

Solidarity for safety, productivity and sustainability

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For the second year running International Labor Day was celebrated amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The sense of apprehension that shrouded last year's commemoration remained unabated this year.



Vaccine rollout to achieve the much-needed herd immunity against COVID-19 is underway across Indonesia but there is little official data on the number of workers and employers who have received the vaccine. The inoculation program is now prioritizing elderly people, teachers and state officials.

On the other hand, while there is no sign yet of when the pandemic will be over, the public's compliance with the health protocols seems to be waning. Many, particularly those who have been vaccinated, feel immune, therefore they do not care about the basic safety measures of wearing masks and physical distancing.

The pandemic has undoubtedly posed one of the greatest challenge to mankind. In the context of employment, the pandemic has highlighted three priorities in the world of work: safety, productivity and sustainability. Ideally, the government, workers and employers should fight for all three.

Unfortunately, as we observe International Labor Day, we seem to pay less attention to safety, productivity and sustainability. Many workers, for example, insist that the main problems they face center on welfare and justice. Or perhaps workers consider the concepts of safety, productivity and sustainability to be too grey, scientific, utopian and do not correlate with what they have been fighting for so far. If these two possibilities are confirmed, the debate over priority aspects in labor affairs still dwells on the discourse between labor costs and profit. Such a debate has persisted for a long time and has sparked tension between workers and employers. As a result, as we often see on streets and in the media, conflict is unabated.

The idea of solidarity for safety, productivity and sustainability is not new for workers and employers. They have actually recognized and dealt with safety, productivity and sustainability, but unfortunately misinterpretations and different perceptions about the trinity often occur. Not to mention the preconception about labor costs and profit on the part of workers and employers, which hinders their understanding about and commitment to safety, productivity and sustainability.

In the pandemic, workers and employers, for example, tend to interpret safety as the availability of personal protective equipment (PPE). The two parties often settle for daily use of PPE in the workplace. In fact, PPE is only one of several important variables of safety.

Many employers believe implementation of occupational safety and health (OSH) will only reduce their profits. They think OSH does not have any correlation to the benefits the company will gain. On the other hand, many workers consider the use of PPE a barrier to their productivity. Failure to meet production targets means less income, if not reprimands from their supervisor or perhaps dismissal. There is a lot of research that explains that the three concepts above are very closely related to one another. The three of them balance labor costs and profit. One of these pieces of research is The return on prevention: Calculating the costs and benefits of investments in occupational safety and health in com-

panies (2011), which involved 300 companies from 15 countries in Asia, America and Europe.

There are two important findings in this.

First, there are benefits resulting from investment in OSH in microeconomic terms, with the results offering a return on prevention ratio of 2.2. In practice, this means that for every 1 euro (or any other currency) per employee per year invested by companies in workplace prevention, companies can expect a potential economic return of 2.2 euro (or any other currency).

Second, improving safety quality has a strong impact on reduced hazards, reduced breaches, reduced accidents, reduced fluctuations, reduced disruption, reduced wastage, reduced time for catching up, improved quality of products, improved adherence to schedules, improved customer satisfaction, an increased number of innovations, improved corporate image, improved workplace culture and better hazard awareness.

The second finding explains that safety is closely related to productivity. It is related to reduced wastage, improvement of product quality, number of innovations, etc. In short, safety quality contributes to many things, which are elements of productivity.

Unfortunately, the interpretation of the concept of productivity is often reduced to only the number of products. This is a rigid interpretation that only calculates roughly the ratio between output and input. An interpretation that insists that the definition of productivity is when the input is small with a large output. This kind of textual interpretation encourages employers with little input to force workers to produce larger quantities of products. This is what creates conflict. Productivity will not materialize when conflict occurs.

Why is it unnecessary to consider a textual interpretation of the productivity formula comparing output and input? In my opinion, this kind of interpretation encourages the world of work to only pay attention to today. With this interpretation, the world of work will not be encouraged to anticipate the future. It is not stimulated to prepare the earth and people for a future that will surely change. In fact, it is evident that the world of work changes frequently. Humans (be they workers, employers or governments) will have to adapt to these conditions to make things better.

Safety definitely leads to greater productivity. If the quality is low, you cannot expect high productivity. Likewise, if safety is not considered, you cannot hope for high profits. If there is a written advantage, it is likely only on paper. Such an advantage will only lead to new conflict.

Likewise, productivity will follow the degree of sustainability. Those who live and work with an emphasis on productivity will continue to live or operate. Because from the start they will live frugally, efficiently, effectively, adhering to the schedule, being client-oriented, innovative, respecting personal safety and health, aware of risks and hazards, and having a high work culture. These are characteristics that are always alive and adaptable over time.

Therefore, when we show solidarity to fight for safety, productivity and sustainability through concerted action and commitment, we can definitely believe that life will be better in the future.

Happy Labor Day, we hope you will be safer, healthier, and more productive.