The Movements of Working Children and the International Labour Organization. A Lesson on Enforced Silence*

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Relations between the International Labour Organization (ILO) and grassroots movements of working children are characterised by tensions. Working children’s claim to participate in conceptualising child labour policy is increasingly rejected. Most recently, in November 2017, the Latin American Movement of Working Children and Adolescents (MOLACNATs) lodged a complaint with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child over violations of rights enshrined in the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This article reconstructs the history of working children’s movements and their communication with ILO since the 1990s. © 2018 John Wiley & Sons Ltd and National Children’s Bureau

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Introduction

This article attempts to reconstruct the history of the protracted efforts of children from the Global South to influence the policies of an international organisation. The unique feature of the children concerned is that they work and have organised themselves in their own movements. The singular feature of the organisation is that it acts within the remit of the UN, creating internationally binding rules that deal with child labour, affecting the lives of the children. Our examination deals with the question of possibilities children have for asserting rights enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in policy-making.

We are writing this text as researchers and human right activists who have been able to gain an understanding of and, to a different extent, offer support and collaboration to working children for more, at least one of us, than three decades. As professionals we are committed to participatory research as a means of doing justice to the views of children. Although we are well aware of the difficulties involved in fulfilling conditions to ensure participation, we stand firm on the principle that only policy-making and programming involving beneficiaries can offer a peaceful and respectful dialogue needed to promote positive change.

In our analysis, we refer to documentation on international conferences on the elimination of child labour that are open to the public, but have so far received scant attention in research. When those conferences dealt with children’s interests and rights, the children concerned are seldom present or they are granted only symbolic presence. Even in the case of the conferences that are at the centre of our analysis, children were only given a marginal

role. But it has been shown that, under certain conditions, children can go beyond this role and become a force that challenges adults and leads them to rethink their own views. Conferences do not redistribute the structural power between adults and children, but they are an example of how seriously children’s participation rights are taken and will be examined here with this regard.

We first map out the ups and downs of communication between the two extremes, referring to historical documents, then show parallels between arguments proposed by working children’s movements and academic research, finally discussing the question whether the voices of working children from the South are condemned to be silenced or can be retained as a means of ensuring policies and practice are beneficial for children.

The prehistory of a conflict

Since its foundation in 1919, working children have been the focus of interest of the International Labour Organization (ILO). However, at present they are not perceived as subjects with own rights, but as disruptive factors in the regulation and ‘humanisation’ of the labour market. They are conveniently classifiable under the term child labour, thus covered by policy exclusively conceptualised and operated by adults with little consideration to what children’s experience is or might be. There are around 20 conventions on child labour adopted between 1919 and 1973 (see Dahlén, 2007), which all aim to regulate child labour (whichever definition is applied) by minimum age regulation and compulsory education.

Only in the most recent convention, No. 182 on ‘the Worst Forms of Child Labour’ (ILO 182), adopted 10 years after the CRC is there formal reference to children’s rights. However, this does not involve the right of children to be heard in matters concerning them and give due weight to their views when making decisions. Until the present, ILO has refused to allow working children to participate in decisions affecting them and does not foresee any opportunity for children to participate in its institutional structures. It thus clearly infringes the participation rights enshrined in the CRC, which the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its General Comment on Article 12, has expressly defined with regard to working children as follows: ‘Children and, if existing, representatives of working children’s associations should also be heard when labour laws are drafted or when the enforcement of laws is considered and evaluated’ (General Comment No. 12, 2009, para. 117).

Social movements of working children emerged during the late 1970s, in Latin America, Africa and Asia and many of them were formalised in the early 1990s. At local level, children’s organisations have been recognised as of crucial importance to develop strategies and actions that appropriately and respectfully address the problems they face in their everyday lives in a sustainable manner. Working children’s organisations’ creative strategies are not only in relation to increased protection against harmful or exploitative work, but often include a broad range of issues such as protection against other forms of abuse and violence or increased access to education. Rather than simple consultation, working children’s movements promote solidarity, collective empowerment and actions which have added considerable experience of participatory research and dialogue with local and national authorities to promote changes in a variety of manners (see for instance van Beers and others, 2006; Coly and Terenzio, 2007; Cussiánovich, 2001; Liebel, 2001; Terenzio, 2001). It is that expertise that they proposed to bring to international debates.

Working children’s movements have discussed ILO child labour policy since the mid-1990s and emphasised their right to participate in policy-making. The rationale for those initiatives was the 1992 launch of the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) by ILO, which at that time began to intensify its fight against child
labour beyond existing legal measures. This was done through action programmes developed and implemented in collaboration with several national governments.

Earlier discussion of ILO 182 had led to hopes in the movements of working children (as well as amongst some experts and academics) that instead of implementing blanket bans, ILO would develop a differentiated approach to children’s work. Organised working children thus expressed an interest in contributing to the development of ILO 182.

With the support of the International Working Group on Child Labour (IWGCL), founded in 1992 by two NGOs to assess the impact of child labour policies and promote the participation of working children (see IWGCL, 1997), the first intercontinental meeting of working children’s movements took place in December 1996 in Kundapur in India. It was attended by 34 delegates from movements in 33 Latin American, African and Asian countries. At that meeting, the following statement (“The Ten Kundapur Points”) was issued:

- We demand recognition of our problems, initiatives, suggestions and organisation processes.
- We are against the boycott of goods manufactured by children.
- We demand our work to be respected and safety be guaranteed.
- We demand an educational infrastructure that fits our situation.
- We demand a professional training suited to our context.
- We demand access to decent health care service.
- We demand to be involved in the decision-making processes that affect us, whether it is at a local, national or international level.
- We demand to fight against the circumstances that created our current conditions, and foremost against poverty.
- We demand more activities in rural areas, so that children are not forced to migrate to the cities.
- We are against exploitation, but we demand access to work in dignity adjusted to our education schedule and leisure time.

Concerning the Conferences that are being organised, we demand participation on an equal footing (e.g. if there are twenty ministers, there should be twenty working children). We are prepared to discuss with ministers, but they do not represent us.

**Ups and downs of children's participation in international conferences**

Part of ILO initiatives to intensify advocacy and campaigning in the late 90s, international conferences gathered governmental, UN, trade unions and civil society representatives to assess advances, intensify efforts and discuss technical solutions to eliminate child labour. They have been organised at regional and worldwide level. So-called ‘global conferences’ have been held in Amsterdam (1997) (defined extraordinarily as an ‘international round table’ conference), Oslo (1997), The Hague (2010), Brasilia (2013) and Buenos Aires (2017). Declarations made during these events are seen as of strategic importance for working children themselves.

Before the 1997 Amsterdam conference, with the intercession of the IWGCL and a UNICEF consultant who had beforehand been a consultant to ILO, representatives of the movements of working children were invited for the first time to the International Child Labour Conference hosted by the Dutch government during February 1997 in Amsterdam in collaboration with the ILO. Eight working children and adolescents from Africa, Asia and Latin America attended as delegates of their respective movements.
After a week of intensive preparation to overcome linguistic hurdles and familiarise with the procedures of an international conference with adult institutions, children presented themselves at the conference with remarkable forethought and concrete proposals for a new convention. Whilst they were unable to impose their demand for direct involvement in future ILO bodies’ decision-making, their performance impressed many delegates — including the Dutch, Senegal and Swedish ministers of labour and social affairs — so much that they were invited to the follow-up conference scheduled for October of the same year in Oslo. Simultaneously, however, opposition to further participation of working children in the negotiations arose, in particular among some trade unions. Two particular reports presented the events on and between the two conferences from different perspectives.

In one Reddy (2013: 11-13), IWGCL chair at that time, observed:

The children had a week of intense preparation during which several members of the Resource Group acted as facilitators. The seriousness with which the children approached this meeting and their level of concentration was an eye-opener to us all. The way they shared responsibilities among themselves and extent of groundwork and study by each one of them was amazing.

Consequently, the children used the space to their advantage. They [...] demonstrated through their very lucid and eloquent presentations that they were capable of handling the formality of the conference, though for all of them this was a first experience and that given the opportunity they could participate in an international forum with poise. Children challenged stereotypical representation of children who work as ‘antisocial’ and their families as ‘dysfunctional’. They said ‘the policy-makers know what needs to be done; it is just that they lack the political will to address poverty and imbalanced development’. They raised several fundamental questions regarding international trade and western concepts of what constitutes childhood. They demanded reforms in the education and justice system.

The presence of well-informed working children, who were representing their movements, and were therefore accountable to their organisations, changed the nature of the deliberations. It forced an awareness of the language that was used, the perspective from which the problem was viewed and questioned many existing assumptions regarding working children. When the phrase ‘eradicate child labour’ was used, one of the questions the children asked was: ‘Do you want to eradicate us or the problems we face?’ A simple question, but fraught with deep implications that force us to question our basic intentions.

This active participation of working children brought about two things. Their very presence introduced an unwritten accountability. When your constituency is monitoring your every word and action, you become extremely careful about the steps you take and determine where you place the lens of your camera — are you looking down at their problems from your ivory tower or through their eyes. [...] The fact that the recommendations of this Amsterdam conference reflected many of the concerns that the children voiced proves that they were convincing and able to convert the majority of participants to their view.

In a book published by Rädda Barnen (Sweden), Jo Boyden, Birgitta Ling and William Myers described the participation of children as an early example of the implementation of Article 12 CRC at international level (Boyden and others, 1998: 235 and 237):

This was the first time that the participation mandate of the Convention of the Rights of the Child had been implemented on a major international meeting, and considerable innovation was necessary in order to make that participation meaningful. In the unfamiliar environment of a typically formal international meeting, developing country children from rural villages and urban poor areas presented their views with equanimity, balance and eloquence. Their contribution was clear indication of the feasibility of children’s participation in such international meetings, and was a successful example of the right of expression guaranteed by the CRC. And there is little question that
enthusiastic support of working children for a new convention would add to its credibility, expand its interest and attractiveness to the general public, open new opportunities for social mobilisation, and improve the chances for its being ratified. [...] Only by responding how children regard both the value and risk of their work will it be possible to devise policies and programmes that children themselves will comprehend and support. Actions conceived with the understanding and support of working children are more likely to be effective in promoting their full development while safeguarding them against workplace abuse.

Nevertheless, reality did not live up to expectations. The children’s success at the Amsterdam conference had unexpected outcomes as described here by Reddy (2013: 13):

There was a very hostile response from the trade unions of the North, especially those from the UK, Scandinavia and certain other parts of Europe. They realised that if working children were recognised as a constituency by the ILO would threaten their own status in the tripartite and open the gates for other constituencies that were unrepresented as well. This would also make it extremely difficult to ‘use’ the child labour issues for other economic and political ends. The ILO, instead of seizing the opportunity to have a serious dialogue with unions and movements of working children from different parts of the world and to develop a Convention, which had the mandate of working children themselves, aligned with the trade unions in blocking any further participation on their part.

As a consequence, only three child representatives were invited to the Oslo follow-up conference in October 1997. To enable children to express their view, Save the Children (Norway) thus organised a parallel forum. The Latin American delegates who were present protested against exclusion in front of the conference building. The Asian and African delegates, on the other hand, wanted to make the best use of the opportunity to make their views heard. They accordingly took part, but their role remained marginal.

On its part, ILO promised to invite child representatives to the regional consultations on the new convention. According to Reddy (2013: 13), when a collaborator of the Indian working children’s movement, Bhima Sangha, subsequently took part in the Asian regional consultation and raised a question about the total absence of working children, the host minister read from a pre-prepared speech that he pulled from his pocket and explained that ‘international spaces were not appropriate for children’ and proceeded to add that ‘children would be invited to national processes’. Progressively, working children’s involvement was thus removed from international setting.

Global power relations between children and adults

As far as we know, in the period until the adoption of ILO 182 at the ILO International Labour Conference in Geneva, June 1999, no such consultation took place in any country. Instead, on the initiative of the Indian activist and later Nobel Peace Prize laureate Kailash Satyarti, and in coordination with the ILO, the so-called Global March against Child Labour had been formed. The Global March initiatives consisted mainly of demonstrations in several countries calling for stricter measures against all forms of child labour. Children were also involved in these demonstrations, but participation was conditional on them adopting a position against any form of child labour. In some countries, such as Bolivia, Peru and South Africa, this led to conflicts with those working children who wanted to participate in demonstrations with other slogans (e.g. on South Africa see Levine, 1999: 151-152).

Whilst participation of working children’s movements in drawing up the new convention was strictly denied, some ‘former child labourers’ mobilised by the Global March were readily given the stage at the Geneva Conference to express support for even greater bans. In retrospect, ILO praised the Global March as a children’s social movement (see Fyfe, 2007; ILO, 2002, 2006) with little consideration for the actual lack of children’s participation. In
contrast, Bourdillon and others (2010: 146) highlighted the difference between organisations of working children and the Global March initiatives: on the Global March, they argue, ‘children did not make decisions about policy, but participated in activities controlled by adults’.

Over the following years, there were repeated attempts by the movements to establish contact with ILO in order to influence policies. With the exception of the African Movement, which has been allowed to participate in aid programmes for migrant children under the IPEC programme using the skills of the young people, ILO is still today not willing to cooperate with the movements. Although those movements have repeatedly invited ILO to their meetings, most recently at an international forum in La Paz, Bolivia, in October 2017, its representatives have regularly refused to face children’s questions.

In Latin America, children’s movements have been further ostracised and publicly portrayed as ‘dangerous’. In 2002, a defamatory presentation of movements was published on the regional website of the ILO-IPEC programme (quoted in Tosello, 2014: 119; the text has since been deleted from the website; our translation from Spanish):

In Latin America, there is an exceptional situation. [...] There is a Movement of Organisation and Promotion of Working Children and Adolescents (NATs) in the region. These organisations, which are mainly located in Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador and Paraguay, are undoubtedly rooted in and they ‘defend’ child labour. These organisations have undoubtedly had a notable influence on the drafting of the Child Codes in some countries (Peru and Paraguay for example). One of the efforts of IPEC has been, without entering into dialectical confrontations, to indicate to governments the dangers of this type of movement and to create strategic alliances with various NGOs in the countries, as a counterpoint to these so-called NATs movements.

If ILO and governmental bodies had in the 90s demoted child participation to initiatives at regional and national level, in some part of the world it has exacerbated conflict between working children movements and ILO rather than bringing about the very much needed dialogue. The openness of some government representatives willing to listen to children and efforts to create a constructive dialogue, for instance during the 1997 Amsterdam conference, stand in contrast with the more recent situation.

In June 2015, for instance, a delegate of the Bolivian Movement of Working Children and Adolescents (UNATSBO) wished to attend the International Labour Conference in Geneva where the new Bolivian Children and Adolescents Code (from 2014) was scrutinised. The movements had an influence on the Bolivian legislation that adopted a protective stance towards working children rather than the predominant posture of elimination. Instead of being able to argue the rationale for that legislation, the young delegate was nonetheless forbidden to speak. She expressed her frustration with the following words (translated from the Spanish original in the personal archive of Manfred Liebel):

I felt like a fish, that being in the water, I could not swim. To hear so many things from your country, that said barbarities, that they did not come to the case, and you cannot speak, it is horrible. It’s the ugliest thing that ever happened to me. Hearing that they said that the new Code of Bolivia is a setback, when they do not realise, that there are thousands of children working in their countries. And they are taking a step back, because they put them in the basement, do not want to bring them to light. I do not know, whether it was fury, anger or a feeling of helplessness, I felt. [...] It is very different to defend your rights in your country, than to defend it worldwide, because there are several countries that are against you. And with the exception of some who defended, the majority attacked Bolivia. And since you are not in your country, there are no people who support you, they can make you quiet and take it easy. There is no standard that protects you. That’s why I said: Here I am being kept silent, but in my country I will not shut up and nobody will shut me up. The ILO commission, which they want to send to Bolivia, can be a threat, but also an opportunity. It may be, they will only distract us, saying that they will do an examination when they only come to change
the Code. We will keep an eye on the dates, so we can talk to them, so that at least those people can make them understand the reality here in Bolivia.

The enforced silence that the Bolivian children’s delegate calls ‘the ugliest thing that ever happened to me’ is not an isolated case. It challenges the very notion of the right to participation enshrined in the CRC, questioning whether children whose situation and lifestyle do not correspond with western standards of ‘real childhood’ (see Liebel, 2017) even have a chance to make their voice heard.

Can working children of the Global South ‘speak’?

Thirty years ago, Indian scholar Gayatri Spivak asked the now famous question: ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ (Spivak, 1988). She did not mean to say that people she called ‘subalterns’, in line with Antonio Gramsci (1971), were not able to speak but that they were being deprived of their language through ‘epistemic violence’. Subalterns are not necessarily perceived as a minority, but as a group marginalised and ignored by the hegemony. Their voice remains ‘unheard of’ in the hegemonic discourse. Spivak provides the example of the ban on the widow burning ‘Sati’, which was introduced by the English colonial power ‘for the benefit of those affected’. The colonial administration could therefore speak for and represent these women because it had the hegemonic power to construct a narrative in which Indian women appear to be helpless victims of their culture. For Spivak, not being able to speak does not mean that the subaltern subject cannot articulate one’s own needs and interests, but rather that one’s own act of speech does not lead to a dialogue with the hegemonic class and is never heard by it. For her, the ethical dilemma of these subjects is the fact that they have to be represented by the powers that control them, otherwise they do not find out from their distress.

Similarly, working children are not helpless. By organising themselves in their own movements, they try to represent themselves. This does not always happen smoothly, given the high levels of dependence of children’s organisations on adult support, thus the risk of adult dominance (see, for example, Taft, 2014). However, whilst children usually have the last word in their own organisations, processes implemented by ILO make it unlikely they can describe their own experiences and perspectives, thus make their voices heard at international level in such a way that it breaks through the hegemonic discourse surrounding the notion of ‘child labour’.

Meanwhile, at organised Global Child Labour Conferences, no representatives of working children’s movements were allowed to attend. At the Second Global Child Labour Conference, 2010 in The Hague, children’s involvement took the form of a 5-minute cosmetic appearance of a Dutch children’s dance group at the opening ceremony and the seemingly ‘acceptable’ speech by a 14-year-old ‘former child labourer’ from India in the presence of the Dutch queen at the end of the conference. At the Third Global Child Labour Conference, held in Brasilia in 2013, working children were also completely excluded. That exclusion has led some NGOs to deliver the voices of working children to the audience, at least at the Fourth Global Child Labour Conference in November 2017 in Buenos Aires. Under the slogan: ‘It’s time to talk’, an adequate consultation was held, involving over 1800 working children from 36 countries (O’Kane and others, 2018).3 Nevertheless, representatives of these children were denied the opportunity to present the results of the consultation at the conference. In agreement with the Argentinean government, all young people under the age of 18 were forbidden to attend ‘for security reasons’ (see Van Daalen and Mabillard, 2017).4 This blatant violation of participation rights enshrined in the CRC has led the Latin American Movement of Working Children (MOLACNATs) to file a complaint with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (see: https://www.opendemocracy.net/beyondslavery/secretariat-of-movement-of-latin-american-and-caribbean-working-children-and-adolescen).
Since the turn of the millennium, some international organisations committed to the implementation of children’s rights have become more aware that children must also be involved internationally and particularly must be heard at international conferences. The willingness of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to allow children to participate in its deliberations and consider reports submitted by children (see Simeunovic Frick, 2011) demonstrates the awareness of the strategic significance of their participation.

Despite formal commitments to children’s rights, ILO’s position towards the participation of working children has become more entrenched. During the early 1980s, ILO child labour experts Gerry Rodgers and Guy Standing expressed a nuanced understanding of children’s work and opposed a notion that elimination of their work would ‘naturally’ promote their welfare (Rodgers and Standing, 1981: 42-43):

Many forms of child work are a source of interest and possibly creative activity for the children concerned, and contribute significantly to family incomes or to family subsistence. Conventional views of the normal duration of childhood, or of the desirability of formal schooling tend to obscure these points. […] Where child labour does have adverse effects […] they can usually be traced to the socioeconomic framework within which children work, as much as to the work itself. Thus, the suppression of child wage labour opportunities is unlikely to increase the welfare of the children concerned unless substitute income sources and alternative possibilities for personal development are developed at the same time. […] Action towards child work must be sympathetically oriented towards the needs and perceptions of the children themselves. It must also be based on a thorough understanding of the motivations behind child work, its functions, and the individual gains from it, whether for the children themselves or for others who benefit from their work.

During the 1990s, working children were at least mentioned occasionally as potential partners in ILO publications. Some children’s rights experts clearly saw working children’s organisation involvement in policy-making of strategic importance in the understanding of their resistance to child exploitation, as well as in the fight against poverty (Ennew, 2002; Miljeteig, 2001). Academics also felt working children’s movements discourse uniformly placed emphasis on the positive and negative aspects of their work that clearly indicated the need for proper evaluation of the actual outcomes of child labour eradication policies with the focus on the children themselves (Hanson and Vandeae, 2003 and 2013; Invernizzi, 2003). Researchers have indeed long since identified the benefits of children’s work alongside the detrimental (e.g. Bourdillon and others, 2010; Invernizzi, 2001, 2006; Liebel, 2004; McKechnie and Hobbs, 1998; Nieuwenhuys, 1994; Spittler and Bourdillon, 2012; Thorsen and Jacquemin, 2015; Woodhead, 1998).

A variety of benefits, beyond the often essential economic ones, are underlined in those examinations, including forms of work that facilitate development, study and recreation, which allows for learning work tasks as well as acquiring important social skills. Elimination of child labour, thus, whilst aiming at protecting children from harm and exploitation, might deprive them of considerable advantages.

If the notion of the social, cultural, economic and political construction of childhood as an experience as well as a social category is accepted, it is evident that positive and negative aspects of work vary significantly from one place to another and from one job to another. According to Ennew and others (2005: 52), it is perfectly possible to reconcile this diversity and point of view of children with a focus on their human rights:

A human rights approach to child labour should pay attention to the empowering aspects of basic human rights instruments, including the rights of children to express themselves and take action on their own behalf. This entails viewing children as capable as well as vulnerable, and of work as fulfilling and developmental as well as harmful and exploitive. The requirement is to be rigorously
empirical and use scientific data to establish hazards and harm, and at the same time be sensitive to the influence of dominant social constructions. This would ensure a focus on real problems rather than on the misguided constructions of popular rhetoric. A human rights-based approach to child labour should also be inclusive of children, establishing institutional space for them to participate in defining and addressing work-related problems that merit concern and intervention.

The working children movement’s discourse precisely reveals an evaluation of child labour that has a different content according to places and, in many respects, coincides with a significant body of social science research.

Elimination policies cannot be justified simply by the number of children removed from work or enrolled in school. Indeed, experts show the risk of a blanket ban of child labour are precisely of depriving children of positive and indispensable benefits, thus undermining their best interests. For instance, where elimination of child labour pushes children into more hazardous work, it represents a violation of CRC Article 32 itself. However, evidence shows other rights can be and indeed are violated through child labour elimination policies which unduly undermine survival and livelihood strategies, access to education, etc. It is for the same reasons some experts have argued for long that ‘unwritten rights’ of children (in street situations) include the right ‘to work and do so in fair conditions and for fair wages’ (Ennew, 2002/1995).

Conclusion: Participation of working children and loss of ILO’s legitimacy

Difficulties academic and expert’s acknowledge in relation to elimination of child labour policies would reasonably lead to holistic evaluation of the topic. Yet, as Bourdillon and Myers (2013) note, such evaluations have never been carried out. In the absence of those evaluations, the participation of working children’s organisations not only represents a right in itself, as enshrined in the CRC. Rather than an abstract notion, it also constitutes an indispensable channel through which children can outline their problems and identify rights violations, thus a channel through with policy-makers can, and indeed should, gain information on actual outcomes of current policies and practices.

Yet, organised working children’s arguments and participation rights have been completely ignored for over twenty years (Bessell, 2011). Occasionally, ILO calls on children to engage in discussions and, for instance, establishes online platforms prior to child labour conferences, but always prescribes the questions and framework, allowing only those opinions subordinate to their goal to ban any form of child labour. Fifteen years ago, Invernizzi and Milne (2002) (404; italics original) pointed out that under these conditions, the participation of working children even ‘[…] becomes discriminatory. On the one hand, there will be some children who will be allowed and encouraged to use their participatory rights as long as they conform to the controls that are now subtly being imposed on them. On the other hand, those children who are attempting to claim their rights through the channel of social action that conforms to the pertinent articles of the CRC will be chastised for so doing since they are speaking out for children who work illegally’.5

Thus, ILO deprives itself of any legitimacy to act in the ‘best interests’ of working children. Not only does this make their legal instruments untrustworthy, it also raises the question of whether, as a UN organisation, it violates its duty to make children’s human rights the standard against which its actions are measured in a comprehensive manner.

Notes

1 International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) and Defence for Children International (DCI).
2 When Manfred Liebel, co-author of that article, was in Nicaragua at the time of the conference, he noticed in a newspaper a picture of the Nicaraguan delegate he knew, with tape covering her mouth in front of the conference building. The press agency reinterpreted the protest against exclusion saying that the girl had protested against child labour.

3 The history of this report raises questions of representation itself, as most of the children involved were dependent on NGOs. Only 19 per cent belonged to their own organisations.

4 From the report, it appears that some children were present at the conference. Since these were children of functionaries and delegates, the security concerns seemed to apply only to children from whom critical questions and comments were anticipated.

5 This apparent contradiction in terms had already been clearly addressed at the turn of the millennium by Smolin (2000).

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