

EDITORIAL

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Nearly 100 years ago, the link between social justice, peace and the role of work was embedded in the International Labour Organization's (ILO's) Constitution. The principle that "labour is not a commodity" is at the heart of this relationship and it reflects the space occupied by the ILO at the intersection of the economics of the market and values of justice, fairness, dignity and respect. The challenge of combining social progress and economic efficiency – and today environmental sustainability - is an integrated challenge and decent work key to the response. With human dignity at its core and founded on the value of work for the individual and society, decent work for all is the means of realising social justice in and through the world of work. It is the thread that runs through the changing contexts of past, present and future of the Organization.

There are times – and especially times of upheaval - when it is essential to reflect on broad social and economic developments and the direction they are taking. At one such time of transformation in the late XIXth century, the Encyclical Letter "*Rerum Novarum*" reflected on the condition of labour. Less than two decades later, in 1919, the ILO itself was established to address working conditions "involving such injustice, hardship and privation to large numbers of people so as to produce unrest so great that the peace and harmony of the world are imperilled". The ILO, as the only part of the League of Nations system which survived the Second World War, was compelled in 1944 to take stock again and reaffirm its principles for a post war world that would be marked by ideological confrontation and the process of decolonisation with far-reaching implications for labour and the world of work. The resulting Declaration of Philadelphia, now part of the ILO's Constitution, set out a vision and direction for the ILO in these circumstances, reinforcing its ethical foundation. It highlighted the responsibility of the International Labour Organization "to examine and consider all international and financial policies and measures in the light of this fundamental objective" that "all human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity".

Today, we are at another crossroads. We are reminded of the call in “*Centesimus Annus*”, issued on the centenary of “*Rerum Novarum*” to look back, to look around, to look at new things and to look to the future. On the eve of the Organization’s centenary, when the world of work is undergoing tremendous transformation, the ILO’s tripartite constituents have considered it timely to reflect on the future of work in the pursuit of inclusive and sustainable development. Once again the Organization must confront the challenge of supporting orderly change and social and economic progress through decent work within countries that is supportive of peaceful co-existence between them.

The ILO’s Future of Work Initiative has elicited huge interest. Many are addressing the issue from a variety of standpoints, particularly on technology as a driver of change. For the ILO, given its mandate, our Initiative must by definition, be a contribution to the cause of social justice. It has resonated, no doubt because of widespread concern that change in the world of work is moving away from, not towards, the realisation of social justice including fear of a future without decent work. This, despite the fact that there have been extraordinary advances in the productive capacity of the global economy as well as social advances accompanied by great prosperity. Yet globalisation has only partially fulfilled its promise to reduce poverty and has contributed to increased imbalances between and within countries.

Inequity, high levels of unemployment and under employment, and large-scale exclusion within and between societies nurture discontent and often hostile responses. Economic growth without decent jobs will undermine social cohesion and ultimately growth itself.

Technological innovation, robotisation and artificial intelligence are contributing to an intense reorganisation of production. Climate change will continue not only to impact on the most vulnerable countries but also to increase risks and uncertainty in the global economy. Demographic pressures in certain areas threaten food security, access to jobs and decent living conditions. We are seeing the impact of demographic, economic, environmental and other factors that are resulting in strong migratory pressures in certain areas. Many young women and men are facing futures of unemployment or survival in the informal economy while ageing populations will require new forms of care and services. The cumulative impact of these forces risks exacerbating existing imbalances and tensions within and between countries and provoking extreme responses. But there is a choice and we have to decide if we are up to the task of taming the forces of change and harnessing them to create a better future for all.

I believe that all who value work and who recognise its value in people’s lives will not give up on work despite the unprecedented transformations taking place. Diverse traditions and orientations, secular and religious, that put the human person and social justice at the centre of development will be striving for a people-focused future built on the dignity of work – through

opportunities for work itself, through respect for fundamental principles and rights at work, protection at work and in the case of contingencies when women and men have no work or cannot work, and through social dialogue that can produce balanced solutions. Social justice also means managing a just transition to environmental sustainability so that the most vulnerable are not obliged to carry the heaviest burden.

The Encyclical Letter “*Laudato Si*” speaks of bringing the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development. Doing so will be facilitated by a shared ethical framework anchored in the values of solidarity and inclusion that can generate creative and innovative thinking on policies that yield better outcomes for all and, in so doing, counter visions of the future as a zero sum game and the resulting policies of exclusion and individualism.

David Morse, former ILO Director-General in his Nobel Lecture in 1969 said “there are still dangerous explosives in the hidden depths of the community [...] the defusing of these explosives, and the building of a truly peaceful world order based on social justice, is the task of the ILO.” This is the lens through which we need to assess actions, strategies and plans for the transforming world of work – as the Declaration of Philadelphia called on us to do. In its centenary year, the tripartite ILO – governments, employers and workers - will grasp the challenge of drawing on the ILO’s founding mandate to shape a vision for ILO action in its second century. It is hoped that this will contribute to a global recommitment to an ethical framework and action for a future with decent work for all and ultimately for a future with peace and stability: “*si vis pacem, cole iustitiam*”.