

**Economie des politiques publiques**  
**L3 CPES/ENS**  
**Examen avril 2016**

**L'édito suivant a été publié dans le New York Times du 24 décembre 2012. Commentez-le en utilisant les outils de l'analyse économique, aussi bien empiriques que théoriques. Votre devoir ne peut pas excéder 1200 mots. Il doit me parvenir au plus tard dans la journée du lundi 2 mai.**

TODAY millions of American children will be opening gifts left under Christmas trees. Sadly, many of those trees are decorated with ornaments produced by involuntary child labor.

Just this month, an advocacy network, the Global March Against Child Labor, led a surprise raid of a sweatshop in New Delhi. Fourteen children, ages 8 to 14, were rescued. They were working in small, unventilated spaces for up to 15 hours a day, forced, under the constant threat of violence, to make Christmas decorations and seasonal gifts to be sold in America and Europe.

These were just 14 children of the six million who, according to the United Nations, are trafficked into labor under the threat of physical harm or physical restraint each year. Forced labor is part of an even bigger problem: recent estimates indicate that there are 215 million laborers under the age of 18 worldwide, over half of whom are working in hazardous conditions. The United States Department of Labor publishes a "list of goods produced by child labor or forced labor," which mentions 134 goods — including decorations, clothing, electronics, shoes, jewelry, fashion accessories and toys — produced in 74 countries.

During the holiday season, heightened consumer demand in the West for these goods leads to a shortage of labor. To cope with this, teenagers and children are often recruited or, as in the New Delhi case, trafficked into forced labor. Poor parents are often tricked into selling their children to middlemen for a few dollars, after being told that their children will receive care and a free education, and that their wages will be sent back to the family.

Last Christmas, an investigation of toy factories in China, where 85 percent of the toys on the American market are produced, revealed that about 300 youth workers were drafted to help with the holiday demand. Another undercover investigation of a Chinese factory last year revealed that children as young as 14 were making Disney's best-selling Cars toys in preparation for the 2011 holiday season.

The use of child labor has been rising around the world since the financial crisis in 2008. A recent study by the risk-assessment company Maplecroft revealed that manufacturing supply chains in 76 countries were at "extreme risk" of involving child labor at some stage, up from 68 countries last year. Among these countries are key American trading partners: China, India, Brazil, Indonesia and the Philippines. Bangladesh, where a recent garment factory fire killed 112 workers, is also a major offender. Many of the dead were young women, some as young as 12.

America's own history of addressing domestic child labor in the early 20th century points the way to a global solution to the current problem. Just as today, toys and trinkets then were often made by poor children in factories and tenements — but in America itself. In 1912, Lewis Hine photographed New York City tenement children sewing dolls and displayed the images alongside photographs of middle-class children playing with the same dolls in Central Park. The photographs prompted the State Legislature the next year to prohibit the making of dolls and children's clothing, among other items, in tenement houses.

Child-labor opponents in the early 20th century drew attention to child labor at Christmastime to stir a complacent American public. Life magazine captured the irony in a 1913 cartoon that contrasted a child laborer, making a stuffed toy, with a privileged child who would later play with it. And in a popular book from 1914 called "Children in Bondage," one reformer wrote that tenement children were "wasting their bodies and souls to make a little joy for the rest."

Child advocates also promoted boycotts on the products of child labor. Florence Kelley introduced the “White Label,” which was given to businesses that refused to sell the products of child labor. During the Christmas season, child advocates told consumers to shop only at White Label stores. The movement raised consumer awareness and helped spur the effective abolition of most industrial child labor in the United States in 1938.

Today, business interests have managed to thwart serious efforts to curb the problem of child labor abroad. Though many corporations and trade associations have official policies against child labor, they are not clamoring for import bans on the products of child labor. Some have even successfully lobbied against such legislation. For instance, the Child Labor Deterrence Act, which would ban the import of goods made by children under the age of 15, has repeatedly failed to pass since Senator Tom Harkin, Democrat of Iowa, introduced it in 1992.

What we need now is a White Label movement for the 21st-century global economy. Among others, Shima Baradaran, a law professor at Brigham Young University, has advocated fair-trade labeling to combat child labor. Fair trade, she points out, is one of the fastest growing markets in the world, and consumers would be less likely to purchase the products of child labor if other options were made known to them.

In an age when business lobbying makes meaningful trade regulation difficult to achieve, this kind of social entrepreneurship must carry the day. The Department of Labor already conducts extensive research on the sources of commodities in global markets. This information could form the basis of a public awareness campaign about child-labor-free products. To bring this campaign fully into the digital age, nonprofit organizations should sponsor the design of an app that allows consumers to determine whether products are child-labor-free. (There is already a Fair Trade Finder app that helps consumers locate nearby stores that sell fair trade products. A child-labor-free app could serve a similar purpose.)

Through the choices they make in the marketplace, consumers have the power to reverse the trend of global child labor. And as the world’s largest market for child-labor goods, it is American consumers who must lead the way. In the season of giving, and with New Year’s fast approaching, there is no better time to find the resolve.

*Marjorie Elizabeth Wood is a visiting assistant professor of American history at the School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University.*