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## Story behind Declaration of the Rights of the Child

by Nikola Milošević - Tuesday, May 31, 2016

<https://inspiratron.org/blog/2016/05/31/story-behind-declaration-right-child/>

I would like to share a story behind the Declaration of the Rights of the Child. Since it is a story about conflict and international blockade, which I have also experienced, I will try to explain what happens in these situations from my experience as a child in a country under the blockade. I would do this so you can better picture how it is like for a child to live in these conditions and why it is important to stop international blockades and sanctions. So let me start.

Our story starts with year 1919. The First World War have finished in November 1918. Allied nations put earlier during the war blockade on Central powers (Austria, Hungary and Germany). This contributed to the victory, however, even thou Allies won the war they have still not in 1919. released the blockade that they put in 1914. This caused tremendous amount of suffering for people of former Central powers. Here, I would like to make a digression and go to 1991. and international blockade of Yugoslavia, since that one I have experienced and try to picture out what in such situation happens.

In 1993.-1994. Yugoslavia and Serbia as a part of it ended up under international blockade because of some wrong decisions of Yugoslav and other governments. All trade with other countries were banned. Soon enough this caused crash of Yugoslav economy and hyperinflation. What these words mean for common people living in country? Imagine you are living in a place where every day all the prices grow by 50%. Where there is a huge job loss. People who are working do not receive salaries for about 10 months. People who are getting salary are getting really small ones, since average salary in Yugoslavia at that time was about 10 Deutsche marks, or 5 Euros in today's money. Imagine you are a father, in a family of 3-5 members and you need to find a solution for survival of your family. What you can buy with 5 Euro a month? How much food is it? You cannot go to street and beg for money, as many unemployed and homeless do in the western world, because everyone in the country are at the same level. And of course it is below your dignity level. Even when you found something like a solution to at least keep the value of the money and make most of them through exchanging it to foreign bank notes and change it back every time you want to buy something, there are people who cannot handle that, such as elderly retired people and children. You need to take care of them as well. You need to manage money of your parents or grand parents and make sure they don't die out of hunger. I also want to picture this by one event that happened in my family. My parents and I managed to go to Slovakia, visit one of my grandpa there. My father told my grandpa, his father to pick his money out of bank as soon as they come and spend it as fast as possible. My grandpa was not careful and was late 1-2 days in picking money. When my father asked him what have he bought with his money he said that he managed to buy only 1kg of dry pork ribs. My father was quite crushed that he was working for a whole month for 1kg of dry pork ribs. How would you feel it that is all you can buy with your monthly salary. In the first article of Charter of human rights is stated that all the people are born equal in dignity and rights. Do you think this violated dignity part? I do think so. However, lucky situation in Yugoslavia at that time was that it is quite socially responsible state, so government managed to keep prices of basic food such as bread low. But, your child needs toys, books, clothes... and you definitely cannot afford them. Some children are passionate about computers and gaming consoles. At that time these things costed about 1000 Euro, so you would need to work for about 20 years in order to afford them and not spend money and anything else. I hope this manages to illustrate the way of life people need to carry in this occasion, and I need to emphasize that this is life of common people far away from war and people who were always against it, always voting against these warlords and their ugly games. However, blockade made them suffer the most and especially the most vulnerable groups such as children and elderly people.



Poster that Eglentyne was giving at Trafalgar square

Let's go back to Germany. Even though hyperinflation in Germany was much lower than in Yugoslavia ( $3.25 \times 10^6$  percent per month in Germany,  $5 \times 10^{15}$  percent in Yugoslavia cumulative inflation over the time period 1 October 1993 and 24 January 1994), Germany and Austria were not able to manage the famine. 9 out of 10 children in the city of Vienna, Austria were starving. A lot of people were starving including many children. Founding that out Eglentyne Jebb went to the Trafalgar square in London with a flyer having photo of two starving children stating "Our blockade is causing this! - All over Europe millions of children are starving to death!". For doing this, she was arrested. Her trial brought the issue on surface, however, she was convicted, but Judge, impressed by her, offered to pay fine she got. Later on, she founded Save the Children movement and soon blockade of former Central powers was released. She also helped in other crises in France, Belgium, Balkans, with Armenian refugees in Turkey and in 1923 in Russia. However, she needed better approach, where most of the mankind will help. She said: "I believe we should claim certain rights for the children and labour for their universal recognition, so that everybody - not merely the small number of people who are in a position to contribute to relief funds, but everybody who in any way comes into contact with children, that is to say the vast majority of mankind - may be in a position to help forward the movement." She went to Geneva to the meeting of the International Union, drafted a brief document about rights of the child. The document was passed and became known as The Declaration of the Rights of the Child, or the Declaration of Geneva. One year later the document was adopted by the League of Nations. In a bit modified form it was adopted by United Nations in 1959. In 1989, a Convention of the Rights of the Child was adopted in United Nations and by now it was signed and ratified by every member of United Nations except United States who signed it but did not ratify it.



Eglentyne Jebb

It is quite amazing where we got with these declarations and similar movements. Still there are problems and some children are starving, mistreated and enslaved. From the past experience, we can see hope that we can solve these issues. If in Vienna 9/10 children were starving in 1919 and almost none is starving today, we can solve the hunger in Ethiopia, where only 4/10 children are starving. In Haiti half of the children today cannot go to school, however, in 1930s, during the Great Depression, nearly half of the children in some parts of the United States of America could not go to school. In Malawi, children death rate is high and life expectancy is 48 years. However, in the UK the same was going on in year 1900. That is not long ago. However, a lot of these problems are also caused by foreign influences. As I described earlier, international blockade started children rights movement, because it dehumanized innocent people and children under it and took away their dignity. This is why, I think today we should categorize international blockades and certain kinds of sanctions as a crime against humanity which should be prosecuted in international tribunals.

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