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► An ILO for All Seasons

The International Labour Organization's
Ways out of Crisis

Kari Tapiola

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The International Labour Organization's Ways out of Crisis

Kari Tapiola

Dedicated to the memory of Pekka O. Aro, an ILO official
and friend who died of SARS while on assignment in 2003

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An ILO for All Seasons: The International Labour Organization's Ways out of Crisis

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Contents

Preface	1
Acknowledgements	3
1. Introduction: The ILO, war and crisis	5
2. The Great Depression and public works	9
International economic cooperation	11
Keynesian policies of the ILO	12
Industrial relations and economic planning	13
Tripartite cooperation	16
3. War, reconstruction and growth	19
Philadelphia	20
The emergence of human rights	23
Building up the toolbox in turbulent times	23
Full, freely chosen and productive employment	26
Ideology and labour standards	27
Decolonisation and development	28
The Nobel Prize	29
4. A world of growing contradictions	30
World Employment Conference	31
Fragmentation of the consensus	33
Employment and structural adjustment	34
From adjustment to transition	35
5. Transition without crisis awareness	37
The child labour effect	39
6. Emergencies and standards	41
Protecting health care workers	42
HIV and AIDS in the world of work	45
SARS and other diseases	46

7. Return of a global crisis	49
8. The new dimensions	53
Environment, emergencies and crisis	53
The informal economy	56
Crisis response as part of the Decent Work Agenda	59
The role of the private sector	63
9. Moving forward	66
Vulnerable groups	68
A centralized national response	69
Making a diagnosis	70
The reconstruction agenda	70
The problem with peer reviews	72
Reviving the social dialogue	74
Restoring the balance	75
Annexes	77
International Labour Standards for guidance in situations of crisis	77
References	81
List of abbreviations	85

► Preface

2020 will be remembered as the year the world of work was brought to its knees by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is difficult to assess the consequences of this crisis in terms of human lives, job destruction and the threat to the health and well-being of millions of workers around the world. However, one thing is clear: no one has escaped unscathed, because everyone is either infected or affected by COVID-19!

At a time when some States are fine-tuning their strategies to emerge from the crisis, the ILO remains a central player in the international response to prepare the post-COVID-19 world. While more creativity and innovation will be required, the experience gained over the ILO's 100 years of existence also represents a major asset to support its constituents in these difficult times. In 100 years, the ILO has weathered many major crises, including the Great Depression of 1929, the Second World War, the fight against HIV/AIDS, the painful ordeal of the 2008 financial crisis, and regional crises such as SARS in Asia (2003) and Ebola in Africa (2014).

Beyond these crises, what lessons can we learn from this troubled past, and what were the ILO's responses with its constituents during these difficult periods of instability and uncertainty? What can we learn from this past to better face the future after COVID-19? Over the course of a conversation, Kari Tapiola and I decided to conduct a study based on the ILO's history. We wanted to identify the ingredients for success in fine-tuning the political and socio-economic responses to the COVID-19 crisis.

Under difficult working conditions (in particular due to the lockdown measures then in force in Switzerland), Kari cleverly managed to plunge us into the history of the ILO's turbulent periods to demonstrate that what makes our Organization strong and resilient is its tripartite nature, which represents an asset to address the challenges affecting the world of work. Therefore, the ILO Centenary Declaration and the four pillars of the ILO's response to COVID-19 – stimulating the economy and employment; supporting enterprises, jobs and employment; protecting workers at their workplaces; and relying on social dialogue for solutions – remain vital instruments to help governments and social partners to mitigate the impact of COVID-19.

“An ILO for All Seasons” shows us the important role that the ILO is called upon to play as part of a global and coordinated response by States during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. This study therefore aims to be a modest contribution to stimulate discussions on the best strategies for an effective response to the COVID-19 crisis. In a world where multilateralism is in danger, the ILO, through its century-old history, teaches us that it is still possible to put into practice the wish expressed by its Director General Guy Ryder, not for a “new normal,” but for the “better normal” that we all want.

In conclusion, I would therefore like to thank Kari for this valuable contribution, which will certainly strengthen future debates on the ILO's role and importance in the service of its constituents, especially in times of crisis. I would also like to thank my colleagues in the Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV), especially Mamadou Kaba Souare and all those who contributed to the implementation of this study.

I hope you enjoy reading it.

Maria Helena André

► Acknowledgements

This monograph was written from March – June 2020 during the COVID-19 closedown in Geneva. It originated with a conversation I had with the Director of the Workers' Activities Bureau, Maria Helena André, on the ILO's experiences in dealing with employment and economic crises during its hundred years.

She encouraged me to start writing, and in the process I consulted her, despite the busy and complicated schedules of all teleworking ILO officials. I also received particularly helpful guidance from Mamadou Kaba Souare of ACTRAV.

Dorothea Hoehtker made constructive comments on the structure and orientations of the text, but she bears no responsibility for its shortcomings. A number of colleagues have readily provided me with information that I have requested.

I extensively used the documentation and literature that the ILO and a number of other international organizations make available on-line. A particularly important source was the reports of the Directors (later Director-Generals) of the International Labour Office to the annual International Labour Conferences. The Office under the leadership of Director-General Guy Ryder has continuously produced an impressive stream of data and analysis on the labour-related aspects of the crisis. I have consulted this data but tried not to unnecessarily duplicate any of it.

New data and insights available almost daily prove that COVID-19 is a moving target. Someday, the time will come to make a comprehensive analysis of the crisis and draw conclusions, using a similar but more extensive method than was used by the Office in 2004 when it drafted a guide following the SARS virus outbreak.

I wished to dedicate this monograph to the memory of Pekka O. Aro, who in 2003 succumbed to SARS while on a mission to prepare an Employment Forum in China. Pekka was a close friend from our Finnish and international trade union days. In addition to his last assignment, he was involved in other crisis-related stages that I have mentioned. He led the International Chemical Workers' delegation to Bhopal in 1984 after the Union Carbide plant disaster. That chemical leak, which still claims lives today, led to the Convention on Major Industrial Accidents. He led the Workers' Group during its first year of negotiations at the 1992 Conference before joining ACTRAV as Workers' Specialist in Budapest. The ILO's successes are due to the devotion of many international civil servants like him.

Kari Tapiola

Kari Tapiola (born 1946) attended the International Labour Conference as the Workers' Delegate of Finland for the first time in 1974. He has worked as a journalist and a trade union official in Finland and as General Secretary of the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD (TUAC). He was Worker Member of the Governing Body of the ILO 1991 – 1996 and was then appointed Deputy Director-General of the ILO until 2010. Tapiola retired in 2014 but has continued to be engaged in history and fundamental principles and rights at work projects.

1. Introduction: The ILO, war and crisis

The International Labour Organization was set up because of war and crisis. Its main aim was to achieve social justice, not only by mitigating the consequences of the First World War, but by preventing all recurrence of war. A state of crisis usually continues after an armed conflict itself is over. In its first twenty years, the ILO was confronted with employment crises, first caused by the shortcomings of the transition to peace, and then by the Great Depression. Towards the end of the Second World War, circumstances shaped the reconstruction and the societies that became known as welfare states. Such societies were not successful everywhere, but the aims and methods that were rolled out to emerge from the crisis continued to guide economic and social policy.

The main contribution of the ILO was international Labour Conventions and Recommendations – standards designed to guide labour legislation and policy in the member Countries. The ILO's first Conventions in 1919 signalled that standards should protect workers from unjust treatment, overworking, economic shocks and crises (such as loss of employment) as well as everyday dangers involved in the work process.

Workers regularly face several kinds of threatening situations arising from the danger posed by machines, substances and the behaviour of other people. When the work involves interaction with people who have a contagious illness, the safety of both the general public and health care personnel becomes a major concern.

Every year, considerably more people lose their life in job-related accidents or illnesses than in conflict and war. Fatalities due to diseases that stem from working environment hazards by far exceed the number of accidents.

Loss of employment usually leads to loss of income, status, security and possibly housing. In short, the basis of a human being's existence in society changes. With mass employment, the Industrial Revolution produced the prospect of mass unemployment. When the incomes of large numbers of workers are no longer sufficient to ensure their and their family members' subsistence, by definition there is a social crisis.

Crises regularly bring out the best in the ILO. As Daniel Maul in his centennial history concludes, the ILO has always been an organization for difficult times. In 1969, Director-General David Morse noted that the ILO had most significantly survived through the most troubled fifty years in the history of mankind. His successor, Wilfred Jenks, wrote in 1973 that the ILO's challenging one generation ago of conventional wisdom had become the conventional wisdom. An organization can survive if it anticipates the future and continues to reinvent itself.

I have taken a mainly chronological approach to show how crises and reconstruction have interacted with one another. At the same time, there is a “doctrinal” aspect brought out by this approach, which shows how the ILO’s general philosophy has evolved. While the basic message has not changed, it has both adapted to emerging circumstances and guided this process. There are frequent references to Director-Generals’ Reports to the International Labour Conferences because they give the Office an opportunity to present its assessment of current events.

The first response to unemployment was social insurance. But assistance, however necessary, was insufficient. More active employment services and public works were needed.

The way in which the first standards were applied demonstrated that state-financed work needed to be followed up by private capital and activity in order to become more sustainable. State intervention remained necessary, however, producing industrialization, infrastructure, war machines and subsistence for the population in countries without freedoms. But alone it did not produce wealth and welfare.

For that, a combination of public and private measures was needed. With the rules came the method: tripartite cooperation, which involves not only government authorities but also employers’ and workers’ representatives.

Making a deal for cooperation was decisive in war-like circumstances and reconstruction, and required sufficient involvement of all three parties. However, the last decades – especially the period of globalization – have conspired against this balance. A craving for “lean government,” lamentations about the “weakness and non-representativity of trade unions,” uncontrolled consequences of technological innovation and a plethora of new forms of organizing work have changed the perspective.

When there is a crisis which threatens employment and businesses at such a scale that the economy risks faltering, certain tools are necessary. I shall try to outline the development of these tools, from crisis to crisis and in light of the changes affecting global political landscapes. My premises are the following: **First**, the tools developed since 1919 succeeded in providing relief and continue to be a part of any approach used today. **Second**, although political and ideological contradictions have changed, there has been no radical departure from the tripartite philosophy; it has merely matured. **Third**, the guiding principles of tripartite cooperation (and subsequent social dialogue) and international cooperation remain under-utilized and sometimes outright neglected. **Fourth**, vital parts of the ILO toolbox are based on tripartite cooperation which, when not used, causes the system to become rusty. Partial use of the tools cannot produce the full desired effect.

In the second part of the twentieth century, crises were mainly national or regional. Global military crises were kept in check by the potential of nuclear weapons for mass destruction. The face of crisis has been one of economic deficiency or disruption where employment has vanished or not materialized. At the same time, natural disasters have had increasingly grave effects on lives, employment and livelihoods.

Environmental damage caused by uneven and uncontrolled economic growth has reached a global level.

Nothing about health disasters has changed since antiquity; their mechanisms and effects have been known for centuries. One of the deadliest disasters, the so-called Spanish flu in 1918 – 1919, remained partly hidden amid the chaos at the end of the First World War, although even US president Woodrow Wilson had a bout with it during the Paris peace negotiations. No pandemic at the same scale appeared during the first century of the ILO.

Health disasters cross borders which have been largely rendered obsolete by political and industrial development, trade, and business and leisure travel. In early 2020, the COVID-19 crisis brutally brought the world back to a time of walled cities and limited movement. This has gone against the aspiration of nearly every policy in today's integrated and interdependent world which suddenly found itself at varying stages of paralysis.

The ILO's international labour standards address disasters caused both by human beings and nature. On the basis of experience, crisis responses to mass unemployment and loss of income security lie in employment policy, training and retraining, employment services and job-creating investments.

ILO Conventions and Recommendations do not include specific standards for mitigating crisis situations, although they provide for dangers inherent in certain occupations and processes. In exceptional situations, focus is on public order, saving lives and preserving the health of both the population and the personnel caring for them.

In a crisis, involuntary labour may be requisitioned, and exceptions to the right to strike are acceptable if public health and safety are manifestly endangered. There is a large amount of case law on how to best manage exceptional situations when and as long as necessary.

Exceptions to the right to strike usually cover those whose work translates the authority of the state. This does not mean, however, that all state or local administrations – let alone the whole cast of public sector workers – can be excluded, especially when public services have been increasingly outsourced. One of the longest cases in the ILO's standards supervisory system on freedom of association is about the organizing rights of Japanese private sector firefighters. Also, an exception cannot be dependent on the decision of government alone. The ideal solution is that workers and public or private employers agree on the occupations which should remain outside industrial action.

In a health or environmental crisis, both personnel who are directly involved and the general public must be protected against hazards. At the same time, the work and life of potentially large numbers of people are affected by the measures that are taken to contain the health crisis. COVID-19 has shown that one very real outcome can be to

stop whole sectors of the economy, leading to unprecedented job and income losses and the collapse of enterprises.

A crisis does not just suspend the world in time so that it can snap out of it one fine day. It will be a different world, and history has repeatedly shown that it is shaped by the remedies that are administered when constraining catastrophes and carrying out reconstruction. This dynamic has produced the active labour market and social policies that define our societies today. If the world is to remain true to the aim of social justice, it will need the instrumentarium of international labour standards developed through the ILO.



Health workers testing for COVID-19 at the Mpilo Central Hospital in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, in April 2020.

2. The Great Depression and public works

The crises the ILO faced in its first twenty years of existence were recessions with significant employment loss, culminating with the Great Depression. Following that, the world went into a downward spiral which led to the Second World War. At the same time, different forms of public intervention were used to restore jobs and economic activity. A Convention and a Recommendation adopted at the first International Labour Conference in 1919 outlined a three-pronged approach consisting in unemployment insurance, employment services and job creation by public authorities. Free public employment agencies under centralized control were to have advisory committees with employers' and workers' representation.

Recommendation No. 1 included unemployment insurance systems with public expense or subventions to associations managing such systems. The ILO was to coordinate the operations of various national systems.



The first International Labour Conference in Washington DC in 1919 adopted Conventions and Recommendations on employment and unemployment, hours of work, minimum age, maternity protection and hazardous substances such as anthrax and white lead.



Statues of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial in Washington DC depict a bread queue of the Great Depression.



Standing in queue is an unmistakable sign of crisis. Observing social distancing while queuing to shop in Kampala, Uganda, in May 2020.

In his report to the 1921 International Labour Conference, the ILO's first Director, Albert Thomas, noted that more was needed than the "excellent palliatives" that unemployment benefits provided. They sustained people but unemployment was not extinguished. The need was for prevention and remedy of unemployment by supporting industries to maintain or create jobs.

Large scale works of public utility were designed to stimulate the economy rather than leaving people idle. A resolution of the 1926 Conference called for the organizing of public works to "counteract the fluctuation of private business." By the time the ILO convened an International Public Works Committee in 1938, most member countries announced their intention to give effect to the public works standards which had been adopted.

► International economic cooperation

Albert Thomas was convinced that despite all the proposed measures, only international economic reorganization could remedy a social crisis. A call to reorganize international economic and social relations has been made at every crisis point during the ILO's first hundred years. Already in 1920, the ILO's Governing Body proposed that the League of Nations convene an international economic conference. British Prime Minister Lloyd George first turned down the ILO's foray into the broader economic field when the Genoa Conference was organized in 1922, but the Italian government invited the ILO anyway and a tripartite delegation was duly dispatched.

The ILO delegates were particularly active in the drafting of the 1922 Conference's resolutions on unemployment, which included the active placement of workers where feasible in agricultural work; the use of public contracts for increasing employment in affected industries and regions; and the promotion of productive public works. The achievements of the Conference, however, remained meagre.

Thomas commented in 1930 that international efforts had been undertaken "in a world in which nations have not yet sufficiently grasped the necessity of cooperating for the common good and are still displaying a spirit of rivalry and mistrust towards each other. The fact that unemployment in the last resort is the result of this spirit cannot be sufficiently stressed."

The ILO's inquiries on unemployment noted that employment statistics by country and industry were not reliable, and suggested that an international commission be set up to recommend how each country could improve the data. The development of labour statistics is, together with international labour standards, one of the lasting achievements of the ILO.

► Keynesian policies of the ILO

The ILO justified public employment support by comparing it with earlier measures for agriculture and land settlement. But more was needed. Quoting John Maynard Keynes, the Director reported to the 1922 Conference that if the economy simply returned to its pre-war level, the effect on employment would not be sufficient.

In 1927, the Joint Committee on Economic Crises of the League of Nations requested a further study by the ILO into the causes of unemployment and possible remedies. Thomas was compelled to note in his report to the 1930 Conference that it was “easier to give a list of the causes than to abolish them, but even this list would not be so easy to establish, owing to the number of complex independent phenomena involved.”

After the 1929 stock market crash, many countries increased employment services and channelled recruitment through them. In Italy, despite employers’ reluctance, recruitment became compulsory through mechanisms which were overseen by a representative of the ruling fascist party and employers and workers from their corporations.

In the United States, President Herbert Hoover’s administration encouraged job creation by local authorities and private industry and monitored the purchasing power of the local population. Employers and the trade unions agreed to abstain from claims for higher wages or threats to cut them. These were early steps on the road that led to Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal.

The League of Nations convened the 1933 International Monetary and Economic Conference, also soliciting the ILO’s expert views. Following a now-familiar pattern, the Governing Body organized a tripartite preparatory Conference.¹ True to its Keynesian line, the ILO focused on the weakness of purchasing power as a main factor of the Great Depression.

Many of the measures undertaken in different countries were welcomed by Thomas. However, one of the provisions in Convention No. 2 had “unfortunately been unsuccessful”: the call to coordinate national measures with the International Labour Office.

¹ The Tripartite Preparatory Conference on the Reduction of Hours of Work was held in Geneva, 10 – 25 January, 1933. Resolution addressed to the World Monetary and Economic Conference, International Labour Conference, 17th Session, Geneva, 1933, Record of Proceedings, Appendixes IV and XIV.

► Industrial relations and economic planning

Thomas's last report in 1932 included a section on planning, industrial relations and the role of employers and trade unions. The severe bank and credit crisis one year earlier had led some to question the very pillars of social policy. According to Thomas, the psychological depression had become more serious than the economic one. Yet "in spite of the unprecedented depression, labour legislation had been almost unshaken in all countries." The Workers had also maintained their belief in the ILO. One year earlier, the French trade union leader Léon Jouhaux had declared that planned, managed and controlled production were a condition for according such confidence. The 1932 Conference adopted an employer-sponsored resolution proposing a "gold truce" to stop the crisis from getting worse and to gain time for developing remedies.

Thomas was strongly in favour of extending public works beyond nation states. Together with the League of Nations, infrastructure programmes were contemplated by a "Commission of Enquiry for European Union." Workers considered such measures too palliative; for employers, they seemed utopian. Thomas maintained his belief in European public works although it mainly resulted in arranging



Director Albert Thomas addressed the International Labour Conference for the last time in 1932. He continued to call for better international cooperation on economic and social policy to improve employment and working conditions.

committees and conferences, which he with resignation noted to be “the only means yet devised for establishing the required collaboration between experts, technicians and politicians.”

Quoting eminent experts, the encyclical of Pope Pius XI as well as the International Chamber of Commerce and the Socialist International, Thomas still passionately argued for an organized economic system against *laissez-faire* politics. He used the whole social theory of the nineteenth century (Henri Saint-Simon and Jean Charles Léonard de Sismondi), the experience of international control over strategic materials during the First World War, scientific management and rationalization as well as the Soviet five-year plan to show that a significant degree of planning was inevitable. The question was, would it be centralized or free?

During the years of Thomas’s successor, Harold Butler (1932 – 1938), the ILO continued to expand the case for protecting and stabilizing incomes. In his 1934 Conference report, Butler contrasted the experience of the United States with that of Germany. Both were using “alternative methods of solving the problem of the State’s functions in relation to internal and external economic relations” – and both were moving towards a planned and managed economy in substitution for a *laissez-faire* one. In his reports, Butler envisaged a transition to new forms of economic structure which



At its 12th Session in Rome, 1922, the Governing Body was discussing the ILO’s participation in international economic conferences. In the foreground is the French Workers’ Representative Léon Jouhaux who was a Member of the Governing Body for 35 years.

combined the virtues of free enterprise and collective organization. He underlined that government interference could also be introduced by consent and not only by compulsion.

Experience had shown that cutting wages did not bring unemployment down. In countries where trade unions were strong enough to negotiate tolerable outcomes, wage levels sustained employment. Butler saw collective bargaining as one form of economic planning. Better management of the economy would avoid some of the “evils and injustices which have strewn the path of past progress.”

In the fifth year of the Great Depression, 1935, Butler recorded that unemployment had declined and world production improved. The provision of work had been given priority over all other measures, and people demanded meaningful work instead of passive support. Public works had improved the situation in the United States, Germany, Japan, Italy and Sweden, and in the Soviet Union all work was public.

Butler saw public works as a new form of planning which could be applied beyond an economic depression. He believed such works should be financed by loans and not by taxes which would hinder fresh enterprise, and accompanied by an expansive monetary policy.



The Tennessee Valley Authority, created by the New Deal in 1933, provided both work and economic opportunities in a State with development needs. Dams for hydroenergy are typical infrastructure projects. In the picture, the Fontana Dam in North Carolina. ([Wikipedia](#))

Other supportive measures consisted of shortening working time by reducing overtime, redistributing work and recognizing the merits of increased leisure time. The International Labour Conference adopted the Reduction of Hours of Work (Public Works) Convention, 1936 (No. 51). It limited to 40 hours the weekly working time of persons employed for government-financed building or civil engineering works.

Butler was convinced that industrial reorganization could be done in a way which reconciled private industry with some measure of discipline and order. The old “self-regulatory economy was no longer likely to be tolerated unless it guaranteed the maintenance of social well-being.”

In the late 1930s, public investment produced a boom which Butler called fraudulent and capricious. Much of it was due to the surge in armaments. Within several years, countries chose different political routes which led to a global conflict.

There was a world of difference between the way public works were conducted in the countries that remained true to the ILO’s principles versus Germany and others who, following its example, left the ILO.

The influence of Keynes combined with the United States joining the ILO in 1934 with its New Deal policies. In 1940, when the ILO moved its Office to Montreal for the war-time, it was also physically closer to those implementing the New Deal. The ILO’s historian observes that “in adopting Keynesianism and the modern welfare state, the ILO could enforce its role in the international arena and finally overcome, to a certain extent, internal controversies regarding its role and competence as a player in the economic debate.”²

► Tripartite cooperation

The Workers’ Group insisted that when governments undertake large-scale public works, they also discuss production and international trade with employers’ and workers’ representatives. But besides the recruitment methods in fascist Italy, there were very few references to tripartism in the surveys of measures against unemployment in the 1920s. More was said at the time about the role of social partners in scientific management and planning.

The outlook of the ILO’s constituents became more expansionist and cooperation-oriented, not least because of Keynesian policies and the New Deal in the United States, the Popular Front in France, and, for as long as it lasted, the Republican government in Spain. There was a fleeting relaxation with the Soviet Union, which joined the ILO in 1934 but did not really participate in its work. Still, this mitigated the confrontation between revolutionary and reformist trade unions. At the same time, there was a

² Dorothea Hoehtker draws this conclusion in a 2013 unpublished study for the International Institute of Labour Studies on the ILO’s role in the economic debate from 1919 to the 1990s.

growing realization that the pattern pursued by Germany threatened not only the independence of trade unions but also the freedom of employers.

Economic planning had led Albert Thomas in 1932 to further examine the relatively new concept of industrial relations. The United States had resorted to government involvement to counter the crisis. The Soviet Union and Italy practiced extensive planning. Thomas observed that if non-democratic societies paid attention to workers' interests, then traditionally more liberal societies ought to be able to do the same.



Three Directors together in 1938. Edward Phelan (left), then Director Harold Butler (centre) and John Gilbert Winant (right). They steered the ILO through the Great Depression and the Second World War.

Little by little, elements of tripartite consultation and decision-making were institutionalized and started to spread. Voluntary collective bargaining expanded between employers and the trade unions. Industrial relations were pursued, works councils were installed and national tripartite economic and social policy bodies were set up.

In 1936, the Popular Front of France passed a large number of reforms promoting public works, credits for agriculture, scientific management of industry, price monitoring, the 40-hour work week and paid holidays. The legal status of collective agreements was recognized, and the government carried out consultations with employers' and workers' representatives. There was unprecedented growth of trade union membership, which nearly quadrupled in a year, as well as strengthening of employers' organizations.

In several European countries, legislation reinforced unemployment benefits, health insurance and pension systems. Working time was reduced, although it increased again in the countries preparing for war. In Latin America, in addition to laws on wages, collective bargaining and joint commissions were used. At that time, social insurance was an ILO priority in the region.

As the war approached, there were increasing calls for the ILO to look more closely into its basic mode of working, tripartite cooperation, particularly from the Workers' Group. A 1928 resolution, proposed jointly by the Canadian employers' and workers' delegates, had already required the ILO to start surveying national cooperation between social partners.

In early February 1940, before the suspension of meeting activities due to the war, the Governing Body agreed that the next Conference would discuss methods of collective bargaining between government authorities and employers' and workers' organizations. The AFL representative of the United States, Robert Watt, suggested extending the discussion to include the transition to peace and demobilization, because the Organization had failed to address this sufficiently after the First World War. However, his proposal was considered premature.³

The 1940 Conference was not held, and the ILO went into exile in Montreal. The issue of tripartite cooperation was brought back by the Acting Director Edward Phelan against the backdrop of the war-time experiences. Phelan now took a step that had not been possible in 1919. He linked tripartite cooperation not only to managing the war-time emergency, but also to the post-war reconstruction process. Robert Watt's proposal materialized in Philadelphia with the Employment (Transition from War to Peace) Recommendation, 1944 (No. 71).

³ The exchange is reproduced in the minutes of the 89th Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office, Geneva, 3 – 5 February 1939, p. 23.

3. War, reconstruction and growth

For the ILO, the Second World War and exile of the Office in Montreal was an existential crisis. To keep the Organization alive, Acting Director Edward Phelan succeeded in convening a tripartite Conference in 1941 in New York, as the US was still formally neutral in the war. This Special Session followed the format of an International Labour Conference, but did not count as one. Its agenda did not include either the setting or application of standards.

Tripartite cooperation had once again been implemented as a tool to cope with the war. The ways in which countries had used it prior to the Second World War was explored in detail in a technical ILO report entitled “Methods and Collaboration between Public Authorities, Workers’ Organizations and Employers’ Organizations.” It contained a survey of war-time efforts in Allied and neutral countries, and led to a resolution adopted by the Conference.

In his report to the Conference, Phelan contrasted the voluntary tripartite model with the centralized and coercive policies applied by Germany and many of its allies. He pointed out that economic security could exist in totalitarian systems, but the price would be slavery and disrespect of individual dignity and liberty. Phelan underlined that the ultimate aim of reconstruction was to allow people to have a reasonable standard of life and contribute to rising prosperity through productive work. Otherwise, the world would relapse into the economic and social disorders which had played an important part in the origin of the war.

Phelan’s report made the case for institutional arrangements at the national level when the time for reconstruction would come. Efficient employment services under centralized control should have adequate information on labour market resources and requirements. Vocational training would ensure that the demands for labour could be met.

According to Phelan, industrial history had proved that “reasonable hours, fair working conditions and a proper wage scale are essential to high protection.” Although it was natural to relax peace-time standards on wages and especially hours of work in times of war and national emergency, the experience of the First World War had already shown that excessive hours of work equally harmed the health and safety of workers and the maintenance of output at desired levels of quality and quantity.

The 1941 Conference resolution stated that “wisdom and justice” dictate that employers and workers be given a voice in determining their economic and social interests. Agencies set up by public authorities, with functions of planning and application of public policies, were needed. They should include representatives and responsible spokespersons of employers and workers, acting jointly with governments.

The new feature in 1941 was the emphasis that, in addition to just consulting with employers' and workers' organizations (as recommended by the ILO), tripartite cooperation should now become a regular tool. The 1941 Conference argued for both the international role of the ILO and for institutionalizing tripartite cooperation nationally. Receiving the Conference at its final sitting in the White House, President Franklin D. Roosevelt called the ILO a "wild dream" because of its vision of tripartism.

Roosevelt had helped the ILO to secure its first Conference in Washington, DC. Now on November 6, 1941, he stated that the aim of the post-war reconstruction effort was not "to produce temporary remedies for the ills of a stricken world; we are planning to achieve permanent cures – to help establish a sounder life." In this process, the ILO "with its representation of labour and management, its technical knowledge and experience, will be an invaluable instrument for peace."⁴

► Philadelphia

A direct line leads from the 1941 Conference to the decisions of the first regular International Labour Conference which resumed the work of the ILO in Philadelphia in April 1944. The gestation period of the reconstruction philosophy occurred between the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, one month after the 1941 Conference, and the Allied landing in Normandy a few weeks after Philadelphia.

The Philadelphia Conference is best known for adopting the Declaration on the aims of the ILO. Yet one day before, the Conference also adopted the Employment (Transition from War to Peace) Recommendation, 1944 (No. 71). It stated that the primary objective of full employment must be supplemented by effective organization to help employers and workers find the most suitable matches for both of them. Skills should be fostered and distributed satisfactorily. The Recommendation targeted demobilized workers and all those whose work had been disrupted by the war.

Measures ranged from information on jobs to the drawing up of demobilization plans together with employer's and workers' representatives; the use of employment services; the facilitation of vocational guidance, training and retraining; supporting mobility; and ensuring gender equality and equal remuneration. Notification on planned lay-offs should be given to employment services at least two weeks before a job was terminated, and 75 per cent of public works should be carried out by workers recruited through employment agencies.

⁴ Roosevelt's speech is reproduced in the Record of Proceedings. Conference of the International Labour Organisation, New York and Washington D.C., 1941, p. 158.

Article 1 (d) of the main political Philadelphia Declaration contains a broad formulation of the scope of tripartite cooperation:

The war against want requires to be carried on with unrelenting vigour within each nation and by concerted international effort in which the representatives of workers and employers, enjoying equal status with those of Governments, join with them in free discussion and democratic decision with a view to the promotion of the common welfare.

Article 2 of the Declaration stated that social justice presumed freedom, dignity, economic security and equal opportunity. It was “the responsibility of the ILO to examine all international economic and financial policies and measures in the light of this fundamental objective.” In effect nothing humanly important was outside the scope of the ILO and its tripartite constituents.

Two years later, the Philadelphia Declaration was annexed to the revised Constitution of the ILO. The mandate to deal with international economic and financial policies in the light of their impact on employment and social questions was thus no longer a wish or recommendation; it had become an obligation.



Edward Phelan (right) and Wilfred Jenks drafted in 1944 the Philadelphia Declaration, which is incorporated in the Constitution of the ILO. It underlined the role of freedom of association and tripartite cooperation as obligations of member States.

The Philadelphia Declaration and Recommendation No. 71 are about post-crisis management. They outline the agenda and the use of the ILO's tools for recovery and rebuilding. Again, the starting point was that societies should not return to the pre-crisis stage, but build new defense mechanisms against future crises.

The Philadelphia Conference adopted Recommendations on employment services and public works (national planning). It also initiated the work which led to the Labour Clauses (Public Contracts) Convention, 1949 (No. 94). A resolution summarized the pre-war standards for organizing employment. The standards concerned fee-charging employment agencies (1933), unemployment provision (1934), minimum age in industry (1937) and public works (1937). The resolution encouraged their ratification and implementation, and issued Recommendations on these topics and on the unemployment of young persons, apprenticeship and vocational education.



Plenary Session of the Conference in May 1944 in Mitten Hall, Philadelphia.

► The emergence of human rights

In the “Western” world, reconstruction politics incorporated the human rights underlying international labour standards. The drafting of fundamental rights Conventions coincided with the recovery. These rights were rooted in the ILO’s Constitution, but in the interwar period, the ILO had drawn up standards only on minimum age for employment (to limit child labour) and on forced labour. The war had shown that forced labour was not only a colonial issue but could be used against unwanted people and political opponents. The atrocities of the war paved the way for new Conventions on freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, against forced labour and discrimination, and for equal pay between women and men for work of equal value.

In the first post-war decade, the focus was on rebuilding what had been destroyed, and making use of and spreading new technologies. In his report to the Paris Conference, Edward Phelan wrote that before the atomic bomb, efforts to eliminate war had been half-hearted at best. War had been a sickness affecting the world but it had not been mortal. This had now changed: The choice was between a peaceful world or none at all. At the 1947 Conference, Léon Jouhaux, on behalf of workers, proposed a resolution supporting the European recovery programme. It was unanimously adopted.

In the areas destroyed by war, essential needs included food, clothing, shelter and medical supplies. These were urgent, but unlike the years after the First World War, there was hardly any employment crisis. There was enough work to be done. In much of the world, rapid reconversion was more efficient than rebuilding. Organizing employment during the transition called for mobility and planning for industrial activity. Employment services and training and retraining continued to be necessary.

► Building up the toolbox in turbulent times

In his first report to the Conference in 1949, the ILO’s new Director-General, David Morse, saw a “seething, restless world.” The recent record in terms of employment and productivity had been impressive. Yet the ILO’s standard-setting had left a stronger mark in Parliaments than on the ground, where the demand for assistance was growing. Morse was concerned that economic development and reconstruction had slowed down the ratification of Conventions.

“The stage at which workers had to be protected against conditions of work harmful to health or to family or community life, such as overlong hours and insufficient rest, is now past in many countries.” Morse gave the example of paid holidays: In 1920,

only one country included them in its legislation, and three decades later this figure had increased to 40, in addition to partial legislation and the inclusion of free time in collective agreements.

At the time, attention had started turning to colonial possessions, which were on their way to becoming independent. Social and labour laws were written, technical assistance delivered and trade union activity expanded (less was said about employers' activities). However, closer examination showed that workers' wages were so low that they actually hindered the development of regular paid employment. In 1949 Morse also quoted reports to the UN Trusteeship Council and to the Belgian Senate, concluding that "the payment of excessive low wages to African workers was not merely unjust but also uneconomic." With the undoing of the colonial system, an entire economic and social policy would have to be revised.

Once decolonization began, the reorganization of the multilateral system centered on the United Nations. The UN succeeded where the League of Nations had failed. It had also started with crisis management; its first institution in 1943 was the United Nations Relief and Reconstruction Agency. In two decades, UN assistance was to become a regular feature of supporting the economic and social building up of a new



David Morse (left) and the Secretary-General of the United Nations, U Thant, at the 50th anniversary of the ILO in 1969 where the World Employment Programme of the ILO was launched.

post-colonial world. The ILO became an integral part of the effort financed by the UN Development Programme.

Beyond cyclical fluctuations, the crises of the time could not be compared with the unemployment of the 1920s or 1930s or the World Wars. The looming issues were the Cold War and decolonization. In addition to military tensions, the Cold War produced global rivalry between the Western and Soviet models of economic and social development. After the return of the Soviet Union to the ILO in 1954, the consensus on the existing tripartite model disappeared. The political philosophy of ILO member States had remained reasonably homogenous throughout the early Marshall Plan period. The majority in the ILO continued to include reformist trade unions and private, independent employers.

In industrialized market economies, workers' growing prosperity contributed to welfare and production. Standards for income support, social security and health and safety became a driver of prosperity. The mistakes of the Treaty of Versailles which had punished Germany were avoided. Private employers did not resist the improvement of living standards, as the economy was not a zero-sum game.



David Morse receiving President William Tubman of Liberia, who addressed the Conference in 1964.

► Full, freely chosen and productive employment

Standards must strike a balance between preventive measures and remedies. It is easier to envisage preventive measures to protect the life and health of workers than to avoid large-scale losses of jobs and incomes. Rules to cope with employment crises took the ILO straight back into the general policy-making domain.

The 1964 Conference produced the landmark Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122), with a more detailed Recommendation. After 113 ratifications, it is currently a “governance Convention” which is subject to regular reporting every three years. The Convention’s preamble uses Philadelphia language on the ILO’s obligation to consider the bearing of economic and social policies on employment. It draws on the pledges of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights concerning the right to work, the free choice of employment, just and favourable conditions of work, and protection against unemployment.

The Employment Policy Convention states that each country should pursue a policy designed to promote full, productive and freely chosen employment. Work should be available for all who seek it, and it should be as productive as possible. Freedom of choice should be met with the fullest possible opportunities, and if necessary, public programmes should assist the process. There should also be full cooperation and consultation with employers’ and workers’ organizations.

The accompanying Employment Policy Recommendation No. 122 envisages more detailed measures to adapt to structural change of “exceptional magnitude.” It should be met with active measures against large-scale sudden dislocation. Consultations with all concerned are prescribed for temporary and exceptional measures. As examples, the Recommendation mentions reducing working time without wage cuts, longer paid holidays and increasing education and training to delay entry into the labour force.

The Recommendation’s potential crisis measures also included diversification; public works, investments and undertakings; attracting new industries and advising them on conditions of establishment; public allocation of government orders; community development which does not violate the Forced Labour Conventions; and the development of medium and small-scale industries. The Recommendation also asked industrialized countries to consider the needs of developing countries and increase their access to markets. The Employers’ Group considered that the Recommendation allowed too much state intervention in business and voted against it.

► Ideology and labour standards

Standards that emerged during these years were more ambitious and precise than those drawn up at the dawn of the ILO's history. The socialist countries consistently criticized the prevailing political landscape, especially the role of private enterprise, but their administrations and institutions studied carefully the details of the ILO's standards on occupational health and safety, labour inspection and the provision of social security. This influenced the way in which the infrastructure of the socialist version of welfare states was developed. Years later it also helped the transition to market economy conditions.

From the beginning, the Cold War had produced clashes on freedom of association, forced labour and discrimination. With the consolidation of the Soviet bloc, fundamental divergences on freedom of association became more pronounced. The prevailing majority view of the International Labour Conference considered that trade union rights covered the rights of private employers, too.

The 1919 Constitution had recognized that freedom of association concerned both employers and workers. Employers' rights became an issue which divided both workers and governments. The Employers' Group kept the socialist managers outside its meetings; the Socialist countries insisted that the ILO should recognize "managers" in addition to private employers. Conference debates were full of different views on socialism and free enterprise. The issue came up regularly when the role of private enterprises was discussed.

Disagreement between (and within) groups on fundamental rights created a dynamic where industrialized market economy countries (in practice the OECD) and the Employers' and Workers' Groups formed an uneasy alliance. However, this alliance brought about a vast body of technical standards with protections against health and safety hazards and for social security.

In the debate surrounding David Morse's report to the 1964 Conference, the Soviet government representative considered that the ILO was sticking to an outmoded situation: A third of the planet had already chosen the socialist system, which according to him was both superior to the capitalist system and the main factor for development of mankind.

In his response to the debate, Morse admitted that the lines of division within the Conference were no longer quite so clear as in the past. After the crises of the interwar period, such as the Great Depression, and the reconstruction effort, divisions had appeared which were more reminiscent of the UN's bloc policies than the ILO's traditional search for consensus solutions. Morse added that, just as disarmament does not happen through a vote, the ILO needed decisions based on a consensus. For the Director-General, the challenge was to establish cooperation among different social systems and between old and new nations.

► Decolonisation and development

The crises and conflicts caused by decolonization and a large number of newly independent states were essentially political. They arose in countries which now were sovereign, and so at least in principle, the situation was an improvement over the previous state of affairs. Some countries became independent after years of war; however difficult their starting point was, gaining sovereignty was an achievement and by definition a positive result. But in a matter of years, this sovereignty did not produce employment. In addition, the ILO's studies and data were recording an increasing amount of poverty and divisions within these societies.

In his report to the Conference in 1966, David Morse explored the need for industrialization in developing countries, suggesting that a new class of entrepreneurs be developed. He chose his words carefully, avoiding references to the private sector although the implication was that this hardly could be done by the public sector alone. Like his predecessors in the interwar period, Morse emphasized planning and industrial policies which presumed state guidance and consultations with the social partners.



A meeting with the beneficiaries of an ILO-assisted project for the integration of displaced persons in El Salvador in 1989.

► The Nobel Prize

The ILO arrived at its first half-century mark in a reasonably tranquil world. The Cuban missile crisis had subsided and the European division had stabilized, although Vietnam and the Middle East were receiving increased attention. Yet David Morse had to admit in his 1969 report to the Conference that the ILO's biggest failure had been its inability to close the widening gap between the rich and the poor.

The ILO of David Morse launched the World Employment Programme in 1969 as the realization sank in that the prescribed growth models did not create employment or reduce poverty. In the developing world, despite promises and expectations, jobs and incomes failed to materialize to a sometimes critical extent.

In the same year 1969 the ILO was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Speaking on the occasion in Oslo, Morse gave a reasonably positive assessment of the state of the world. However, he also spoke of the “hidden explosives” still buried under the surface. The potential for crisis remained, but the contestations of the moment mostly reflected the generational frustrations that had caused the May 1968 protests in Paris and elsewhere in the world; they had not taken the shape of a global cataclysm.

The political red lines had been drawn by the “peaceful coexistence” between East and West, and the roof was not crashing down on the global system. This relatively happy state of affairs was reaffirmed by Morse's successor Wilfred Jenks in his 1973 report: “Our old task of asserting the social purpose of economic growth is done. We are honourably discharged from it because it has been completed. There is no further need to preach social justice; at the level of professions of faith, the whole world has been converted.” But Jenks himself admitted that this was rhetoric. It had become even more difficult to navigate between opposing views of how societies and economies should be run.

Internationally, one of the most burning questions was that of apartheid, which was a worsening national crisis in South Africa and led the country – a founding member of the ILO – to leave the Organization in 1964. Over the next thirty years, a pattern of ILO response developed in which the two key elements were public pressure and assistance to liberation movements. The ILO used its structure and methods: reporting, Conference discussions, Declarations with a plan for action and labour market programmes, which promoted assistance and education which became more efficient once national employers and trade unions initiated cooperation in the 1980s. South Africa was out of the ILO, but its social partners maintained contact with the Organization's groups and were thus involved in the process. However, calls for strong action were limited by employers' and many governments' general reluctance to accept economic sanctions. The possibility of deciding on such sanctions was included in the ILO's original Constitution but it was removed in 1946.

4. A world of growing contradictions

In late 1973, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) stopped selling oil to the United States and The Netherlands. This quadrupled the price of oil and resulted in shortages felt by industries and consumers in the developed world, particularly owners of private cars, which had been emblematic of the entire recovery and reconstruction period. The oil crisis had a link with apartheid: the United States and The Netherlands were seen to be the main supporters of Southern African regimes, including Portugal which ruled directly its overseas colonies.

In his report to the 1974 Conference, the newly elected Director-General Francis Blanchard noted that this energy crisis ended a period in which growth was expected to continue indefinitely. Enumerating recent political, economic and social developments, his message was that while there was no general crisis, there was a proliferation of several critical situations. However, a crisis for one group could be an opportunity for another. The solution seemed to lie in a new international division of labour which would transfer industrial production and employment to the developing world.

Several parallel crises of differing intensity resembled the situation described by David Morse ten years earlier. The multilateral system had divided itself into blocs, with divisions within the groups of employers and workers as well. This called for manoeuvring, but it also prevented a global crisis which could have equally threatened all parts of the system once the acute fear of nuclear war had subsided.

Neither the free market nor socialist industrialization worked as a development model. One perpetuated inequalities, and the other failed to create wealth. There were few examples of anything close to full, freely chosen and productive employment.

The attempts at socialist development models produced employment which was neither freely chosen nor productive. Transposing productive capacity and knowledge to the developing world was not sufficient to generate activity and jobs anywhere close to the needed level. Western free market methods left national markets exposed to the continued influence of former imperial masters and to the new phenomena that information and communication techniques made possible: multinational enterprises.

Ideological and political divisions had hindered Europe from functioning as a region. The occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968 meant a long-prepared European Regional Conference had to be cancelled. By the time détente permitted the convening of the conference in January 1974, the ILO was forced to recognize that despite the developing countries' greater needs, they could not be the sole object of the Organization's attention. There were problems in Europe, too.

The 1973 oil crisis marked a shift away from the power relations of reconstruction and decolonization. Increased energy prices caused unemployment in both industrialized and non-oil producing developing countries, and the subsequent inflation led to a series of austerity measures. There was a new international alignment which had to cope with uneven development and the lack of global economic and social progress.

At a special UN General Assembly session in April 1974, developing countries' new Group of 77 outlined a plan for a New International Economic Order (NIEO). However, it was sparse on concerns for democracy, equity and social justice. The views of governments in the United Nations increasingly drifted apart, with consequences for the tripartite constituents in the ILO. The International Labour Conference could not reach unanimity on a Declaration for the first United Nations Women's Conference in 1975 because of a dispute on whether or not to support the concept of an NIEO.⁵

► World Employment Conference

The tripartite World Employment Conference, conducted in parallel with the 1976 International Labour Conference, was where conclusions would be drawn from the experiences of the World Employment Programme. Its premise was that un- and underemployment and poverty had reached “such critical dimensions that major shifts in national and international development policies were needed to ensure full employment” at the earliest possible time. In particular, the urban informal economy had grown “out of proportion.” Strategies to achieve full employment and satisfy basic needs were needed to ensure decent working conditions and the respect of freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining.

The Conference defined “basic needs” as the minimum families needed for consumption and housing and essential services by the community. People should be able to participate in decisions that concerned them. Freely chosen employment was both a means and an end. Economic growth was to be accelerated. The policy framework encompassed both the public and private sectors, although the Conference noted that there should be a national planning framework. In most countries, the government was the principal promoter of both development and employment. The role of small and medium-sized enterprises in the rural and urban sectors was recognized but not elaborated upon.

The Conference suggested a worldwide programme of household surveys, asking in particular for information on each country's lowest income groups and their basic needs strategies. There was little discussion on how the information would be used or analysed. Countries' comfort level was low when it came to providing detailed

⁵ The debate in the Plenary Session of the Conference is typical of the period. It is contained in the Record of Proceedings, International Labour Conference, 60th Session, pp. 869 – 881.

information on shortcomings or policy failures for public scrutiny. This reluctance had already been recognized by Albert Thomas. It did not allow a systematic follow-up of the World Employment Programme. Over three decades later, it would also impede the application of the Global Jobs Pact.

The debate on multinational enterprises at the ILO's World Employment Conference in June 1976 illustrated the multifaceted nature of these conflicting views. Workers were ready to agree with the Group of 77 on the need to control multinational enterprises, but proponents of the NIEO resisted the rights at work and social policies demanded by the trade unions. Employers were against the calls for government intervention and feared nationalizations. OECD countries could not deny the fact that they were home to major multinational enterprises. And while the socialist countries relied on state control, their group did not want to go against workers as they at least formally were "workers' states"; nor did it want to oppose the Group of 77, which generally supported them on the anti-imperialist front.

As a result, the Conference announced that it could not reach a consensus on the issue. The final statement recorded at length the different views of governmental groups, employers and workers. Furthermore, the Employers' Group and a number of Western industrialized countries considered that the topic of international economic cooperation was beyond the scope of the ILO. The conclusions called for a "more equitable international economic order" but it did recognize the United Nations General Assembly's call for a New International Economic Order. The Government of the United States disassociated itself from this point.

Many of the ILO's statements and decisions in the 1970s resulted from compromises and tactical alliances. A *de facto* consensus on economic and social policies still prevailed in the OECD area, rooted in the philosophy of a market economy with strong social safeguards. This vision had produced the Philadelphia Declaration, reconstruction, the OECD and the European institutions, and welfare states. However, as the World Employment Programme had shown, it was not transferable into the vast majority of the developing world. Moreover, its premises were fundamentally at odds with the socialist model.

Amid these political currents it would have been difficult for the ILO to make any novel call for major measures against employment and social policy crises. For any efficient prevention, there needs to be a reasonable agreement on the nature and causes of a crisis. It is impossible to chart a realistic path to the future if one group wants to improve on the earlier foundations and another wants revolution instead. Even if the immediate intention is to repair the damage (such as lost jobs and production), the pre-crisis situation is not a benchmark for the future. As has been seen with every crisis and downturn, a return to the status quo will not produce more resilient societies. Yet a certain degree of restitution usually takes place.

Despite these currents – or partly because of them – the body of international labour standards progressed steadily. Much of the standards framework built up in the period spanning from the 1960s to the 1980s aims at removing hazards in working

life, strengthening unemployment and sickness insurance, caring for specific categories of employees – including health care personnel – and the balance between work, family life, leisure and education. Political currents may have been turbulent, but work for the social infrastructure continued. To an extent, it was independent of the conflict between free markets and state controlled economies, because ultimately the need for health and safety applied to both systems.

The political debate on labour market policies became more confrontational as of the late 1970s, although this had little immediate effect on standard setting. One explanation is the time-lag between proposals to place an item on the Conference's standard-setting agenda and the actual adoption of a standard, which typically is several years. Ministries in charge of labour and social issues, which furnished the government with delegates and experts for ILO meetings, also defended this state of affairs. After all, much of the standard setting updated earlier standards which were firmly rooted in the ILO's Constitution.

► Fragmentation of the consensus

Anyone can see the gradual fragmentation of the immediate post-Second World War consensus as a change or a return to the past. The optimist considers that after every restitution, there is sufficient improvement over the old to be able to move forward.

In his 1974 Conference report, Francis Blanchard concluded that the energy crisis and the problems it heralded would lead to considerable shifts in the structure of employment. Both workers and developing countries needed help to adjust to new patterns and techniques of production.

The notion that increased labour market flexibility could turn market forces into the major driver of adjustment entered the international debate through the OECD in the beginning of the 1980s. Safeguards of the reconstruction and growth period were now seen as rigidities, caused by overly protective labour laws or collective bargaining which inhibited business decision making. The era of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan had started.

Even the generally market-oriented OECD agreed that flexibility should be negotiated, not imposed. In the expanding debate on labour market flexibility, the ILO proposed to promote flexibility by improving enterprises' capacity to respond to production-related challenges; this was specifically of concern to socialist countries as well. Admitting that the question of how wages were fixed could not be avoided in this context, it was felt that better results could be achieved through labour-management cooperation, improved training, higher investment and agreements on the rapid introduction of new technologies.

The optimal adjustment policies would be based on the shared belief that economic performance benefits as much from cooperation as it does from competition. The ILO considered that in many countries, there would be scope for a “social pact” in which trade unions accept the need for a certain measure of wage moderation in exchange for an expansion of job opportunities. This was a faithful ILO vision based on tripartite cooperation.

► Employment and structural adjustment

The ILO convened a tripartite High-Level Meeting on Employment and Structural Adjustment in November 1987. International financial institutions participated in the deliberations. The Meeting agreed that unemployment had increased in both industrialized and developing countries due to external shocks, “the crushing problem of international indebtedness” and changes in terms of trade. The manner in which individual countries resolved their domestic economic problems affected growth, incomes and employment in all other countries.



Francis Blanchard with Lech Walesa, the President of the independent Polish trade union Solidarnosc. The picture is taken in 1981 when Walesa was Workers' Delegate of Poland. After martial law, detention and round table negotiations, Walesa returned to the Conference in 1990 as Workers' Delegate, and the following year he was elected President of Poland.

The Meeting noted quite candidly that there was a general understanding on measures that should be taken, but that the adequate urgency was lacking. Nor were the contents of this general understanding specified. The consensus was that adjustment policies should be crafted to form the basis for future growth. Developing countries should follow “appropriate policies,” which were not specified. The macro-economic policy of industrialized countries should stimulate demand “where appropriate.”

In light of the fierceness of the debate on trade one decade later, it is notable that the High-Level Meeting quite emphatically made the case against protectionism and for an open global trading system. Adjustment in developing countries was to increase the productive capacity of the poorer and vulnerable groups, especially women and young people. Particular attention was drawn to the contribution of small and medium-sized enterprises to employment, together with adequate standards of social protection for workers.

In both industrialized and developing countries, cooperation between employers’ and workers’ organizations was to increase the adaptability of enterprises and the whole economy. The Meeting stressed the need to strengthen the most fragile national institutions: labour ministries and trade unions.

► From adjustment to transition

Toward the late 1980s, the ILO faced both technological change and a crumbling of the socialist system. The call of the Solidarnosc trade union for freedom of association in Poland was followed by Mikhail Gorbachev’s perestroika in the Soviet Union. In the end, the socialist bloc and the apartheid regime of South Africa were swept away. Poland and South Africa had been the subject of lengthy discussions in the ILO, as fundamental standards on freedom of association, discrimination and forced labour were relevant to both.

From the outset of his final Conference report in 1989, Francis Blanchard noted that the time was one of paradoxes. Growth had resumed in many parts of the world after the recessions of the beginning of the decade. However, especially for Latin America and Africa, it had been a “lost decade.” A remarkable feature of this report – written on the cusp of global systemic change – is that indirectly but unmistakably, Blanchard addressed pointed criticism at how developing countries’ economies were managed. High degrees of government control had meant less flexibility, which reduced these countries’ capacity to adjust. The policies lacked what Blanchard called “a bias for the benefit of the poor.”

Blanchard’s report was published six months before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Addressing the problems of Latin America and Africa, he could have also written about what was about to hit the former socialist countries of Europe. After “two

decades of crisis and lack or inadequacy of maintenance,” Blanchard summarized the immediate tasks in an ever-changing world. They were the conservation and restoration of the environment and the modernization of the needed infrastructure.

Blanchard also supported the idea of a new Marshall Plan for the world economy, which the reasonably favourable political environment might make possible. Savings from disarmament could be used for regional and subregional infrastructure through a major works programme, much of which would be devoted to environmental protection. Writing 65 years after Albert Thomas, Blanchard again raised the prospect of international public works programmes, which could be financed by savings from disarmament, but with the same lack of response as that of his predecessor.

For some years to come, there were calls, especially from workers, for continuing the dialogue on structural adjustment in the ILO. Employers lost their interest in a topic which was more likely to restrict than increase their room for manoeuvre. At the time, liberating market forces seemed to be the solution, not the problem.

Flexibility, labour market rigidities and structural adjustment were all different kinds of “crises.” However, they did not produce the consensus on remedial action that the interwar employment crises had. Nor did they produce significant new tools for the ILO, although the standards systems continued to be improved. The most extensive innovation was to apply the principle of tripartite cooperation in the present European Union through social dialogue.

Social dialogue as a constitutional obligation in the European Union was met with widely different reactions. To Margaret Thatcher, it was anathema; she was engaged in a conflict of class war dimensions with the mineworkers’ union. For the trade unions, it opened another opportunity to balance the economic and social aspects of European integration. It made the deepening internal market more acceptable to the trade unions and labour parties and paved the way for further enlargement. Social dialogue also appealed to the continental and Nordic preferences for consensus policies.

The notion of social dialogue was generally accepted, but with widely different understandings of what it really meant. However, it introduced a concept into the crisis consciousness, which became synonymous with tripartite cooperation once it was combined with the ILO’s Decent Work Agenda.

5. Transition without crisis awareness

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, democratization and transition were almost exclusively sought through market-oriented economic policies. Among segments of the populations, the “shock therapies” that ushered in the market economy led to employment, income and social protection crises. However, the collapse of undemocratic regimes could hardly be labelled as a crisis. The political, economic and social system was changed without any equivalent of the reconstruction programmes – and the associated institutions – that had followed the Second World War. Michel Hansenne, who was elected Director-General in 1989, was faced with a situation where those responsible for social and labour policy were asking for urgent assistance to cope with an entirely new situation.⁶

People atop the Berlin Wall near the Brandenburg Gate on 9 November 1989. The text on the sign “Achtung! Sie verlassen jetzt West-Berlin” (“Attention! You are now leaving West Berlin”) has an additional text “Wie denn?” (“How?”). Photo: [Sue Ream](#) (San Francisco USA)



⁶ Hansenne describes the concerns of labour authorities in emerging and transition countries in his book, *Un garde-fou pour la mondialisation. Le BIT dans l'après-guerre froide*, Chêne-Bourg : Editions ZOE, 1999, pp. 23–25

This assistance was needed much more quickly than the pace at which technical cooperation was usually carried out. The outcome of this need was the Active Partnership Policy initiated in 1993 – a reasonably large-scale redeployment of the International Labour Office’s capacity. In the first instance, 14 multidisciplinary teams were set up throughout the world. This meant a displacement of some 5 per cent of personnel. Given the number of staff in technical and support functions, the effect was much larger than the percentage might indicate. The increase also concerned employer and worker specialists, who were deployed to virtually all of the new teams.

Transition was not a crisis, but it did call for extensive reconstruction. However, just as with the enormous needs that had arisen out of decolonization, this extensive reconstruction was mostly inexistent. More calls were launched for a new Marshall Plan, but there was no single institutional or political framework in which coordinated action could be carried out. Nor were the new domestic political forces ready to carry out the large-scale adjustment that would have been required. In the early 1990s, when several multilateral organizations were providing assistance to the Russian Federation, the UNDP, the European Union, the World Bank and the ILO were running programmes throughout the country with similar aims but different methods.

Transition has since been referred to as one reason for the ILOs’ anti-crisis activities. In a number of former constituent parts of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, armed conflicts occurred. ILO standards could not do much about them, but in the middle



ILO Director-Generals of the period after the Cold War. Michel Hansenne (left), Guy Ryder and Juan Somavia, at the Centenary Conference June 2019.

of the economic shocks, the provisions of the Protection of Wages Convention, 1949 (No. 95) were used by the Russian Federation, Ukraine and other transition countries to deal with local emergencies. This Convention states that wages should be paid regularly and in legal tender, and in the case of insolvency, paying the workers is a priority when assets are liquidated.

► The child labour effect

The return of child labour as one of the ILO's main concerns led to a profound change in the way standards themselves and their relation to technical cooperation were seen. With the opening up of the global market economy, it became evident that “old” problems – child labour, forced labour, discrimination and denial of trade union rights – continued. Workers in industrialized countries saw their jobs move to foreign locations and considered the situation to be a crisis. They were confronted with cheap competition from low paid, unpaid, underaged and generally disadvantaged workers in poorer countries. At the same time, access to world markets, however precarious, was one of globalization's real promises for what became increasingly known as “emerging countries.”

To prevent this situation from bursting into a global crisis, two things were needed. First, there had to be an understanding of the minimum labour standards that would be applied to production in less developed economies. It was logical to turn to the ILO, which in its human rights and other standards had defined minimum rules that by and large were considered acceptable.

The second issue was the how to guarantee the implementation of these rules. The traditional standards supervisory mechanism tended to process information in a way which could be used to justify trade restrictions and sanctions. Applying transparent technical cooperation was more palatable. If it could be established that the deficiencies in labour conditions were due to a lack of development capacity, and not insufficient political will, assistance could thwart calls for sanctions.

Evidence about the extent to which rural and urban poverty hindered development was ample enough. Faced with it, the ILO was looking for pragmatic approaches to get an improvement process started. This resulted in a “first-things-first” approach to the drafting of international labour standards.

The fundamental principles and rights at work (also known as core labour standards) which were codified in the 1998 Declaration of the ILO are not about crisis, but they have become indispensable tools for any recovery. No crisis management programme is complete without them, together with social dialogue and the need for securing employment, sustainable enterprises and basic social protection.

The human rights Conventions adopted from 1948 to 1955 had been referred to as “fundamental” by Morse, Jenks and Blanchard. In his report to the 1994 Conference, Hansenne raised the issue, outlining in 1994 almost the same options as Jenks had in 1973: either a joint arrangement with the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) or some intensified form of ILO action. Some wanted to “sharpen their teeth” through a new trade mechanism; others did not even want to let the ILO through the door. Fearful of the prospect of a “social clause” – making trade access contingent on respecting labour standards – a consensus was reached in 1998 for the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its follow-up.

This was a somewhat happy marriage of convenience, not untypical of the kinds of *modus vivendi* that industrial relations regularly produce.

The 1990s thus ended with a new balance: a universal market economy with core labour standards that at least provided a moral compass. In the process, what had started as a push to strengthen workers’ rights became a mechanism for rights at work, indicating that employers have rights, too. This was reminiscent of the formulation in the original 1919 Constitution that the right to organize belonged to employers and workers alike.

A first-things-first approach was notably applied to the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182). The existing but weakly ratified Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) had summarized the standards issued since 1919 on the ages when children should be at school and not at work. Stronger provisions were called for, as many child labourers were well under any established minimum age. The argument that “exploitative” and “intolerable” child labour had to be given priority initially led to criticism that some forms of child labour could then be considered more tolerable and left unattended.

The formula that was eventually agreed upon stressed that all child labour should be eliminated, but some forms were so hazardous that they needed urgent action. They could not be justified with deficiencies of development or capacity; some of them, such as slavery, debt bondage, trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, were outright illegal. Other hazardous forms should be determined in consultation with the social partners, and urgent programmes for their elimination should be implemented.

It is natural to start crisis management with the most vulnerable groups. A first-things-first approach also facilitated moving ahead on social policy with the notion of establishing national floors for further improvement. It was not possible to determine global minimum levels, which would often be under what more advanced economies had achieved, but the principle that each country should provide basic social protections could be enforced. This was the essence of the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202). Giving priority to vulnerable groups in the selection of topics for future standards helped to achieve Conventions on Domestic Workers and Violence at Work as well as the Recommendations on the Informal Economy and Peace and Resilience.

6. Emergencies and standards

Major accidents have provoked legislation and social action since the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York City, in which 146 persons, mainly young immigrant women, perished in 1911. The fire promoted both factory inspection legislation and organizing by the Ladies International Garment Workers' Union. Sadly, the same factors still prevailed in 2014 in Dhaka, Bangladesh, when the Rana Plaza factory building collapsed with 1,134 lives lost. History was being repeated in uncomfortably familiar ways.

Conventions on health and safety in mines and major industrial accidents were adopted in the early 1990s. They were directly prompted by industrial accidents. A toxic leak from the Union Carbide fertilizer plant in Bhopal, India, in December 1984 led to over 3,000 immediate deaths and thousands since then in the surrounding environment. Over 600,000 people have been affected. Another Convention was prompted by a string of mine accidents in China and Ukraine which caught media attention in the drive for privatization and the market economy in the early 1990s.

The preamble of the Prevention of Major Industrial Accidents Convention, 1993 (No. 174) recognizes that accidents can be due to organizational errors, human factors, outside interference and natural forces. It calls for consultations with employers on a national policy on the protection of workers, the public and the environment. Hazards should be recognized while protecting confidential information. When time-bound plans are needed to deal with the longer-term consequences of an accident, the social partners should be consulted.

Workers' and employers' representatives should normally be able to accompany labour inspectors, and they have the right to consult both general safety reports and those on accidents that have occurred. If there is reasonable justification, they have the right to interrupt the process. The Convention also stipulates that if a process, substance or technology is found to be harmful, this must be disclosed to any country importing the products concerned.

The Governing Body reached a compromise to take up the topic of health and safety in mines as there was no agreement on other items. The press had reported on fatal accidents in recently privatized mines, especially in Ukraine. The ensuing Safety and Health in Mines Convention, 1995 (No. 176) calls for "coherent occupational safety and health policies" which are established and periodically reviewed with employers' and workers' organizations. National laws should determine which authorities should compile statistics and inspect, supervise and, if necessary, suspend the activity for safety reasons.

Supervision procedures should be set out in law, but employers' and workers' organizations should be consulted on them. Plans for regular surveillance should be drawn up and carried out by employers, but workers have the right to be informed, to request an inspection and to leave their workplace in case of danger. They also have the right to select health and safety representatives, who can consult with the employers and the responsible authorities, assisted by independent experts if necessary. The Convention also stresses that workers should take reasonable care of their own safety and immediately report any problems.

Conventions No. 174 and 176 are modestly ratified. However, the United States which otherwise is more than sparing with ratifications, has signed on to the Health and Safety in Mines Convention. Both are deemed to be up to date instruments. The topics were agreed upon when there was agreement that, each year, the Conference should adopt one standard and start negotiations for the next. Maybe today other alternatives, such as codes of practice, would also be explored.

► Protecting health care workers

There is a considerable body of protective standards designed to deal with any crisis, including health emergencies. The standards deal with the protection of workers directly concerned – medical or other emergency workers – and at-risk groups potentially subject to exposure.

Delicate questions are addressed such as the right of workers to keep a distance from potentially sick persons while assuring the need for proper care. Any standards in this area must be balanced by strong safeguards against the discrimination of workers who have contracted a virus but do not require hospitalization or isolation. The stigmatization of persons who have contracted the HIV/AIDS virus has been a serious workplace issue.

The Nursing Personnel Convention, 1977 (No. 149) calls for the adoption of policies on health care services in cooperation with the social partners. The accompanying Recommendation No. 157 states that in special emergencies, nurses can temporarily substitute for personnel in a higher category, provided they have adequate training and receive appropriate compensation.

The ILO has quoted calculations showing that the levels of staffing and education of nursing personnel have a direct impact on mortality in hospitals.⁷ An increase of one patient per nurse means a 7 per cent increase in mortality, whereas higher education and training levels produce a 7 per cent decrease.

⁷ A Tripartite Meeting on Improving Employment and Working Conditions in Health Services was convened by the ILO in April 2017.



Over a hundred years of front-line work. Nurses were mobilized in 1918 to transport patients of the Spanish flu in Washington D.C. ([Wikipedia](#))



In 2020, health-care personnel had to observe strict security measures (here in a Bangkok hospital) while caring for a rapid increase in COVID-19 cases. Still, hundreds of them were infected and many died.

A considerable proportion of nursing personnel is low paid, and many of them are women or minorities and migrant workers. Crises and large-scale accidents frequently lead to calls for the review and improvement of their remuneration, but this has rarely been followed up. Instead, austerity policies have invariably squeezed funding for medical personnel. Restrictions on medical workers' right to strike also continue, and some countries still do not allow these workers to organize, including in Africa where serious outbreaks of Ebola have occurred.

► **Work-related diseases and health hazards**

Occupational safety and health standards provide for illnesses caused by exposure to harmful processes and substances at work. The hazards are preventable through measures that address the working environment. Conventions on phosphorus and white lead, which had been negotiated before the creation of the ILO, belonged to this category. To spread knowledge of the newly founded ILO, Edward Phelan concocted a cocktail called "White Lead and Anthrax" for Genevan socialites in the 1920s. Early ILO Recommendations concerned anthrax, lead poisoning and white phosphorus.

Some standards date from the interwar period, but most date from the second part of the twentieth century. A notable factor is the high incidence of occupational illnesses. It is estimated that 2.3 million people die annually from work-related diseases, of which infectious diseases are in third place after occupational cancers and cardiovascular illnesses. Accidents come in fourth, with 321,000 fatalities every year, including 170,000 among agricultural workers. The number of yearly non-fatal occupational accidents is 317 million.

The standards address situations generated by production or treatment processes. Employers can control the use of substances; public authorities can ban those which are particularly harmful; and workers should have a role in monitoring measures at the workplace. However, infectious diseases that originate from outside the workplace can also have a dramatic effect on workers and enterprises. This has been the case with HIV/AIDS and the SARS and Ebola viruses, but their impact has not reached the level that COVID-19 achieved within a few months. As of this writing, the number of COVID-19 fatalities worldwide has surpassed the annual estimate of deaths from occupational accidents.

Viruses are biological hazards. If a virus is contracted in an occupational context, the provisions of care and compensation apply in accordance with the Employment Injury Benefits Convention, 1964 (No. 121) and its accompanying Recommendation No. 121.

A relevant standard is the List of Occupational Diseases Recommendation, 2002 (No. 194). The list was drawn up for the purposes of prevention, recording, notification and compensation, and is subject to revision by meetings of experts and decisions by the Governing Body. It was last revised in 2010. The list includes chemical hazards, biotechnology, new working conditions, the effect on migrant workers, the informal economy, and emerging forms of employment through outsourcing and temporary contracts. The importance of psycho-social hazards and mental illnesses has been increasing.

A Protocol to the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155), adopted in 2002, provides for a periodic review of occupational accidents and diseases and their notification; improvement of statistics and data; and the determination of the employers' responsibility.

A number of the instruments adopted deal with work-related illnesses. The Occupational Cancer Convention, 1974 (No. 139) requires ratifying countries to adopt policies to prevent risks due to prolonged exposure to chemical and physical agents. It provides for protective measures, supervision and regular medical examination of potentially exposed workers.

The Radiation Protection Convention, 1960 (No. 115) stipulates that if exposure to ionizing radiation exceeds prescribed levels, workers should undergo a medical examination; the employer must notify the competent authorities; an expert examination must take place; and remedial action is to be undertaken on the basis of medical and technical advice. International Basic Safety Standards were agreed upon by the ILO, WHO, IAEA, FAO, OECD/NEA and PAHO and published by the IAEA in 1994. Diseases involving working situations and general public safety need to be treated by inter-agency collaboration.

The Asbestos Convention, 1986 (No. 162) aims to prevent the harmful effects of asbestos and control health hazards. It does not outright prohibit the use of asbestos, although such action would be compatible with the Convention. The joint ILO and WHO committee on occupational health has a programme on the elimination of asbestos.

The Chemicals Convention, 1990 (No. 170) regulates the production, handling, storage and transport of potentially toxic chemicals. It also covers their treatment and waste disposal. It aims to cover all the ways in which chemical substances can cause illness among workers. On chemical control, inter-agency cooperation exists in the form of an International Programme on Chemical Safety. It involves the ILO, WHO, UNEP, FAO, UNIDO, UNITAR and the World Bank.

A number of sectoral Conventions apply to certain categories of workers. Health care workers are examined separately in this monograph. Other categories for which standards exist are offices and commerce, construction, mines, agriculture, domestic work, hotels and restaurants, and seafarers and fishers.

► HIV and AIDS in the world of work

It took 15 years after the identification of AIDS to recognize its link to the working environment. After the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) was negotiated, the Conference turned its attention to HIV/AIDS. A Resolution adopted by the Conference in 2000 recognized it as a threat to decent work. It eliminated large numbers of people in their prime years from the labour force. Millions of lives and livelihoods had been lost, and being affected by the virus provoked serious discrimination and stigmatization at the workplace.

Standard setting on HIV/AIDS was preceded by several years of a special programme at ILO headquarters with projects in the field. The programme enjoyed support from both employers' and workers' organizations. One of the key tools was a code of practice on HIV/AIDS at workplaces. It was prepared together with employers and workers' organizations and led to extensive awareness-raising and technical cooperation.

The next step, standard setting, led to the Recommendation concerning HIV and AIDS and the World of Work, 2010 (No. 200), which recognized that in the worst affected countries, the disease was undermining decades of development and destabilizing societies. Productivity had fallen, skills and experience were lost, and labour costs had increased.

In justifying the need for the Recommendation, Director-General Juan Somavia described HIV/AIDS as "a pandemic which moves at the fault lines of society, affecting disadvantaged and marginalized groups."

The remedies included in Recommendation No. 200 cover both prevention and treatment. There should be no discrimination in recruitment or termination of employment on the basis of HIV and AIDS. The confidentiality of personal data should be respected. Workers do not have to disclose their health status, and there should be no obligatory testing. Workplace measures should prevent harassment and violence. Access to treatment should be facilitated as should redeployment, if needed.

Recommendation No. 200 also stresses the need for care and support services for workers and their families. In line with the consensus on the topic among the social partners, the instrument envisages national tripartite workplace policies and programmes, many of which the ILO has sponsored.

► SARS and other diseases

For the ILO, the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen from March 6 to 12, 1995, is best known for its emphasis on employment and for the formula that enabled the consensus on fundamental principles and rights of work, as expressed in the 1998 Declaration. However, the Summit's voluminous programme of action also touched upon communicable diseases.

In paragraph 22, the programme of action notes that these diseases

constitute a serious health problem in all countries and are a major cause of death globally; in many cases, their incidence is increasing. These diseases are a hindrance to social development and are often the cause of poverty and social exclusion. The treatment and control of these diseases ... must be given the highest priority.

The UN Summit of 117 heads of state and government in Copenhagen thought specifically about tuberculosis, malaria and HIV/AIDS. At the time, SARS, MERS, Ebola, H1N1, Zika and COVID-19 were still in the distant future.

In 2005, the World Health Assembly adopted an Emergency Response Framework covering a wide scope of events such as infectious disease outbreaks, hazardous chemicals, oil spills or releases of radiation. A disaster can either be produced by a virus, as in the case of SARS, Ebola, H1N1 and Zika; radiation as in Chernobyl and Fukushima; chemicals as in Bhopal; or tsunamis and earthquakes. Emergency needs arise equally from military conflict, humanitarian crises and terrorism. In virtually all cases, the responses will include occupational safety and health measures for both health workers and the immediately exposed population and the environment. With the spread of COVID-19, many details contained in these instructions have become familiar throughout the globe.

The SARS epidemic in 2002 – 2003 affected the ILO directly. It led to the postponement of the long-prepared China Employment Forum. A senior ILO official in charge of the preparations, Pekka O. Aro, caught the virus on an international flight and died in Beijing in April 2003. The SARS experience underlined the extent to which the virus spread through international travel. The crisis became a concrete issue for the whole ILO community, as delegations rushed to cancel their announced participation in the Beijing Forum.

In early September 2019, a joint WHO/ILO briefing note on Ebola for employers' and workers' representatives was published. The virus and possible post-traumatic stress are occupational diseases. Risks include infection, distress, stigma, violence, long working hours, dehydration from wearing protective gear, and ergonomic problems. Business travellers to regions where Ebola has occurred are also at risk.



Pekka O. Aro in his office at the ILO in Geneva. He died of SARS while preparing for a China Employment Forum in Beijing in April 2003.

► **ILO guidelines against SARS**

In response to a request by ASEAN Senior Health Officials following the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) outbreak in 2003, the ILO published a guide on practical and administrative response to an infectious disease at the workplace. The report contained detailed measures from national to workplace level based on ILO standards.

The general rule is that sick persons are not to come to their workplace, or if they do, they should be directed to appropriate care. All workplaces should have proper sanitation, daily cleaning, and fresh air. This demonstrates the extent to which proper environmental standards and labour standards converge. In the event of a SARS outbreak, there should be screening measures, avoidance of physical contact and “social distancing.” The measures outlined in the survey faithfully anticipated the reactions to COVID-19 a decade and a half later.

In workplaces serving the general public, employees have the right to ask a suspected sick person to leave or discontinue working. Clinics, hospitals and nursing homes should have protective gear, and employees and patients alike must observe hygiene measures, starting with frequent hand washing. Personnel attending to SARS cases should have complete protective gear.

Arrangements should also be made for the return of recovered patients to the workplace, including use of protective clothing for a certain period, possible psychological counselling if needed and adequate information to co-workers.

There should also be a coherent national policy on occupational safety and health and the working environment, agreed upon in consultations with employers’ and workers’ representatives. In particular, it should reach out to unemployed persons, migrant workers, immigrants, people on the margins of society and prisoners. Hospitals for treating SARS or similar illnesses should be identified and properly equipped. Arrangements for quarantine should be foreseen, in addition to confinement in private homes.

Standards also cover the social protection of all categories of the population, including the right to unemployment benefits and safeguards against the termination of employment due to illness. The terms of working from home need to be agreed upon between the worker and the employer.

As COVID-19 has shown, a large crisis presenting an acute threat of loss of life takes a particularly heavy toll on medical personnel. Literally hundreds of them have contracted the virus and died.

The basic thrust of the standards – as clarified once again at the time of the SARS outbreak – was that workers have the right to withdraw from work which they feel is dangerous. However, if the nature of the work involves a level of risk, withdrawing from it would have to presume that this risk had become considerably higher.

7. Return of a global crisis

Indications of new international crisis potential were provided by the Asian financial crisis in 1997. An ILO analysis published at the time concluded that even minimal investment in social protection schemes would have saved millions of the jobs lost. The consequences of the crisis, especially in Indonesia, were changes in regimes and new technical cooperation activities based on social dialogue and the 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

As the new century approached, the forces that shaped the world economy provided an increased sense of crisis. In his first Report on Decent Work, in 1999, the new Director-General, Juan Somavia, quoted the founder of the World Economic Forum, Klaus Schwab: “The forces of financial markets seem to be running amok, humbling governments, reducing the power of unions” and causing a feeling of helplessness among individual people. Somavia concluded that the end of the Cold War had weakened the sense of common purpose among the constituents.

The new debate on a “global financial architecture” – which now was something separate from the New International Economic Order – called on the ILO to deal with recurring crises of adjustment and development.

In his first report, Somavia introduced the concept of Decent Work. It was a new step towards closer integration between the different methods used to confront the challenges of an increasingly complex and globalized world. Initially it was an attractive way to package the strategic objectives of employment promotion, social protection, standards and social dialogue. At the 1999 Conference, the eminent economist Amartya Sen called it a new developmental paradigm.

As of the beginning of the twenty-first century, Decent Work became the shorthand version of all that the ILO stood for. Conference reports pinpointed decent work deficits and promoted the notion of working out of poverty. The Governing Body adopted a Global Employment Agenda in 2003, with the aim of bringing decent work into the core of economic and social policies.



Amartya Sen, laureate of the Nobel Economics Prize, called Decent Work a developmental paradigm in his speech to the 1999 International Labour Conference.

The concepts were equally applied to examining the social dimension of globalization. After two years of work by an independent tripartite World Commission, the “doctrine” of the ILO was completed in 2004 by the notion of fair globalization, which should be managed according to the decent work approach.

The 2008 financial crisis was neither sudden nor unexpected. In his report to the 2006 Conference, Somavia noted that there was a growing global jobs crisis. The 2005 world growth rate of 4.3 per cent did not provide jobs for all the entrants into the labour force. The political fallout was disenchantment with the effects of international investment and trade, leading to protectionism, migration control and xenophobia. The political system’s credibility was undermined when elections were won on the promise of jobs which subsequently failed to materialize.

Two years later, Somavia observed that the crisis was spreading from the turmoil in the US housing financial sector. Growth continued globally, but so did economic and social imbalances. Power had shifted to the detriment of labour, favouring enterprises which outsourced production. These did not belong to the “sustainable enterprises,” which were increasingly viewed by the ILO as a part of the solution, together with boosting the purchasing power of those worst off, investments in human development and infrastructure, the environment and decent work.

The same Conference in 2008 took another step in further clarifying the ILO’s strategic objectives with regard to employment, social policy, standards and dialogue. It adopted a Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, which led to a more systematic and integrated way of discussing them at the annual Conferences. For some who were involved in the negotiations for the Declaration, it was a guide on how to implement the Philadelphia Declaration.

The financial and economic turbulence of 2008 was a jointly perceived global crisis. Regional crises, often caused by political divergences, had not been seen by the governments and the social partners as something which should have sparked the ILO into immediate concerted action. Much of the debate had been on the effects of globalization, which were a combination of threats and promises – in other words, crises and opportunities.

Probably around this time, the centre of gravity for criticism of globalization shifted from the left to the right, from the questioning of the system’s rules to extreme nationalist movements, which were fed up with the system itself. What happened next matched the observations of the French social scientist Maurice Duverger: extremes converged in their rejection of the system. One of the lessons of the twentieth century was that the methods of far-right extremism are often applied so brutally that they silence the critical voices at the other extreme.

Unemployment had continued to rise, poverty remained persistent, and no relief was in sight for several years to come. Each year brought 45 million new job-seekers, and 500 million new jobs would be needed over the next five years just to absorb them. The double threat perceived by employers and workers was that of a prolonged global increase in unemployment and inequality and collapsing enterprises.

Around the time of the European Regional Meeting in Lisbon in March 2009, the Employers' Group initiated a separate high-level session on the effects of the 2008 financial crisis. Deep concern had been expressed by national employers, whose enterprises were threatened or had already gone bankrupt due to the crisis. Subsequently, the Governing Body decided to modify the agenda of the 2009 International Labour Conference by installing a Committee of the Whole to devise a concentrated response: the Global Jobs Pact.

► **Measures proposed by the Global Jobs Pact**

The Global Jobs Pact was adopted at the 2009 Conference following a three-day Jobs Summit, with the participation of several heads of state and government, “to stimulate economic recovery, generate jobs and provide protection to working people and their families.” The outcome was characterized as an “integrated portfolio of tried and tested policies” which could be tailored to the needs of national constituents of the ILO.

The Global Jobs Pact proposed the following measures:

- Retain working women and men in employment as long as possible and sustain enterprises, in particular medium-sized, small, and micro enterprises.
- Support job creation and promote investments in employment-intensive sectors, including green jobs.
- Facilitate more rapid re-entry into employment and address the issue of wage deflation.
- Protect persons and families affected by the crisis, in particular the most vulnerable and those in the informal economy, by strengthening social protection systems, providing income support, sustaining livelihoods and ensuring the safety of pensions.
- Accelerate the recovery of employment and expand opportunities by acting simultaneously on labour demand and labour supply.
- Equip the workforce with the skills needed for today and tomorrow.

The framework was to be created by the Decent Work Approach, fundamental principles and rights at work, gender equality, voice and participation and social dialogue.

A number of measures recommended by the ILO for recovery from earlier crises were mentioned in the Global Jobs Pact. They included effective public employment services, avoiding deflationary wage spirals, emergency public works programmes and direct job creation schemes. The Pact specifically mentions the Minimum Wage Fixing Convention, 1970 (No. 131).

The role of labour market information in helping to benchmark national progress is also mentioned, as is the strengthening of country-level diagnostics and the capacity to advise on social policy. In addition, the Pact suggests that countries would prioritize crisis responses in their Decent Work Country Programmes with the ILO.

The Global Jobs Pact was a combination of old, new and modified elements recommended and used for crisis management during all the decades of history which it drew upon. Among familiar remedies were immediate income support, employment services and public works, as well as basic original ILO functions like data collection and analysis. New solutions included green jobs and a “low-carbon, environment-friendly” economy, the support of small, medium-sized and micro-enterprises and the ways to deal with the informal economy.

The elements which had matured most significantly and visibly were the strong reliance on social dialogue and the method used by the ILO to balance employment support and sustainable enterprises. By focusing on small and medium-sized enterprises, the ILO was recognizing them as the source of the majority of jobs around the world. What would have been called state intervention in the 1920s had developed into public policies for an “enabling environment.” The notion of establishing social protection floors was also advancing.

When the Global Jobs Pact was adopted, employers stated that follow-up action was the responsibility of national players, especially governments. Workers stressed the role of social dialogue and, in particular, recognition of trade unions’ right to organize. The Global Jobs Pact invited constituents to request assistance from the ILO at their discretion. However, it did not establish any formal new mechanism. Part of the follow-up was achieved through so-called country “scans” – analyses made by the Office together with the countries in question on how the Pact measures were applied locally.

The Global Jobs Pact was a remarkable achievement, akin to the World Employment Programme. However, both relied on national follow-up which mainly did not materialize. In the end, did the Global Jobs Pact wither away for more or less the same reasons as the World Employment Programme had? It remained Geneva-centered, with no framework for inputs by countries which had engaged with the ILO.

In cooperating countries, tripartism was part of the system. In countries that showed little interest in cooperating with the ILO, there was much less tripartism. As the ILO’s constituents helped to select the Organization’s focus countries, any countries out of favour with the Employers’ or the Workers’ Group were excluded.

The Global Jobs Pact served as a point of reference, and one of the outcomes was the ILO’s integration into the G20. Spurred by the 2008 Financial Crisis, the G20 itself had replaced smaller and less global G7 and G8 meetings. The G7 had originated in the energy crisis of the early 1970s; it continues to be the “nucleus” of the OECD group while the global spotlight is on the G20.

8. The new dimensions

In the multilateral world, there are many so-called “flanking issues” which do not always sit chronologically or substantively well with the main narrative. However, they are indispensable for understanding the dimensions of what is being analysed. They are generally referred to using coded words that can be understood in several ways. Over time, refusing to remain neatly in separate boxes, they tend to become part of the general story itself.

For the purposes of understanding today’s challenges, four such issues are relevant: the environment, the informal economy, crisis management strategies, and the changing appreciation of private sector business activities.

► Environment, emergencies and crisis

Since the 1970s, environmental issues have been approaching the global community like Dmitri Shostakovich’s Leningrad Symphony: a persistent piece of marching music first announces itself from a distance, gets insistently stronger, and finally takes over.

The question of the environment was raised at the ILO in the early 1970s. In industrialized countries, increased material welfare started having unmistakable environmental consequences. Social protests found a new cause in environmental degradation, spurred by such publications as Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962. Growth may not have had the expected results in terms of creating jobs and economic activity in developing countries, but its consequences were increasingly seen in the environment around the world.

In most developing countries, environmental deterioration can be traced back to colonial era exploitation. These countries had followed the global development model of industrial countries with even fewer means allocated to cleaning up. The correlation between poverty, poor health and the environment was increasingly obvious. Weak state control and the need for revenue left little room for environmental care, and the trade union movement was more concerned about the incomes, health and rights of workers than the state of the environment.

The United Nations began taking action in 1972 through its first environmental Conference in Stockholm. A Resolution adopted that year by the International Labour Conference noted such “unacceptable” social costs as famine, disease, civil unrest and economic refugees. It pointed out that four out of five common diseases are caused by

dirty water or lack of sanitation, and the daily number of deaths from water-borne diseases worldwide was 25,000. That same year, Wilfred Jenks recognized that the issue could pit growth against the environment. However, he considered that the world could not turn its back on growth and productivity, as they were needed in developing countries, where the serious environmental problems were caused by poverty.

Eighteen years later, in 1990, Michel Hansenne's report entitled *Environment and the World of Work* concluded that pollution and the depletion of national resources had not only become a serious threat but could even be "the end of the world unless we master it." He saw no inexpensive solution, as enterprises had to develop cleaner production methods which, however, in time would pay for themselves. Workers were asked to press for more protection in the developing world.

This was a time when the Brundtland report had introduced the notion of sustainable development. The nuclear catastrophe in Chernobyl, the spread of toxic chemicals from the Union Carbide factory in Bhopal, India, and the Exxon Valdez oil tanker spill had increased general awareness. These disasters had also dramatically shown that continuing to force industrial and economic production without adequate safeguards was a growing danger in a world, which was hungry for progress but poor in terms of safeguards.

Once the Cold War eased into détente, the environment was a politically "safe" issue for the ILO. It was a topic all the different European trade unions could address at joint conferences. The ILO was using the concept of "working environment," which was particularly well suited to its mandate. The Resolution of 1972 had pointed out that the main causes of the degradation of the working environment and the general environment were one and the same. The Working Environment (Air Pollution, Noise and Vibration) Recommendation, 1977 (No. 156) underlined that measures for the protection of the working environment should take account of the protection of the general environment. Monitoring should take place as close to production sites as possible, and assessments on the impact of production on the general environment should be made.

Despite the calls by Blanchard and Hansenne on both sides of the Cold War watershed, follow-up was limited. An integrated approach to the working environment and the general environment remained a work in progress as the agenda turned to economic and political transition and globalization.

In 1992, the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit concluded that the protection of the environment had to become an integral part of the development process. At the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development of the United Nations in 2002, three pillars were defined: economic, social and environmental.

By 2007, the Decent Work approach had gained the support of the multilateral system, but as Somavia noted to the Conference, environmental protection was not achieving the targets that had been set. He ascribed this to a "fundamental flaw" because of the

belief that “markets can replace public policies in balancing economic, social and environmental needs.” This was written one year before the global financial crisis hit.

Somavia pleaded for a transition to green jobs which would be safe for people and conserve the planet. Now that Decent Work had been universally accepted, it was time to bring it into the environmental sphere. The ILO could invest more energy in the process, as it was at the workplace that social, economic and environmental dimensions came together.

The ILO was increasingly pulled into action. The number of international conferences on the environment increased and the pressure of a deteriorating environment was felt. This happened with the active involvement of the employers’ and workers’ organizations. The ITUC and IOE partnered with UNEP and, in 2007, published a report calling for a transition to decent work in a sustainable, low-carbon world.

The issue of the environment was combined with the preparations of the ILO’s Centennial commemoration. In 2013 Guy Ryder launched a “Green Centenary Initiative” which was to examine the way in which decent work could be linked with the transition to a low-carbon, sustainable development path. The aim of “just transition” is to maximize the creation of decent green jobs. The ILO has calculated that implementing the Paris Climate Agreement would create 24 million jobs while 6 million would be lost; the net growth would still be 18 million. The loss of jobs could be offset by recycling and repair activities.

The 2013 Conference also conducted a General Discussion on sustainable development, decent work and green jobs. Its basic message was that the greening of jobs forced innovation, which further strengthened the resilience of societies. This would be possible, however, only by engaging the world of work.

In November 2015, the Governing Body adopted Guidelines for a just adjustment towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all. Its ingredients were fundamental principles and rights at work, gender equality and an enabling environment for employment and enterprises. No blueprint was appropriate, because each case was different, and the importance of social dialogue was again emphasized.

In 2017, Guy Ryder noted in his Conference Report on Work in a Changing Climate that, although earlier environmental discussions had had little impact on the ILO, there was no question anymore about the urgency of the issue. A simplistic confrontation involving employment, growth, material prosperity and development had brought the debate to a standstill. There did not seem to be any prospects for new standards on a just transition. Instead, for the ILO the issue was to remain a cross-cutting one, with emphasis on deepening the knowledge base and work for just transition in the specific context of each country.

The ILO’s added value continued to be in the involvement of partners directly concerned by environmental changes affecting employment and production. In 2016, the WMO calculated that 23.5 million people a year were displaced by floods, famine and other environmental factors. The aim of the ILO was to minimize and manage

dislocations of production and employment. The potential for decent work should thus be integrated into the transition to a low-carbon sustainable development path.

The discussion on the environment may not have produced any new silver bullet, but views about a just environmental transition have largely converged. A closer look shows that this connects to improvements sought in the informal economy, the encouragement of sustainable enterprises and an enabling environment for jobs and economic activity. The common denominators of the remedies suggested are standards, fundamental principles and rights at work, and social dialogue.

► The informal economy

Together with the environment, the question of the informal economy has been gaining in importance over the second part of the twentieth century. Previously referred to as the “informal sector,” it was highlighted if not actually discovered by the World Employment Programme. Blanchard ascribed the notion to the report of the employment mission to Kenya preceding the Programme. He described it in 1974 as “small-scale entrepreneurial activities that have grown up spontaneously among the low-income section of the population, with little or no official recognition or protection”.

The informal economy challenges some of the very foundations of economic and social organization, and has been a regular subject of Conference Reports by Director-Generals, Conference debates and standard-setting. In 2015, Recommendation No. 204 brought it into the sphere of International Labour Standards.

The Employment Policy (Supplementary Provisions) Recommendation, 1984 (No. 169) had already referred to the need to facilitate integration of the informal economy while at the same time warning that formalization may reduce its capacity to absorb labour.

When contemplating standards that could be particularly applicable in the informal economy, Michel Hansenne mentioned fundamental principles and rights at work and occupational safety and health. In his Conference report in 1991, he referred to the informal economy as relatively unexplored and controversial territory. On the one hand, it created employment and incomes. On the other hand, it escaped regulation and provided inadequate protection. The jobs created were not legal, when they could not comply with labour laws, but they could not be seen as criminal either. Without social safety nets it was vulnerable to downturns. Yet in times of crisis, the demand for what it could deliver regularly went up.

The informal economy has seemed to be on the constant edge of crisis. It came into being because the formal economy did not produce adequate income. Hansenne saw

it functioning like a “huge labour sponge”, but it was not to be compared with the underground economy: tax evasion or avoidance of control was not its *raison d’être*. Neither could it be seen as a survival strategy for the poor in developing countries. Growth alone will not make the informal economy disappear; it’s rather quite the opposite.

The situation in the informal economy is not due to the weakness or non-existence of laws, but to the conditions of this economy itself. Aims set out by standards need to be attained progressively, with the first-things-first logic inherent to any crisis situation. This approach could be compared to the one used in the face of the worst forms of child labour and the establishment of social protection floors. It makes it possible to improve the situation without aiming to immediately regularize everything. Fundamental principles and rights at work were, for the ILO, a good place to start.

According to 2019 figures, 70 per cent of employment is either self-employment or provided by micro-, small and medium size enterprises. The lower the country’s income level, the higher this figure climbs. In low income countries, 80 per cent of the labour force is at risk in the COVID-19 crisis. In the lowest income countries, very few enterprises have more than 50 employees. When these jobs are lost, incomes and health and old-age insurance coverage disappear as well.



Hairdressing is emblematic of micro-scale activities in both the informal and the formal sector. Picture from Antsirabe, Madagascar, 2017.

Early estimates of the effect of the crisis indicate that out of the two billion workers in the informal economy, 1.6 billion, with an overrepresentation of women, are affected by the COVID-19 crisis. When 90 per cent of jobs in low income countries are based in the informal economy, the tools to cope with mass unemployment are less likely to reach them. With eight out of ten enterprises in the world informal, support may rather call for across-the-board reductions of charges on everyday expenses (communications like internet and mobile telephones, transport, rents). Collective bargaining and social dialogue have to be adapted to this reality.

► Measures in the informal economy

The Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204) provides guidance on how to transition to formal activities while ensuring that workers' fundamental rights are respected and income security, livelihoods and entrepreneurship are promoted. The Recommendation conveys the need for a balance between the creation of enterprises and assurances that jobs will be decent. It also stresses that the informalization of formal employment has to be prevented.

The Recommendation addresses all workers and economic units (enterprises, households, own-account workers, cooperatives) in the informal economy, including "workers in unrecognized and unregulated employment relations." The objective is to strengthen fundamental principles and rights at work, focusing especially on gender and other discrimination and occupational safety and health. The coverage of social insurance should also be progressively extended to the informal economy.

Several provisions refer to the development of micro- and small and medium-sized enterprises. Entrepreneurial potential should be both preserved and expanded, as should workers' innovative capacity. The approach calls for both incentives and compliance with national laws and policies. Macro-economic policies should favour employment.

The Recommendation underlines the need for an enabling environment for freedom of association and social dialogue. Employers' and workers' organizations should provide services to workers and economic units in the informal economy.

An Annex with a list of Conventions and Recommendations underlines the extent to which International Labour Standards should guide the transition to more formal and secure employment and economic activity. The list is subject to review by the Governing Body.

► Crisis response as part of the Decent Work Agenda

Many of the crises the ILO has been involved in have arisen due to their ensuing large-scale displacement of workers. In the 1920s, the Organization aided Fritjof Nansen's efforts on behalf of the League of Nations to support refugees from the Russian civil war. A total of approximately two million people were displaced by the collapse of the Russian empire; this exceeded the influx of refugees from the Middle East and Africa that caused local crises and blockages in Europe in 2015. After several years of practical work on the ground, the ILO turned refugee assistance back to the League of Nations, from where it subsequently developed into the current work of the High Commissioner for Refugees.

Intentionally or not, military conflicts have heavily targeted civilian populations. The number and scale of natural disasters has also continuously increased. While views may differ on the extent to which they are caused by damage to the environment, their effect has been exacerbated by the sheer size of the populations living in the urban or rural areas affected by earthquakes, storms and tsunamis.

The ILO has been involved in post-crisis reconstruction in many places. After the peace accords that ended the cruel conflict in Cambodia, extensive rehabilitation was carried out in Siem Riep, in the temple area of Angkor Wat. It joined up with UNESCO for a cleaning effort which rendered the site accessible to world tourism. The road system around the complex and in the region was built by an ILO labour-based programme, making optimal use of labour to create sustainable decent work.

In the 1999 Decent Work Report, Juan Somavia outlined a new activity on reconstruction and employment-intensive investment which would be designed for situations in the wake of crisis as well as conditions of extreme poverty. A special programme for crisis management was set up, described as a recognition of the social disintegration and deterioration of employment and poverty situations that accompany crises of various types. The report which launched the notion of Decent Work placed the roots of crises in wars and armed conflicts, crop failures, macro-economic fluctuations, climatic disasters and persistent extreme poverty. Social movements and political transition could also launch the need for crisis action. Intervention packages should be designed to maintain income levels in the short term and foster investment and productive capacity in the longer term.

The InFocus Programme set up in 1999 had no earlier organizational basis in the ILO. Interventions depended on task forces involving different parts of headquarters and officials in the field. Responses to crises relied on employment-related interventions, tripartite cooperation and the implementation of fundamental Conventions. Moving from emergency relief work to dignity, security and self-reliance meant fostering job creation by public and private institutions, skills, enterprise activities and functioning markets. ILO interventions concerned both armed conflicts and natural disasters, such as earthquakes and landslides. The main entry point was job creation, although for instance in Argentina, the programme applied social policy measures to an economic shock.

Later, the ILO pursued anti-crisis activities through its Jobs for Peace and Resilience flagship programme. It developed relief measures in the event of armed conflict, displaced persons, refugees, natural disasters and transition countries. It uses employment-intensive investments to overcome acute crises; technological, vocational and entrepreneurial skills; employment services; and private sector and local economic and business development. The activities rely on institution building, respect for fundamental principles and rights at work, and social dialogue.



The restoration of the Angkor Wat temple site in Siem Riep, Cambodia, and the building of the road system around it was done by an ILO labour-based programme in the 1990s.

After the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, ILO reconstruction measures included both public works and assisting local private-sector contractors to bid for labour-intensive projects which were compatible with the decent work approach. After the devastation by a tsunami in December 2004, the ILO launched an extensive recovery programme in the province of Aceh in Indonesia. Measures started with emergency public employment services, cash for work programmes to support individuals and liquidity in the system, and food for work programmes. Further items on the road to recovery were promoting micro- and small and medium-sized enterprises, microfinance, business development services, managerial and skills training, and developing women's entrepreneurship.

Transforming emergency relief into more institutionalized and sustained action was accompanied by consultations with employers' and workers' representatives. Situations where child or forced labour could be used had to be avoided. When in May 2009 the cyclone Nargis devastated much of the Irrawaddy Delta, despite decisions preventing technical cooperation with Myanmar, the ILO implemented a jobs and livelihoods project in the delta area. This was proposed by the Workers' Group to prevent the use of forced labour, which was the reason for the restrictions.



The powerful tsunami that hit Banda Aceh, Indonesia, in December 2004 carried a boat to the distance of 3 kilometres from the ocean. The ILO was involved in reconstruction of the local economy.

► **Recommendation No. 205**

Confronted with increasing demand to act on a growing number of conflicts and disasters, the ILO reviewed its standards for dealing with them. Recommendation No. 71 from the 1944 Philadelphia Conference on the transition from war to peace had facilitated demobilization and the restoration of employment after the Second World War. However, the wars it addressed were between nations, not within them. The Recommendation was written before collective bargaining and social dialogue were used for national economic policies. New threats had arisen from climate change, natural disasters and irresponsible multinational enterprise activities. In addition, the Philadelphia Recommendation had not addressed the questions of prevention, preparedness and resilience.

The thrust of Recommendation No. 205 is to “generate employment and decent work for the purpose of prevention, recovery, peace and resilience with respect to crisis situations arising from both conflicts and disasters”. Armed conflicts remain an acute problem: when the Recommendation was being negotiated, there were 55 ongoing conflicts in 29 countries. Much of the violence is not between armed groups: it is directed against individuals and civilians. In addition, in several places around the world, such as Haiti, Somalia, Philippines, Myanmar and Indonesia, natural disasters have coincided with conflicts.

What is new? As this monograph has shown, employment policy has been directly linked to crisis since the beginnings of the ILO itself. The three-pronged approach consisting in unemployment insurance, employment services and public works is largely intact, as is the emphasis on tripartite cooperation. The consolidation of the fundamental principles and rights at work has underlined the human rights involved.

The worldwide economic cost of conflicts and disasters between 2005 and 2014 has been calculated to amount to 1.3 trillion US dollars. The relief delivered through humanitarian assistance amounted to one per cent of this cost; less than one per cent of this aid had been spent on prevention.

For the purpose of both prevention and targeting interventions, Recommendation No. 205 calls for identifying vulnerable groups such as migrant workers but also the care workers who are needed to treat the victims. One particularly exposed group are indigenous and tribal peoples, who are specifically mentioned in Recommendation No. 205.

The Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) is about the protection and rights of a sector of society which is hard hit by both human-generated and natural crises. Indigenous and tribal peoples are often neglected in terms of health protection, education, jobs and labour inspection. Crisis situations can lead to displacement and loss of their lands, and the obligation to consult with them may well be ignored.

Tripartite cooperation should be used for the purpose of prevention and relief in all crisis situations. It should be particularly promoted in countries where relations between the authorities and trade unions, or between the social partners, are problematic. Re-training plans can address the increased need for care and safety personnel and services to sustain a vulnerable population. Trade unions are encouraged to participate in this effort by increasing networking through social media.

► The role of the private sector

A fourth significant change since the end of the Cold War and the opening up of the global market economy has been the way in which private sector activities are seen as a solution to economic and employment crises. Positions taken by both the ILO and its Director-Generals have been mixed: sometimes business is blamed for destabilizing growth and employment but it is also expected to provide salvation. Which is it?

As always, there is no simple truth, and the answer lies entirely in how business behaviour is conducted. By now the number of revolutionary workers who would want to do away with their bosses should be quite limited. The private sector is not a homogenous, immutable entity, and its changing components need to be understood.

When mass unemployment lingered on after the First World War, maintaining and creating employment were deemed the responsibility of the public authorities. In the 1920s Albert Thomas made cautious references to credits and assistance to private business. The Keynesian approach prevailed: increased purchasing power should be the main positive intervention by the state to maintain market demand for production.

A novel feature of the New Deal philosophy as it developed was the large-scale use of public funds to resume private investment. Harold Butler referred to this in 1935 as “priming the pump of business,” citing examples from the United States, Germany, Argentina, Japan and Sweden. Capital that remained idle was mobilized towards investments promising long-term security and profits.

In 1966, David Morse focused his Conference Report on industrialization, which he called an “indispensable agent” for economic and social development and, among other things, suggested that a new class of entrepreneurs be trained to set up undertakings. Socialist countries and their worker allies, especially the WFTU, responded that public or worker controlled activities should take over. Their recent proof was Cuba. Yet Morse also saw governments increasingly recognizing that “industrialization cannot be left to completely spontaneous and uncoordinated individual efforts.” In developing countries, trade unions were weak and management was divided between foreign, domestic, private and public ownership. As the biggest employer, the state often had an interest in keeping private industry under control.

In 1992, the employers and workers in the Resolutions Committee of the Conference bilaterally settled a lingering conflict which had arisen out of the employers’ proposal to recognize the role of the “spirit of enterprise.” The workers opposed this as an ideological position in the post-communist transition. Yet governments were also increasingly looking towards private sector solutions. Support for an “enabling environment” for enterprises could create more employment than intervention alone.

The outcome was a resolution on the “role of enterprises in employment growth and the creation of full, production and freely chosen employment.” It stated that this should include both “the promotion and encouragement of the creation of development of enterprises without unnecessary regulation and excessive bureaucratic interference” and “the promotion of freedom of association and free and voluntary collective bargaining”.

With an increasing number of enterprise programmes by the Office, the Employers’ Group embraced this new approach in discussions on future standards. Employers wished to have standards which would support employment promotion, and they tended to be Recommendations instead of Conventions.

In 1998, the Conference adopted the Job Creation in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Recommendation No. 189. Its preamble stated that two thirds of all new jobs were in SMEs. Most of the Recommendation addresses the full range of government-defined economic, fiscal, industrial, transport and regional policies which should facilitate access to markets. The Recommendation specifically requests the removal of excessive and burdensome constraints.

The Recommendation also refers to the Conventions which at the same Conference session formed the basis of the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. A balance is thus maintained between enterprise creation and the basic protection of the rights of workers, the provision of quality jobs, especially for women, and consultation with the social partners.

From a crisis management point of view, the Recommendation notes that “in times of economic difficulties, governments should seek to provide strong and efficient assistance to small and medium-sized enterprises and their workers”. This includes women, the long-term unemployed, older workers, students, minorities, and indigenous and tribal peoples. Recommendation No. 189 does not mention micro-enterprises, which had entered the lexicon by 2015 when the Conference had a General Discussion on the topic. The growing emphasis on micro-enterprises and the self-employed has reflected further shifts of employment and economic activity. In the 1960s, the ILO still referred to “cottage industries”.

The more the role of SMEs is stressed, the more it raises the question of the transition from the informal to the formal economy. The overlap with concerns of inappropriate regulation or lack of supportive infrastructure is considerable.

The Decent Work report to the 1999 Conference recognized that enterprises are the key to growth and employment in open economies. Director-General Somavia announced that the ILO “must position itself as the international centre of expertise and data for business,” especially regarding standards, codes, legislation, occupational safety and health and good corporate governance. Somavia added that a focus on the enterprise is essential if the ILO’s work is to be informed by workplace practices and realities.

The Global Employment Agenda of 2003 included enterprise development in its key areas. The tools of the Agenda included business development services support for enterprises and cooperatives in local economic development programmes.

The concept of sustainable enterprises is linked to the aim of sustainable development, in the spirit of the 1987 Brundtland Report. The International Labour Conference of 2007 saw this concept as an element of the social, economic and environmental pillars of the world of work. Sustainability consisted of International Labour Standards, human rights, social development and the rule of law, underpinned by a sound and stable macro-economic policy. The conclusions of the Conference referred to entrepreneurs' "legitimate quest for profit", combined with development needs, respecting decent work, human dignity and environmental sustainability.

At the enterprise level, sustainability meant making use of social dialogue; human resources development; good conditions of work; productivity, wages and shared benefits; corporate social responsibility; and good corporate governance and business practices.

The 2015 UN Sustainable Development Goals also recognize that private business activity, investment and innovation are "drivers of production, economic growth and job creation." These are seen to depend on a "dynamic business sector with labour rights".

In 2019, the ILO Commission's report on the Future of Work outlined a "human-centred business and economic model" where investments need to be underpinned by a supportive business climate and incentives for long-term financing.

The Preamble of the Centenary Declaration recognized the importance of sustainable enterprises as "generators of employment and promoters of innovation and decent work." The operative parts of the Declaration called for

supporting the role of the private sector as a principal source of economic growth and job creation by promoting an enabling environment for entrepreneurship and sustainable enterprises, in particular micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises as well as cooperatives and the social and solidarity economy, in order to generate decent work, productive employment and improved living standards for all.

9. Moving forward

The intention of this monograph, which is presented in chronological order but complemented by thematic sections, is not to argue that the COVID-19 crisis is a logical consequence of the way in which economic, social, environmental and political forces have shaped the last hundred years. Yet it is not outrageous to claim that while the ILO has been carrying out work to promote social justice, underlying forces have conspired to produce another global crisis. Maybe we have now met the “hidden explosives” under our societies, described by the first Nobel Peace Laureate Frédéric Passy and quoted by David Morse five decades ago.

We may have finally got a taste of the environmental catastrophe that we have been dreading for some time now. Today’s crisis has shown itself to be different from the prospect of Venice, Jakarta and New York being engulfed by rising sea levels. It is not destruction by earthquakes, tsunamis or cyclones. It has an eerie resemblance to the danger that a “neutron bomb,” instead of physical nuclear mass destruction, could



COVID-19 forced the United Nations system to close down and rely on distance work. In the picture, the deserted colonnade of the International Labour Office in Geneva.

simply wipe out life – the same grim vision that was evoked by Nevil Shute’s 1957 novel *On the Beach*. The world is facing a force which does not take political sides: nature itself.

The four pillars of the ILO’s response to COVID-19 show the extent to which we are dealing with something more than the consequences of a disease. The pillars are stimulating the economy and employment; supporting enterprises, jobs and employment; protecting workers at their workplaces; and relying on social dialogue for solutions.

It is usually unwise to comment a battle which has just begun. However, there is some wisdom in assessing its early stages in order to adjust the measures involved for a more optimal result. It is also necessary to examine the weaknesses, particularly if they hide some underlying causes of crisis.

The crisis has shown that the early tools of the ILO form the basis of any response to an employment and social crisis, even today. The remedies for the consequences of an economic recession, a jobs crisis or a natural disaster combine social insurance, active labour market policies and work initiated by public authorities. They rely on passive assistance for as short a time as possible and measures to build, often literally, the way out of crisis.

The emphasis on the private sector’s role in employment creation has evolved. With the disappearance of centrally planned economies, we expect significantly more achievements by private entrepreneurship. Supporting employment and enterprises are seen as two sides of the same coin. Fear of state intervention has mutated into an expectation of public support for sustainable enterprises. At the same time, a considerable and probably growing proportion of enterprise activities struggle to reach a decent level of sustainability.

The earlier recurring question of the extent and form of state intervention, including planning, seems, at least for the time being, to have vanished into a dark hole together with the different views on the merits of an organized vs. laissez-faire economy and capitalism, socialism and public management in general.

After the Second World War, the ILO introduced the notion of human rights into its standards system. Since the establishment of a global market economy, any enabling environment for growth and jobs is expected to include both fundamental principles and rights at work and social dialogue.

Concern for the most vulnerable groups has increased throughout the global community. Decolonization created a world divided into developed and developing countries. Since the period of structural adjustment, social divisions have increased and are present in all societies today. In any large-scale employment crisis, a considerable part of employment and livelihoods affected is that of the self-employed and workers in micro-, small and medium-size enterprises. Many of them are in the informal economy.

Unrestricted economic development has created serious environmental dangers which have replaced the threat of nuclear war in apocalyptic scenarios of the future.

The mechanics of the global market economy, with real-time interaction between all its parts, have revealed how vulnerable the world is to an old-new phenomenon: diseases.

Dealing with HIV/AIDS and the experience of SARS and Ebola have produced a detailed and immediately useable blueprint for protective measures and equipment against diseases which spread beyond national borders. These measures range from workplace protocols to social and employment policies and international cooperation. The immediate reaction to COVID-19 has shown that the ILO's occupational safety and health Conventions contain the needed advice in crisis situations – if they are used.

The ILO's main crisis response, however, is reconstruction-oriented. The aim is not to restore an earlier state of affairs but to improve on it, because it has been part of the problem. The crisis has also underlined that the main responsibility falls on public authorities. Crisis management cannot be subcontracted but it can be shared. International Labour Standards contain ample references to cooperation with employers' and workers' representatives. Such cooperation is not an option; it is a requirement.

The Future of Work Report of 2019 observed that the “concentration of economic power and the decline in the strength of the workers' organizations and collective bargaining have contributed to rising inequalities within countries.” Even as measures to overcome a crisis have been developed with workers in mind, ever since large-scale public works were introduced, incentives have been extended to businesses and employers. However, the corollary of this, using collective bargaining and social dialogue, has become increasingly fragile.

► Vulnerable groups

In any crisis, two kinds of vulnerable groups need special attention: the personnel in charge of the physical safety and well-being of the population and the most exposed parts of the population itself, many of them workers. A pandemic like COVID-19 draws much-deserved attention to medical workers. Other risk groups include public and private service workers and any category involving personal interaction with the general population. The groups highlighted by the pandemic have included both air transport personnel and seafarers. Many of these workers are women and migrants.

It seems obvious that certain provisions of the Maritime Labour Convention are breached when seafarers are denied access to shore, or sick personnel are refused medical treatment by port states.

There are many examples of how, at work or leisure, modern societies rely on large numbers of underpaid, disadvantaged workers. When a crisis hits, they become front-line personnel. There is a valid case for follow-up to COVID-19 for each of these groups on the basis of International Labour Standards. Their wages and working conditions in the aftermath of this particular crisis should also be reviewed so that any improvements in pay and benefits are not cancelled the moment a crisis appears to subside.

► A centralized national response

COVID-19 has shown that for the common good, certain activities need to be carried out at a sufficient scale, subject to centralized management and decision-making. Elected public authorities must retain the main responsibility for the welfare of the population. While cooperation with all layers of society is needed – although it may occasionally have to be forced – the management of a crisis cannot be outsourced. Private entities that have a role in caring for the health and safety of the population must respect centralized instructions, too.

At the same time, the reestablishment of authority should not lead to authoritarianism. A comparison with the interwar period is instructive, when the ILO examined the questions of state involvement in the economy and planning. ILO Directors had to carefully explain that any planning had to be compatible with democratic market economies and dialogue.

In the 1930s, there were similarities between the New Deal in the United States and the industrial development of Germany and Italy. From an employment perspective, both produced more results than a *laissez-faire* attitude. The crucial difference came with accepting and utilizing the contribution of independent social partners. The desired outcome could not be obtained at the cost of freedom and social justice.

In the COVID-19 crisis, public authorities have been in the driver's seat. In most countries they have had the support of national parliaments and local government as well as the scientific community. This could reverse a trend, which has been chipping away at the basics of the welfare state, but for that, more than a demonstration of state authority is needed.

► Making a diagnosis

When COVID-19 started spreading, the required knowledge on what to do about its effects was available; it was the state of material preparedness that was inadequate. To what extent the response could have been anticipated is secondary to the need to realize that while disasters of this nature affect our general environment, they spread particularly fast in a working environment, and the working environment should be in a semi-permanent state of alertness.

Any future response requires practical knowledge of the circumstances that have conspired to spread the crisis. Much of the ILO's energy in its early years was spent on collecting data and analysing employment and unemployment. COVID-19 has spread rapidly in the global working environment of international business and leisure travel. Its biggest effects are in losses of jobs and economic activity. It is indiscriminate in whom it hits, but wherever it goes, it wreaks havoc in circumstances where the social, economic and environmental factors have major deficiencies.

This particular virus seems to thrive on the interaction between humans and animals, travel, housing and urbanization, health and social services, and the availability of prevention and care for both the ill and the infirm. Poor air quality, housing and sanitation – all of which are working environment issues – correlate to the number of fatalities in a given outbreak of disease.

Adequate disease control will again call for focus on the convergence of several well-known crisis factors, namely poverty and precarious employment, weakness of governance structures, environmental vulnerability, a disproportionate burden on women, and significant numbers of either foreign or domestic migrants. Such conditions may be found in some East and South-East Asian or African urban markets. But they may as well be considered typical of the living conditions and workplaces of migrant workers in all countries, including the wealthiest ones. There is a large amount of migrant labour in health care services, human transport, catering, construction and domestic work.

► The reconstruction agenda

As Albert Thomas recognized, the weakest link in any crisis-management plan is international action. So far, COVID-19 has been countered by a minimum of international coordination. Calls for global solidarity and global responses through the multilateral system have not produced significant joint action. Each country has been preoccupied by its own situation although all are confronted by the same problem.

Nevertheless, the multilateral response has, in principle, recognized the social agenda. The G20 group of 19 heads of state and government and the European Union originated in the 2008 international financial crisis. In March 2020, the group had its priorities right when it announced its commitment to a multi-trillion dollar assistance package. In their priorities to “do whatever it takes,” after saving lives world leaders stressed the need to safeguard jobs and incomes. This was followed in descending order by fiscal stability, growth and recovery. The leaders asked the ILO and the OECD to monitor the pandemic’s impact on employment. It may be prudent to remember, however, that this request, however welcome, does not really go much further than what the League of Nations asked the ILO to do in the 1920s.

However, an extraordinary G20 meeting of Labour and Social Affairs Ministers, convened virtually by Saudi Arabia in April 2020, was a bit more specific in promising to seek the advice of the ILO, the OECD and the World Bank Group to resolve short-term crises and to plan for medium and long-term recovery.

Even if the multilateral system is incapable of decisive political action, more hope comes from action which can be sufficiently characterized as “technical,” through specialized agencies – WHO, ILO, FAO, UNEP, UNESCO – or special programmes of the UN, such as HRCR, UN-AIDS, WFP. The different actions in response to conflicts and natural disasters have usually been carried out by a number of participating organizations. The action on health emergencies described earlier also contains many examples of cooperation between multiple agencies. This also has an important positive effect in preventing humanitarian or health assistance from becoming politicized.

The ILO’s assistance, informed by its standards, has above all been know-how and support to its tripartite constituents. Education and training have been provided, occupational safety and health systems built up, laws drafted and monitored. Throughout there has been a search for suitable employment policies. But the Achilles’ heel is the conviction, expressed by Albert Thomas in 1921, that the measures discussed by the ILO cannot truly be efficient unless they are translated into general economic and social policies.

By now, the approach of Decent Work could be called an *acquis*, internalized by the multilateral system. At the beginning of the century, the UN’s Millennium Development Goals failed to grasp its importance. The Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015 included a range of economic, social and environmental objectives. Goal No. 8 contains sustainable economic growth, productive employment and decent work. The ILO is the main custodian of this goal.

► The problem with peer reviews

For a hundred years now, the ILO has stressed the importance of providing knowledge and comparable statistical data combined with the experience of the application of labour standards. The history of the ILO is also a history of data collection, statistics and comparative research. The issue has rarely been about obtaining data, but how that data is used.

In the Director's Report to the last Conference before the Second World War, John G. Winant had made the case of what could be done by studying "the same phenomena in a large number of different countries," as this made it possible to "rule out what is coincidental in one" and bring forward what is common to all of them.

Yet, while the problems may be common, for a variety of reasons the approaches to them can vary considerably. The conclusions of both the High-Level Meeting on Structural Adjustment in 1987 and the Global Jobs Pact of 2009 recognized that each country's situation is different. The mantra of "no one size fits all" has been repeated so consistently that it must be reflected in any potential international action.

The standards supervisory mechanism was designed to detect situations where something has gone wrong. Trends have been analysed on the basis of aggregated information, with country data used only as examples. Whenever country studies have been conducted, as a rule they are not used to draw conclusions or to give instructions suggesting that countries change their policies.

Unlike the OECD, the ILO does not have a regular system for examining country studies. OECD studies are prepared by the Secretariat with input from national treasuries and finance ministries. They can be used to gain international approval for politically unpleasant recommendations which often concern labour and social policies. Treasury officials do not hesitate to point out in international reports that they disagree with politicians or trade unions. The somewhat comparable ILO supervisory system of labour and social affairs is most often fed by formal allegations of labour standard violations. When an issue reaches the ILO's mechanisms, it usually is at an advanced state of conflict.

Not that such peer reviews have not been tried, for instance in the country studies examined by the Working Party on the Social Dimension of Liberalization of International Trade, in the Governing Body in the second part of the 1990s. Another example is given by the Annual Reports under the 1998 Declaration from countries which have not ratified all fundamental Conventions. But as the experience of the World Employment Programme and the Global Jobs Pact shows, countries are very reluctant to discuss their social situation at an international level. Any proposal for an international follow-up of the social and labour aspects of crisis management has to reckon with this simple fact.

We continue to seek a model for honest, open and constructive reviews of the decent work situation in each of the countries. This can be achieved only through a dialogue between governments, employers and trade unions. The result should be neither “best practice” demonstrations nor “worst practice” trials. Both achievements and shortcomings in realizing Decent Work have been extensively recorded. Most information on each country is available, in one form or another, to the ILO. Is it utopian to think that it could be utilized rationally to give guidance and prompt action? The new investment that is needed would above all have to be an investment in a change of mentality.

Child labour is one critical field which shows that this can succeed. Initial reluctance to accept the ILO’s International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) arose out of the fear that transparency and admitting problems would provoke trade and investment sanctions or consumer boycotts. Once the aspect of technical cooperation was added, the affected countries’ transparent engagement turned into a strong argument against sanctions.

Could a similar approach be applied to the situations where poverty and environmental and health hazards combine to produce disasters like COVID-19? Any reasonable assessment shows that such cases call for more than what can be done by political will alone. Could the Philadelphia maxim of poverty anywhere threatening prosperity everywhere be applied to identifying dangers and crafting pragmatic programmes to provide remedies?

The International Labour Office and member countries have experience in preventing national issues from becoming a larger problem. For instance, a trade union can request an intervention from the Office. This usually results in direct contacts between the Office and the parties concerned in order to find a solution without having to use the standards supervision mechanism. A guaranteed level of confidentiality has made it easier for all sides to be involved. A good number of trade unionists have been freed from detention after such interventions. A significant role can be played by both Direct Contacts Missions of the Office and tripartite missions involving the social partners.

The advisory approach applied to the implementation of the Tripartite Declaration on Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy gives a further indication of what is possible. In addition to a Help Desk, through which companies can obtain information and advice on relevant standards and good management procedures, the prospects include a service to assist those wishing to solve problems that arise from the provisions of the Declaration.

► Reviving the social dialogue

The unique feature of the ILO's structure in the multilateral system is tripartite cooperation and the practice of social dialogue. At best, social dialogue between the parties concerned leads to voluntary agreements which have the force of law and a built-in review and revision mechanism. At the very least, they keep the channels open for any future solution.

Until the end of the Cold War, the ILO was quite ambiguous about the extent to which job creation was the responsibility of public or private entities. The notion of "sustainable enterprises", which has been a major change in the ILO's lexicon, is not alien to the philosophy that created the tripartite system. It should be based on a mutually advantageous deal: employers and workers recognize one another's rights and pragmatically decide to cooperate. For governments, the benefit is social peace, production and growth.

There is, however, a dialogue gap, whose origins are both ideological and institutional. It has grown deeper since the 1980s. Private employers hesitate to recognize the benefits of collective bargaining and labour-management cooperation as they did in the period of reconstruction and prosperity, up to the end of the 1970s.

Such arguments as falling union membership or collective bargaining being unsuited to new forms of work have been accepted too easily. They could have been made as early as 1919, but that would have prevented the whole process that the ILO has stood for. Instead of using the partners' shortcomings as an excuse, the focus should be on how to develop organization with either advanced technologies or in the informal economy.

Human beings have developed new techniques to manage production and services in real time. It should not be impossible to devise programmes which support collective bargaining and information and consultation between labour and management in the systems that have been created. Social dialogue is also eminently adaptable. It can be practiced in units of any size and any kind of activity.

Social dialogue is a process which takes time, and does not always produce concrete results. Often the outcome is little more than frustration on both sides of the bargaining table. Yet even then, it is important that partners remain aware of one another's claims and views. If those who are tasked with consultation and bargaining become alienated from one another, social dialogue gets rusty, and reviving it is difficult.

► Restoring the balance

In many countries, COVID-19 provoked various forms of tripartite cooperation despite trends which had revealed an erosion of social dialogue. Joint positions on crisis action have been taken by the ITUC and the IOE. Tripartite meetings at the national and sectoral level have produced agreements which have modified wages, employment conditions and social protection. Vital questions of lay-offs, periods of notice, and financing of the pensions systems and other social benefits have been reviewed. Some of the adjustment measures at the workplace level resemble those implemented after the 2008 financial crisis.

Yet there is a danger that where social dialogue has been pulled out of the drawer once the crisis hit, it could soon be put back again. Many immediate and short-term agreements will need continuous monitoring and adaptation – as does any exceptional situation affecting jobs, incomes, investments and market prospects.



Consensus on dealing with crisis. Sharan Burrow, General Secretary of the ITUC with Roberto Suarez Santos, Secretary-General of the IOE at the Centenary Session of the Conference, June 2019.

When social dialogue and tripartite cooperation are used, there is much less need to determine in advance how a crisis situation should be handled through legislation or other regulations. In some cases, collective bargaining agreements can also include safeguard clauses for extraordinary situations that affect jobs and incomes.

Mainly for reasons of ideology and political and economic dominance, we have let social dialogue lie unused for far too long. Since the end of the Cold War, there is a consensus on the role of the private sector and sustainable enterprises. It seems natural to think in terms of support for both workers and enterprises at the time of a joint crisis. But is it so difficult to agree that this needs to be guided and accompanied by agreements negotiated between the representatives of both employers and workers?

The explicit recognition of the private sector's role, which has been traced above, has been consistently accompanied by the reaffirmation that fundamental principles and rights at work, international labour standards, and social dialogue are equally relevant. The track record of successful crisis management bears out the validity of the deal that this balance implies.

The less you have to use crisis management tools, the better, but those that have been devised to prevent a crisis need continuous maintenance and practice. What we cannot afford is losing the knowledge of what remedies exist and how they can be mobilized. Unfortunately, this is precisely what seems to be happening in many places with COVID-19 and the employment and social response to it.

Commenting the 1931 recession, Albert Thomas concluded that unemployment had become a primarily psychological problem. Yet he was comforted by the fact that the remedies offered by social legislation had not been shaken. It would be reassuring if the same could be said of the main ideas running through a century of the ILO's history: the principles of international labour standards, social dialogue and the need for effective multilateral cooperation.

Annexes

► International Labour Standards for guidance in situations of crisis

International Labour Standards are relevant for all types of crisis. While they are not specifically drafted to counter a crisis or extraordinary situations, over the decades they have been developed as the minimum to be observed in all circumstances. Older standards, such as the 1919 Unemployment Convention No. 2 and Recommendation No. 1, have been replaced. As a rule, their principles continue to influence more mature standards on the same topics. Standards fall into several categories of decent work. Some of them are sectoral, addressing specific occupations. A concise and accessible guide to International Labour Standards is the “Rules of the Game,” updated in 2014.

In March 2020, the ILO’s International Labour Standards Department published a set of Frequently Asked Questions on key provisions of standards in the context of COVID-19.

The Tripartite Declaration on Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy, adopted by the Governing Body in 1977 and revised regularly after that, includes an Annex with the relevant standards. The Recommendation on the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy, 2015 (No. 204), also has an annex of relevant instruments.

Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work

Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87)

Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98)

Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) and its Protocol 2014.

Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105)

Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138)

Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182)

Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100)

Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111)

Governance Conventions

Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81) Protocol of 1995 on extension to the public sector

Labour Inspection in Agriculture Convention, 1969 (No. 129)

Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122)

Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1973 (No. 144)

Employment policy

Employment Services Convention, 1948 (No. 88)

Employment Policy Recommendation, 1964 (No. 122)

Employment Policy (Supplementary Provisions) Recommendation, 1984 (No. 169)

Employment Promotion and Protection against Unemployment Convention, 1988 (No. 168)

Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Convention, 1983 (No. 159)

Older Workers Recommendation, 1980 (No. 162)

Termination of Employment Convention, 1982 (No. 158)

Job Creation in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Recommendation, 1998 (No. 189)

Promotion of Cooperatives Recommendation, 2002 (No. 193)

Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (No. 181)

Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204)

Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 (No. 205)

Freedom of association

Right of Association (Agriculture) Convention, 1921 (No. 11)

Co-operation at the Level of the Undertaking Recommendation, 1952 (No. 94)

Workers Representatives Convention, 1971 (No. 135)

Labour Relations (Public Services) Convention, 1978 (No. 151)

Rural Workers' Organisations Convention, 1975 (No. 141)

Collective Bargaining Convention, 1981 (No. 154)

Social policy

Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102)

Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202)

Social Policy (Basic Aims and Standards) Convention, 1962 (No. 117)

Equality of Treatment (Social Security) Convention, 1962 (No. 118)

Maintenance of Social Security Rights Convention, 1982 (No. 157)

Sickness Insurance Recommendation, 1927 (No. 29)

Invalidity, Old-Age and Survivors' Benefits Convention, 1967 (No. 128)

Employment conditions

Labour Clauses (Public Contracts) Convention, 1949 (No. 94)
Employment Relationship Recommendation, 2006 (No. 198)
Labour Administration Convention, 1978 (No. 150)
Labour Statistics Convention, 1985 (No. 160)
Paid Educational Leave Convention, 1974 (No. 140)
Human Resources Development Convention, 1975 (No. 142)
Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156)
Home Work Convention, 1966 (No. 177)
Forced Labour (Supplementary Measures) Recommendation, 2014 (No. 203)

Occupational Safety and Health

Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No.155) and Recommendation No. 164. Protocol 2002
Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187)
Occupational Health Services Convention, 1985 (No. 161)
Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183)
Occupational Cancer Convention, 1974 (No. 139)
Radiation Protection Convention, 1960 (No. 115)
Asbestos Convention, 1986 (No. 162)
Chemicals Convention, 1990 (No. 170)
Safety and Health in Construction Convention, 1988 (No. 167)
Hygiene (Commerce and Offices) Convention, 1964 (No. 120)
Occupational Safety and Health (Dock Work) Convention, 1979 (No. 152)
Working Environment (Air, Pollution, Noise and Vibration) Convention, 1977 (No. 148)
The Workers' Housing Recommendation, 1961 (No. 155)
Safety and Health in Mines Convention, 1995 (No. 176)
Prevention of Major Industrial Accidents Convention, 1993 (No. 174)
Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention, 2001 (No. 184)
Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190)

Specific categories

Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169)
Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189)
Plantations Convention, 1958 (No. 158) and Protocol of 1982
Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (MLC)
Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188)
Dock Workers Convention, 1973 (No. 137)
Nursing Personnel Convention, 1977 (No. 149)

Working Conditions (Hotels and Restaurants), 1996 (No. 177)
Home Work Convention, 1996 (No. 177)
Migration for Employment (Revised) Convention, 1949 (No. 97)
Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143) and
Recommendation No. 151

Working Time

Hours of Work (Industry) Convention, 1919 (No. 1)
Hours of Work (Commerce and Offices) Convention, 1930 (No. 30)
Forty-Hour Week Convention, 1935 (No. 47)
Reduction of Hours of Work Recommendation, 1962 (No. 116)
Weekly Rest (Industry) Convention, 1921 (No. 14)
Weekly Rest (Commerces and Offices) Convention, 1957 (No. 106)
Holidays with Pay Convention (Revised), 1970 (No. 132)
Night Work Convention, 1990 (No. 174)
Part-Time Work Convention, 1994 (No. 175)

Wages

Protection of Wages Convention, 1949 (No. 95)
Protection of Workers' Claims (Employer's Insolvency) Convention, 1992 (No. 173).
Minimum Wage Fixing Convention, 1970 (No. 131)

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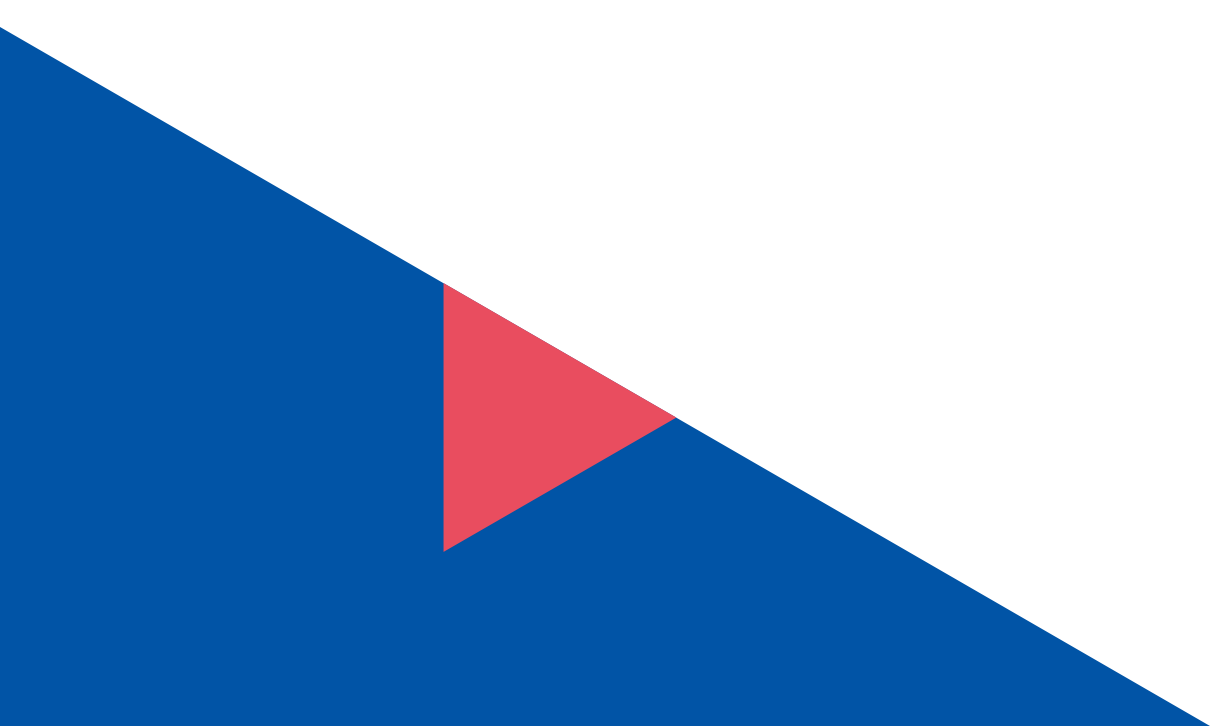
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► List of abbreviations

ACTRAV	Bureau for Workers'Activities
ACT/EMP	Bureau for Employers' Activities
AFL	American Federation of Labour
AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organizations
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
CRS	Corporate social responsibility
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
EEC	European Economic Community
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations
G7	Canada, Germany, France, Italy, Japan, United Kingdom, United States
G20	Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, France, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States, European Union
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GB	Governing Body of the International Labour Office
H1N1	Subtype of Influenza A virus
HCRC	High Commissioner for Refugees (United Nations)
HIV/AIDS	Human immunodeficiency virus and acquired immunity deficiency syndrome
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IILS	International Institute for Labour Studies (ILO)
ILC	International Labour Conference
ILO	International Labour Organization International Labour Office
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOE	International Organization of Employers

IPEC	International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO)
ITUC	International Trade Union Confederation
MNE(s)	Multinational enterprises
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NIEO	New International Economic Order
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OECD/NEA	OECD Nuclear Energy Agency
OEEC	Organization for European Economic Cooperation
PAHO	Pan-American Health Organization
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
SDG(s)	Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations)
SME(s)	Small and medium-sized enterprises
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environmental Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNITAR	United Nations Institute for Training and Research
WEP	World Employment Programme (ILO)
WFP	World Food Programme (United Nations)
WHO	World Health Organization
WMO	World Meteorological Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization



Over a hundred years the ILO has developed International Labour Standards and policy responses to mitigate the effects of employment and social crises. The aim has been to secure jobs and incomes, promote sustainable economic activity, and protect the safety and health of the workers who are directly exposed to dangers. The action of the ILO is guided by the search for social justice and the participation of employers and workers through tripartite cooperation and social dialogue.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how hazards move in a globalized world. It has highlighted the need to use the tools that are available for countering social and economic crises and securing the safety and health of workers.

This book traces the development of these tools and the ways in which they have been successfully applied over the last hundred years. The ILO continues to adapt them to changing circumstances but their foundation remains unchanged. They are jointly accepted rules of the game based on the principles of social justice. Their strength lies in voluntary cooperation between all economic and social actors.

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