even here. The question is of course to which extent circumstances in the Third World - or rather in each of these countries - justify that one speaks of an old or a new *oikos*. Due to the massive, historical and current, interference of western powers into the internal affairs of these cultures, a definitive answer to this question is likely to remain unsettled. I would however like to suggest the following, as a continuation of my argument and by way of conclusion:

In areas of wide-spread child labour in the Third World one would theoretically be justified in comparing this labour, on the one hand, with child labour in pre-modern eras in our part of the world; and on the other hand with school labour in modern economies. The reasons for this are the same, namely that they share the common feature of being system-immanent work. Contrary to that, it does not from a scientific point of view make sense to compare child labour in these contemporary pre-modern countries with after school work for wages in our European countries of today, because they relate to two different *oikos* and thus diverge as to their meaning within their respective modes of production.

Similarly, although with even more reluctance, I suggest that school work in Third World countries is in principle comparable with after school work in the modern *oikos*, because none of them are system-immanent forms of work, even if for different reasons: school work in many Third World countries is an embryonic form in an alien *oikos*, while after school work in a modern *oikos* is withering away in an economy which becomes more and more distant from the circumstances within which it originated.

In current discussions about child labour, the so-called 'abolitionists' seem to be falsely assuming that school work without further qualification and voluntaristically can be imposed in Third World conditions as were it an immanent activity in their economies. Against this position, the more moderate view - which seems to be gaining ground - appears to be much better in accordance with realities, while in fact taking into account the demands of prevailing *oikos* in its assessment of children's obligatory participation in the economy.

I beg your pardon for these presumptive concluding remarks; the gist of the matter is, however, that children's obligatory activities - more or less universally required of children in any prevailing economy - must be interpreted as an ingrained element of this economy.

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