Child Labor Essay, Research Paper

S. L. Bachman stated, Children have worked for as long as families have needed all hands to pitch in ( Political 30). Child labor has been a concern since the beginning of the Industrial Age. Child labor had declined in developing countries by the end of World War II. The concern resurfaced in the 1980 s and 1990 s. The plight of working children in the developing world today is not very different, and in some cases even less harsh, than that prevalent in such countries as the United States and England During the 19th and early 20th centuries (Wasserman 105). During the 18th century it was considered to be helpful to a child s character. There was an estimated 1.75 million children between the ages of 10 and 15 that were employed. Most children worked on farms or house chores, but some had jobs in the factories.It was between 1880 and 1910 that 36 states decided to set a minimum age of 14 to be able to work. This was because they thought it to be important for a child to play and relax. Also because when manufacturing started to become big the adults didn t want the children to take jobs away from them (Wasserman 106). In 1910 North Carolina put a bill into effect designed to put an end to the employment of 13-year-old boys and girls in the mills (Gardner 20).Action against child labor had to be put on hold so that the definition of child labor could be established. Most countries define child labor as age. This is difficult to do because many countries don t have the organization to give every child a birth certificate, so it is difficult to determine a child s real age. Even though the definition is stilling being debated, the worst forms of child labor have been determined. They include slave labor, prostitution, forced labor, and work that is physically or mentally hazardous (Bachman, New 546).The following is labor laws set by the U.S. Department of Labor.Federal Labor Laws for Young Workers14 and 15 year olds:• Can work up to 3 hours on a school day, Monday through Friday and 18 hours during a school week.• Can work up to 8 hours a day on a non-school day, or 40 hours in a non-school week.• Cannot work during school hours.• Cannot work before 7:00am or after 7:00pm, except from June 1 through Labor Day when evening hours are extended to 9:00pm.• Cannot work in any manufacturing, processing, mining, construction, warehouse operations, and many restrictions apply in cooking.• Cannot work in any of the 17 Hazardous Occupations listed below, for 16 and 17 year olds .16 and 17 year olds:• Can work in any occupation except for those declared hazardous by the secretary of Labor. The 17 Hazardous Occupations for non-farm work deal with the following:1. Manufacturing or storing explosives.1. Driving a motor vehicle and being an outside helper.1. Coal mining.1. Logging and sawmilling.1. Power driven woodworking machines.1. Exposure to radioactive substances and to ionizing radiations.1. Power-driven hoisting apparatus.1. Power-driven metal forming, punching and shearing machines.1. Mining other than coal mining.1. Meat packing or processing.1. Power-driven bakery machines.1. Power-driven paper products machines.1. Manufacturing brick, tile, and related products.1. Power-driven circular saws, band saws, and guillotine shears.1. Wrecking, demolition, and ship-breaking operations.1. Roofing operations.1. Excavating operations.18 years old:• Can work in any job for unlimited hours.Employers who violate the FLSA child labor law provisions are subject to a civil money penalty of up to $10,000 for each child labor violation that causes the death or serious injury of a minor (U.S. SDDO-29).Legislation has been able to control labor in the formal areas. As a result, child labor is most common in the highly unmonitored areas. There are 250 million children between the ages of five and fourteen that work. About 120 million of these children work full time, not allowing them to tend school. Of the 250 million working children, sixty-one percent are in Asia, Thirty-two percent in Africa, and Seven percent in Latin America. Fifteen to twenty percent of children in developing countries work for no pay often as domestics or farmworkers. Two-thirds of all child workers live in the countryside: twenty percent of them between 5-9 years old, compared with only 5 percent in this same age bracket in towns and cities (Boukhari 38). The bulk of the working children are in Africa (Buchman, New 545). There is an estimated number between 300,000 and 1 million children that work illegally in the United States ( Peace 633).The lack of enforcement of labor restrictions allows child labor to continue. The number of enforcement officials is very low, especially in developing countries where the immediate priority of surviving is more important than anything else (Bachman, New 545). There are also inconsistencies in legislation, which may cause problems. For example, a difference may exist between the minimum ages required to work and drop out of school. In many countries the minimum working age is lower than the required age of required education, giving children access to employment before they have even completed the minimum amount of schooling. When impoverished children are allowed to work legally, they will often abandon school to better their family s condition. In the opposite situation, you may have the minimum age requirement or work greater than the required schooling age. The children who have completed the required schooling must stay unemployed for a period of time before they can legally work. For example, when a poor child from Africa finishes the required amount of schooling at 12 years of age, that child must wait until the age of 15 to be able to legally work. Such an expectation seems unreasonable (Boukhari 37).These children work for a variety of reasons. The most important is poverty. Children work to ensure survival of their family income in developing countries (Bachman, New 546).Schooling problems also contribute to child labor. Many times children seek employment simply because there is no access to schools. When there is access, the low quality of education often makes attendance a waste of time for the students. Schools in many developing countries suffer from problems such as overcrowding, inadequate sanitation and apathetic teachers. As a result, parents may find no use in sending their children to school when they could be learning a skill and contribute to the family income. Because parents have so much control over their children, their perception of the value of school is a main determinant of child attendance. Parents who are educated understand the importance of schooling from personal experience. As a result, if the parents were educated it is more likely that the child will attend school. School attendance is also highly linked with the family income. Therefore when children drop out of school, it is not necessarily because of irresponsible parenting. It may be due to the family s financial situation. When these children leave school they become potential workers. Some poor families are able to recognize good quality schooling and know that with a good education they will better themselves for life (Bachman, Political 4).

Education is the most important means of drawing children away from the labor market. Studies have correlated low enrollment with increased rates of child employment. School provides children with guidance and the opportunity to understand their role in society. Therefore, many insist on immediately abolishing child labor in developing countries and requiring children to go to school. Yet this approach is impractical for a number of reasons. First, children will not attend these schools without an economic change in their condition. Schools must make it worth their while to attend in order to make up for lost earnings. One necessary provision is that these schools are free. Another possibility is that these schools serve food supplements. Parents might view nutrition as being valuable and therefore keep their children in school. The quality of education can also be improved so that schooling is considered an important factor in the future of a child. Only after they put these amenities in the schools will attendance increase. In some cases when the parents worked the children would have to work next to them. This is because they could not afford child care. So if the children were denied work then the parent was also out of a job (Bachman, Political 35)Another problem with the complete abolition of child labor is that thousands of children feel they have a right to work. A movement called Nats, Ninos y Adolescentas Trabajadores ( Child and Teenage Workers ), started in Peru in the 1970 s. It later spread to Latin American countries, then to West Africa and India in the 1990 s. Now it is making its way Asia. These children oppose that a minimum age be required to begin work. They do feel that the inhumane and dangerous forms of child labor become punishable crime. These children feel that working gives them a sense of belonging and pride. It enables themselves to independent and care for themselves (Boukhari 38). Child Unions have been around for more than 100 years. In New York the newsboys waged a strike against the newspapers, and in 1985 Brazilian street children founded the worst modern children s union and persuaded the Brazilian Parliament to write a section on children s rights into the constitution in 1988 (Bachman, Underage 25).Working might not be all that bad for children. Some studies show that whether working is harmful or not depends on the child. Work that allows a child to think and be productive could be good for a child, but work that involves missing school or working in isolation to very harmful. In 1993, garment manufacturers in Bangladesh, fearing a possible U.S. ban on imports made with child labor, fired an estimated 50,000 children. Some of the children turned to street hustling and prostitution. Fortunately the International labor Organization and the United Nations Children s fund reached an agreement with the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters association to give fired children monthly stipends and jointly sponsor schools (Wasserman 106).There is a supply and demand relationship in the economics of child work. There is a supply and demand of national and international; the firm and enterprise, and family. Suppose a country could effectively outlaw child labor. Three consequences would follow: (1) the families (and the economy) would lose the income generated by their children; (2) the supply of labor would fall, driving up wages for adult workers; and (3) the opportunity cost of a child s working time would shrink, making staying in school (assuming schools were available) much more attractive. In principle, a virtuous circle would follow; with more schooling, the children would get more skills and become more productive adults, raising wages and family welfare. To the extent that the demand for labor is elastic, however, the increase in wages implies that the total number of jobs would fall (Bachman, Political 35).You may not know it, but many of the products you buy were made with child labor. Examples of companies that have been discovered inter-firm connections to child labor include importers (Ikea) who sell hand-made rugs from India, Pakistan, and Nepal; marketers of soccer balls (Nike, Reebok, Adidas); sellers of coffee picked by children (Peet s, Starbucks); and Brazilian automoble manufacturers (General Motors, Ford, Mercedes-Benz) that used steel produced with charcoal made by children and their families. In 1997 an estimated 290,200 children were illegally employed in the United States. This number had drastically declined from two million a century earlier. Although child labor is stronglycorrelted with poverty, child work is also partially determined by local structures of economy, finance and production, as well as cultural norms and practices. Chldren are more likely to work, for instance, if they are from poor, minority or culturally marginalized populations. Girls are more likely, in many cultures, to be denied schooling (Bachman, Political 38).