

A CENTENARY OF EFFORTS AND IMPLEMENTATIONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL WORK ORGANIZATION

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Abstract

Year 2019 marks 100 years since the founding of the International Labour Organization, one of the oldest international organizations. This organization is dedicated to promoting social justice and respect for human rights, especially internationally recognized right to work, advancing the idea of creating decent jobs. It was created after the peace negotiations after the First World War on 11 April 1919.

The research conducted reflects the most important events in the organization's work and the legal instruments it has adopted over the course of ten decades. Among the most relevant labour standards developed by the ILO over time, we can mention: the Philadelphia Declaration adopted in 1944, the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work in 1998, the 2008 Declaration.

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I. ILO EVOLUTION

In 1919, the International Labour Organization (ILO) was established by the Versailles Treaty, materializing the fundamental idea enshrined in its Constitution that a universal and lasting peace can only be established on the basis of social justice (the ILO Constitution). In the context of the International Labour Organization, social justice implies respect for human rights, decent living standards, human labour conditions, positive employment prospects and economic security.

The idea for an international organization dealing with work problems was supported by Robert Owen (1771-1853) in Wales and Daniel Legrand (1783-1859) in France.

Although it is an intergovernmental organization, ILO has a peculiarity that distinguishes it from all other organizations of this kind, namely the system of representation and decision in the entire activity of ILO is based on the principle of tripartism (Popescu, 2006), along with the government representatives also participate social partners (employers and trade unions). So, government representatives and social partners can freely and openly debate the ILO policies and standards of work.

The tripartite approach of the ILO provides means of solving social disputes through dialogue and promotes the "social partnership" between the government, workers and employers of the ILO member states.

Its main objectives are:

- Promoting and achieving the standards and principles of fundamental labour rights;
- Creating greater opportunities for women and men in employment and decent income;
- Creasing the coverage and effectiveness of social protection for all;
- Strengthening tripartism and social dialogue.

With nearly 100 years of activity, ILO still responds to the needs of people everywhere in connection with their work rights through:

- Creating international labour standards and supervising their application;
- International technical cooperation programs;
- Adopting policies and programs to promote fundamental human rights in improving working and living conditions.

In the context of a growing focus on an issue that meets the requirements of contemporary times, the International Labour Organization, as a specialized institution of the United Nations, is an important factor in the overall efforts to develop new cooperation in the interest of the peoples.

Under the leadership of Albert Thomas (1920-1932), the first Director of the International Labour Bureau, conventions and recommendations have been adopted that have significantly influenced Member States' legislation (Popescu, 2008). There have also been some grievances from the governments of the Member States,

in the sense that they considered too many conventions, too large budget contributions and too critical ILO reports.

An important role in the evolution and work of the ILO was played by Edward Phelan, who was director during 1941-1948 and who “helped” to write the 1919 Constitution (www.ilo.org.com) and the Declaration of Philadelphia. It is also worth noting that during the term of Phelan’s mandate, the ILO became a specialized agency of the United Nations in 1946, and in 1948 the International Labour Conference adopted Convention no. 87 on freedom of association, a convention that is part of the 8 ILO fundamental conventions.

After the Second World War, in 1944, the ILO became prominent on the international stage by adopting the Declaration of Philadelphia, a document that after two years became part of the ILO Constitution. This statement defines new goals and objectives of the ILO, with a considerable influence on the work of this organization.

The Declaration of Philadelphia sets out the fundamental principles for the organization’s work, namely:

- Poverty, wherever it exists, is a danger to everyone’s prosperity;
- Work is not a commodity;
- The freedom of expression and association is an indispensable condition of sustained progress;
- All human beings, regardless of race, faith or sex, have the right to pursue their material progress and spiritual development in freedom and dignity, in economic security and with equal chances.

During 1948-1970, when ILO was led by David Morse, there have been major changes in the organization’s work, including: the number of states has doubled, the organization’s budget has increased fivefold, and industrialized countries have become a minority among the developing countries. However, this period was not without problems affecting the ILO’s activity, here we are referring to the “cold war” and the amplification of the divergences between some trade union confederations, which ultimately led to the division of the trade union movement (Popescu, 2008).

Also during this time, the ILO establishes its headquarters in Geneva, and in 1969, when the International Labour Organization reaches 50 year of activity, it receives the Nobel Peace Prize for promoting social equity and peace among nations.

Analysing the evolution of the ILO, one can see another important step in the work of this organization, the one in which the US leaves the ILO (1977-1980). Thus, with the departure of the US, one quarter of the organization’s budget is lost (the US contribution was 25%).

After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the great transformations in Central and Eastern Europe (1989), a new complex process of elaborating international labour standards (Popescu, 2008) was created and the importance of social justice is emphasized and placed in the centre of international economic and social policies.

II. ILO ACHIEVEMENTS

At the 86th session of the ILO Conference in June 1998, the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work was adopted. The overall purpose of this Statement is to encourage the efforts of the member states of the Organization to promote and respect the fundamental principles and rights enshrined in the ILO Constitution and the Declaration of Philadelphia.

Through this Declaration, the 174 ILO member states reaffirm their commitment to promote the fundamental human values, values of particular importance to the social life of any society (Voiculescu, 2009), respectively the principles already enshrined in the seven conventions considered essential to ILO.

The 1998 ILO Declaration on Principles and Rights at Work recalls that the ILO was founded on the belief that social justice is essential but not sufficient to ensure equity, social progress and the eradication of poverty. Even if it is not a legal instrument but a solemn act of the Organization, this Statement provides guidance for economic and social developments at the level of each state and is designed to promote workers’ fundamental principles and rights.

In 1999, ILO launched the concept of “Decent Work”, aiming at formulating an international objective of promoting new jobs and improving working conditions, while respecting fundamental rights at work, including reducing world poverty by half by 2015 (www.ilo.org.com).

Another important statement was adopted on 10 June 2008, the International Labour Organization Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, a statement that reminds of the decent work concept developed by the ILO in 1999. It is a reflection of a productive vision because it highlights the importance of viable enterprises creating more opportunities for employment and earning revenue for all.

Another legal instrument developed by the ILO is the Tripartite Declaration of Principles on Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy which provides guidance in areas such as employment, working conditions, industrial relations and general policies. This Declaration was adopted in 1977, but it was amended several times, the last being in 2017.

The work standards, it has adopted over the course of its 100 years of activity, are a clear evidence that this organization has responded to the major challenges of the world of work. The basic principles underpinning these standards were that “work is not a commodity and that people have the right to material well-being in terms of freedom, dignity, economic security and equality”. So far, 189 conventions and 205 recommendations have been adopted, which have underpinned the achievement of the objectives that the ILO has assumed under the Constitution. In addition, the formulation of international policies and programs on the promotion and respect of fundamental human rights through the improvement of working and living conditions, the creation of a technical cooperation program to help states implement these policies and the creation of an unique system for monitoring the application of international labour standards.

The strategic objectives outlined in the 2008 ILO Declaration on Social Justice for Fair Globalization are priorities for ILO members so far and require concrete steps in the future from international community states. An argument in this respect is that the importance of decent work in ensuring sustainable development is the Objective 8 of the *Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development* which aims to “*promote sustainable, sustainable and favourable economic growth, full employment and decent work to all*”.

On 25 September 2015, New York’s Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development was adopted by world leaders at a UN special summit. The Agenda encompasses the three dimensions of sustainable development - economic, social and environmental. This document includes 17 Sustainable Development Objectives, which will guide policy and funding for the next 15 years and which will consolidate on the progress made under the Development Goals of Millennium (Larion, 2016). It is also estimated that by 2030 more than 600 million new jobs will have to be created and the working conditions of millions of people with a \$ 2 income per day will be improved.

In 2016, ILO General Director, Guy Ryder, stressed that decent work is possible but with efforts from all social partners, namely governments, workers and employers. For this reason, the Global Labour Commission as the ILO centennial marker has been established.

The mission of this Commission is to carry out an in-depth examination of the future of work by identifying the main challenges faced by the world of work and making recommendations for fulfilling the ILO’s mandate on social justice in the 21st century. It will also help shape the ILO direction and guidelines to promote social justice and ensure sustainable peace.

The Commission’s work focuses on the following:

- Work and society;
- Decent work for all;
- Organizing work and production;
- Governance of work.

In the same note, the Commission asks the governments of the Member States to adopt a set of measures to meet the challenges posed by technological change in the world of work. Among these requests we can list: managing technological change to stimulate decent work, lifelong learning, and enabling people to improve, a universal guarantee that protects fundamental labour rights, and encourage long-term investment.

Technological advancement, artificial intelligence and automation will result in job losses, but the Commission believes that these changes can create more opportunities for new jobs. In this respect, governments, trade unions and employers need to work together to build a fair future of work by setting up national strategies.

The work-based agenda is based on three important pillars, namely:

1. Increasing investment in the human capital.

In order to progress in a period of changes in the workplace, all actors involved in the work process must create opportunities by increasing investment in policies and strategies that will help people acquire certain skills to remain active from the economic point of view. Against this background, it is necessary to ensure social protection based on the principle of solidarity and sustaining the needs of people throughout their lives.

2. Increasing investment in labour institutions.

ILO recommendations aim at strengthening work institutions by adopting labour inspection systems to reduce poverty and ensure decent work. At the same time, all workers, irrespective of their employment, enjoy all the fundamental rights provided by the ILO Constitution, among which: a decent salary, the protection of workplace health and safety, working time, freedom of association.

3. Increasing investment in decent and sustainable work.

With regard to this third pillar, we can note that the promotion of decent work can guarantee gender equality, social dialogue, and social justice for those working in the informal economy. Today we face numerous challenges and fundamental changes that directly affect work. These changes should lead to the creation of legal instruments encompassing measures for decent and sustainable work in order to align economic and social policy (Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development).

Social dialogue produces equitable and sustainable solutions to the most difficult issues facing all those involved in the development of labour relations. However, there are workers who do not benefit from the

recognition of fundamental rights at work because they work in the informal economy. That is why this Agenda 2030 is intended to focus on reorienting the economy by giving the opportunity to create decent work that will transform informal jobs into formal jobs to put an end to poverty. Also, investing in the economy can lead to job creation and improved living conditions.

Returning to the commemoration of the ILO centenary, some measures were set in 2013 to reflect on the main challenges faced by the ILO in meeting its objectives and having a direct impact on work. Member States have responded positively to this initiative launched by the ILO, with a tripartite dialogue, focusing on the four topics mentioned above and found on Agenda 2030.

III. CONCLUSIONS

Today, making a retrospective of the work of the International Labour Organization, we can conclude that the objectives set forth in the ILO Constitution, the principles proposed in the Declaration of Philadelphia and other remarkable legal instruments, are more relevant than ever. Social protection of workers, the prevention of unemployment, and the provision of income for decent living remain fields of particular importance to this organization. Therefore, the literature highlights the importance of this international organization, placing it amongst the most remarkable organizations with attributions in respecting and promoting fundamental human rights.

However, the developments and changes taking place in the globalized economy sometimes outweigh the capacity of the International Labour Organization to adapt quickly to the realities it needs to address. However, the organization remains faithful to its social objectives and has the capacity to adapt to the challenges that arise in the workplace. It must provide ideas for managing these changes and strive for reform through research and analysis.

Achieving the poverty reduction target set out in Agenda 2030 depends on the capacity of its strategies to combat it, and access to decent work is the solution to end this phenomenon

In the second century of activity, the ILO must continue to strive to meet the goals of promoting and respecting fundamental rights at work.

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