For the trade union movement, as we often say, the future of work starts now. We need to think about the work of the future by addressing and resolving the problems facing workers today.

One such problem (and certainly a very important one) is the ever-decreasing number of jobs available, not solely due to technological advances but also as a result of the unrestrained freedom of speculative financial capital.

The current global situation has been described as a world with two mountains that are constantly growing. One of them is the mountain of debt. There is not a country nor a government that is not ever more indebted. The other is the mountain of idle money resting in what are misnamed as tax havens, which should, more appropriately, be referred to as tax hideouts. This money is only used for speculation, and not to create productive jobs.

In the middle of these two ever-growing mountains is an increasingly significant number of workers seeking stable and productive jobs, together with small- and medium-size enterprises that are having to shut down or are unable to expand due to the lack of capital allocated to production. The result is obvious: without production there is no way of paying off the debt and resolving the issue of rising poverty.

Meanwhile, most governments continue to bank on foreign investment as a way of creating jobs. They make all the cuts and concessions needed to please investors, as illustrated by the Macri government, for example, in Argentina. And yet productive investments are not attracted in the amounts anticipated, for the reasons outlined above. Nor do the investments attracted create the amount of jobs a country requires, which leads to more adjustments being imposed, at the expense of the most vulnerable social groups, by the International Financial Institutions that claim to be “rescuing” economies in distress.

Economies cannot rely on foreign investment alone, as it creates very few jobs. According to the ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean), for every million dollars of foreign investment, one to six jobs are created, depending on the sector. Only a maximum of six thousand jobs, in other words, are created for every billion dollars of foreign investment.

On reading the documents published by the ECLAC, we see that large companies own 70 per cent of the economies in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean but only generate 10 per cent of the jobs, while small- and medium-sized enterprises (which include social and solidarity economy enterprises) own only 10 per cent of the economies in these countries, yet create 60 per cent of the jobs.

Trade unions and cooperatives therefore have the potential, by working together, to defend already existing jobs and to create many more, based on the idea of “shared prosperity for all” and “a better future for all” set out by ILO Director-General Guy Ryder.

An alliance can be forged enabling cooperatives and trade unions to fight together to defend inalienable principles such as democracy, starting with the right to freedom of association and
collective bargaining. Relevant, in this respect, are the ITUC’s Frontline Campaigns and Four Pillars for Action 2019, aimed at favouring:

- Hope, not hatred
- Rights, not oppression
- Democracy, not dictatorship
- Freedom, not fascism
- Solidarity, not division
- Trust, not despair
- Fairness, not inequality
- Courage, not fear
- 99%, not 1%
- Dignity, not exploitation

A sustainable world cannot be achieved without democracy, and inclusion is fundamental to that. As we say at the ITUC, we need to change the rules that govern our world. To achieve this, we need to work towards building the power that comes from organising more workers and forging alliances with groups that may or may not have similar histories but have the same dreams.

One of the areas we can focus on together is the organisation of people working in the informal economy. One of the many practical examples of what can be achieved is the Sindicato Unión Obrera Ladrillera de la República Argentina (UOLRA), which brings together formal and informal workers in the brickmaking sector. The trade union is engaged in collective bargaining to broaden the rights of the workers in formal employment. Those in the informal sector are invited to join the union and to become members of a cooperative that fights for the recognition of the rights of migrants and women (whose plight would otherwise remain invisible) and to eradicate child labour.

Looking towards the future, and at the more global picture, given the nature of the world’s supply chains, we can work together to build the power of the workers who are employed in the informal sector but are, in fact, working in one way or another for multinationals. A 2017 New Frontline Briefing published by the ITUC, entitled “Scandal: Exporting Greed through the Panama Canal”, names 25 multinationals, operating in El Salvador, Panama, Costa Rica, Brazil and Argentina, that employ four million workers but have a hidden workforce of 70 million people. If we were to set ourselves the task of unionising these undeclared workers and building their power in partnership with cooperatives of different kinds, we would raise our capacity to change the rules.

Another key area is the platform economy, in which companies such as Uber, Glovo or Airbnb clearly do not recognise their workers, and much less their rights. Meanwhile, cooperatives such as La Pájara Mensajería, Coopcycle, Som Mobilitat and Fairbnb are offering alternative platforms. Organising the workers in this sector is crucial for the trade union movement.
Finally, reference has been made to the International Cooperative Alliance’s interest in taking part in South-South cooperation. We, at the ITUC, are also interested in international development cooperation and are fighting for the trade union movement, cooperatives and civil society organisations to be recognised as development actors. We believe that South-South cooperation, which is still conducted on a government-to-government basis, should be democratised and that participation should be opened up to our organisations, which want cooperation that seeks to promote and consolidate universal social protection, progressive tax systems and the institutionalisation of living wages for all.

But all this relationship/alliance between the international labour movement and the ICA must be based on the promotion and respect of all labour rights, starting with the rights to organise and to collective bargaining.