

basic education. Nor are such schools likely to provide vocational qualifications that will prove to be assets in the formal employment market. This in turn will discourage attendance at such institutions.²¹ Consequently, development assistance and domestic resources for the establishment of an effective education system should have a consistently high policy priority.

Conclusion

Public interest in Canada and abroad in the issue of labour standards in general and the exploitation of children workers in particular will continue to grow as free trade and economic integration characterize increasingly the world economy. It is essential to engage Canadians in a well-founded discussion on how best to tackle these issues.

This paper makes the point that the trade-child labour issue and debate needs to be fundamentally recast. It should not be seen as an explicit issue with trade rules or trade measures having the potential of addressing child exploitation and labour problems. Child exploitation is not foremost a trade issue, and the eradication of abuse cannot be accomplished through the trading system. In an institutional context, placing overly high expectations on the WTO are misplaced. The WTO cannot effectively address the root problems of child labour or child exploitation. This institutional constraint was recognized at the WTO Ministerial Conference in December, 1996.²² The trade-child labour nexus is part of a much larger issue, an issue that requires a holistic approach if effective solutions are to be found. An effective response toward child labour requires broad-based multilateral trade liberalization, well-targeted multilateral/unilateral development assistance, domestic social and economic reform, and for the worst forms of child exploitation, a change in social attitudes. Nor should the public consider child labour in a rigid North-South

²¹ Michel Bonnet, "Child Labour in Africa," International Labour Review, Vol.132, No.3, 1993, pp. 376-79.

²² Paragraph 4 of the Singapore Ministerial Declaration reads: "We renew our commitment to the observance of internationally recognized core labour standards. The International Labour Organization (ILO) is the competent body to set and deal with these standards, and we affirm our support for its work in promoting them. We believe that economic growth and development fostered by increased trade and further trade liberalization contribute to the promotion of these standards. We reject the use of labour standards for protectionist purposes, and agree that the comparative advantage of countries, particularly low-wage developing countries, must in no way be put into question. In this regard, we note that the WTO and ILO Secretariats will continue their existing collaboration."