



The Holy See

***DISCORSO DI SUA SANTITÀ PIO PP. XII
AI PARTECIPANTI ALLA 127a SESSIONE DEL
CONSIGLIO D'AMMINISTRAZIONE
DELL'ORGANIZZAZIONE INTERNAZIONALE DEL LAVORO****

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During the course of the year, we have frequently had occasion to converse with representatives of a great variety of different professional associations and to express to each our interest and regard. Now it is with special pleasure that we welcome the delegates of the International Labour Organization, which certainly represents a vast number of workers, with their cares, their difficulties, and especially their aspirations for a better, a more just world.

For more than thirty years you have patiently, untiringly built up a work of which you are justly proud, not only because you have contributed to forwarding social legislation in different States, but especially because you have brought together governments, employers and workers in courageous and productive collaboration. You have led them to rise above passion, above feelings of bitter vindictiveness, above the obstinate refusal to acknowledge unavoidable change in order to listen to one another, to weigh calmly the givens of an extremely complex problem and, with common accord, to propose needed improvements. In this way, you have opened up a sort of international forum, a locus for exchange where all kinds of indispensable information and useful suggestions are received, examined, and disseminated. After a long process of formulation involving discussion and rigorous criticism, the General Conference has worked out conventions which, without having the force of law in the different member States, always required consideration and can, with ratification, become actual international treaties.

A comparison of contemporary labour legislation with its status at the time of World War I suffices to make us appreciate the extent of the work accomplished. Even during the last century, people were urging the necessity for a coordinating organization capable of unifying workers' struggles so that they could extricate themselves from the inhuman situations in which they were mired. Indeed

it was realized that measures of defence and social protection would impose economic burdens and would therefore lower the status of any country that decided to put these into effect.

Our predecessor Leo XIII had an acute perception of the great importance of workers engaging in international collaboration. As early as 1890, a year before the publication of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, the International Conference was scheduled to meet in Berlin to find ways of ameliorating the conditions of the working classes. At that time Leo XIII wrote of the meeting that it was an answer to one of his dearest wishes and added: «A conformity of views and laws insofar as these allow for different circumstances in different places and countries, will be of a nature to greatly advance matters towards a just solution» (Letter to William II, 14 March 1890, *Leonis XIII P.M. Acta*, Vol. X, Roma 1891, pp. 95-96). Shortly afterwards, in 1893, he gave his approval to the proposed congress of worker delegates without discrimination because of nationality or political adherence.

In 1900 the International Association for the Legal Protection of Workers was formed, but war soon interrupted its proceedings. It was still only a matter of private initiative. Greater hopes could be placed in an institution officially recognized by the different States. Finally, in 1919, the universal desire was fulfilled and from that time on the International Labour Organization has continued to respond ever more aptly to the expectations of workers and of all those with a sincere love for justice.

The central structure of the International Labour Organization is as follows: A General Conference, a Governing Body with an International Labour Office, which through its special organizations – regional conferences and industrial commissions – has enabled the ILO to give effective support to workers syndicates [unions] in their efforts to remedy working conditions. While the International Labour Code, concentrating chiefly on the elimination of abuses, set up your organization's main objectives during its foundational period, the Philadelphia Declaration, formulated in 1944, adapted these to new circumstances. The struggle that went on between the two World Wars made it more evident that positive solutions were needed and some of the primary elements of these were put forward: the limitation of work hours; the regulation of the work of women and adolescents; protective measures against illness, unemployment, and accidents; a call for an organic unity of projects capable of being included in formulas for social security and full employment. Among all the areas in which your efforts are being exercised, the relations between workers and employers need your attention, as here we find one of the touchiest spots in the evolution of modern society. The International Labour Organization is already engrossed in collective agreements, in conciliation and arbitration and in the collaboration of employers and workers in planning their enterprise. At the present time, the human factor, its role too long neglected – but not, however, in Catholic social doctrine – is attracting attention, especially of sociologists, and we know that you want to place it in the forefront of your considerations.

The authority and effectiveness of your institution arises in the main from its respect for the high

ideal animating those who press for a civilization completely open to the just aspirations of workers. The International Labour Organization has no desire to represent only one social class or to become an expression of any exclusive bias. It welcomes everything constructive, everything that responds to the real needs of a harmoniously formed society; because of this, our predecessor Pius XI did not hesitate to call attention to the remarkable coincidence of the principles set forth in the Labour Code with those in the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. Christian movements, for their part, wholeheartedly accept the International Labour Organization and are honoured to participate in its deliberations, hoping by so doing to reach their social goals more surely and more quickly. These propose, first of all, to establish living conditions that will safeguard inviolable human rights contained in the natural law or formulated in positive law. By itself, however, law is an inanimate norm, a barrier to fend off deviations; what is essential is the spirit that animates those who defend human rights, the impetus that goes beyond existing perspectives. These are, no doubt, better than those of the past, but they are still lacklustre in many respects and always encumbered by the uncertainty of human weakness. To engage with enthusiasm in building a temporal city where private initiative may flourish without fear; where, in full respect for all persons, the aptitudes and resources of each may unfold and flower; where people can wholeheartedly adhere to higher principles, both moral and religious, it is important to believe in spiritual values and to have a firm expectation that they will be victorious over all the forces of dissolution and discord.

Here we are dealing not just with the interests of the working class and the access of workers to the full exercise of their responsibilities but with the future of the whole human society. The labour movement cannot content itself with material successes, with achieving a perfect system of guarantees and insurances, with acquiring a greater share of influence in the economic sphere. It cannot conceptualize its future as consisting in opposition to other social classes or to the undue ascendancy of the State over the individual. It must seek an end on the same plane where your organization places yours – that is, on the universal level – as the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* envisions it, in a social order where material prosperity is engendered by sincere collaboration by all for the general good and support is given to the highest values of culture and, above all, to a consummate union of minds and hearts.

We wish you well as you bring to a close the work of the one hundred and twenty-seventh session of your Administrative Council. Keep up your tireless study of the problems of the labour world so that you can add to the material already in place, additions that will complete and consolidate the whole. May the Master of all, who became a divine Worker in order to announce his message of peace and brotherhood, continue to watch over your activities and to give you the courageous perseverance to overcome the obstacles in your path. As a sign of his loving kindness and an evidence of our high regard, we accord you and all who collaborate with the International Labour Organization our apostolic blessing.

**Paths to Peace* p.62-64.

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