

To Learn or to Earn? The National Child Labor Committee and the Fight to End Child Exploitation

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The Nobel Peace Prize for 2014 was awarded to Kailash Satyarthi, a prominent leader in India's fight against child slavery. But what of the history of the movement in the United States? We were intrigued by the innovative work of the National Child Labor Committee, and the idea of leadership being an entity, rather than a single person.

Lewis Hine's photographs against child labor and archives of primary source newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Nation* were significant in understanding the context of that era. Poems and songs in the Library of Congress NCLC collection also contributed to our knowledge of media perception of the issue. Research at the Princeton University Firestone Library provided an extensive collection of original pamphlets and primary source documents released by the NCLC. The video archive contained a tape recording of Franklin Roosevelt's 1934 State of the Union Address, where he announced one of the first federal attempts to eradicate child exploitation. We visited the Archive and Study Center of the George Eastman House in New York. Here we explored a vast selection of photographs, newspaper clippings, audio recordings, and speech transcripts. The curator of the museum connected us to Jeffrey Newman, the current president of the National Child Labor Committee. From our interview with him, we gained valuable insight regarding the role of the NCLC.

Research and the consideration of the theme led us to our thesis: The leadership of the National Child Labor Committee piloted the social reform movement against the exploitation of children. By harnessing the power of propaganda to influence public opinion, the NCLC changed society's perception, thus allowing for the passage of national legislation prohibiting the labor of children. The legacy of the NCLC lies not only in ending child labor, but also in establishing of a precedent for future federal regulation of labor.

The harsh reality of child labor was largely unknown to most Americans, resulting in little support from the public for federal regulation. Strong leadership was desperately needed in the campaign against child labor, and was found in the focused and relentless National Child Labor Committee. Their leadership is distinct in their tireless crusade to bring to light the evils of child slavery, as well as their strategic use of photographs and the media to promote federal legislation. We chose to present our research using a website, in order to display information in a clear, effective format that allows for a variety of multimedia elements. Photographs, documents, and audiovisuals were an essential aspect of the NCLC's awareness campaign, and we felt that a website would enable us to feature them comprehensively. The National Child Labor Committee proved to have a crucial leadership role in creating government policy and legislation that ultimately resulted in a powerful legacy — the elimination of child labor in the United States and the establishment of a foundation for increased federal involvement in labor.