

# International Labor Organization & its Contribution in Different Periods

Sanabil Almubidin

Department of Financial Economics

Hashemite University

Email: [almubidins@yahoo.com](mailto:almubidins@yahoo.com) (Author of Correspondence)

## Abstract

The International Labor Organization (ILO) is a United Nations agency that sets international labor standards and promotes social protection and work opportunities for all. The ILO has 187 member states: 186 of the 193 UN member states plus the Cook Islands are members of the ILO. The tripartite structure is unique to the ILO where representatives from the government, employers and employees openly debate and create labor standards.

The International Labor Office is the permanent secretariat of the International Labor Organization. It is the focal point for International Labor Organization's overall activities, which it prepares under the scrutiny of the Governing Body and under the leadership of the Director-General.

The Office employs some 2,700 officials from over 150 nations at its headquarters in Geneva, and in around 40 field offices around the world. Among these officials, 900 work in technical cooperation programs and projects.

In 1969, the organization received the Nobel Peace Prize for improving fraternity and peace among nations, pursuing decent work and justice for workers, and providing technical assistance to other developing nations.

**Keywords:** ILO; History; Impact; Policies; ILO Legislation; Child Labor; Contribution.

## **1. Introduction**

The International Labor Organization has developed a system of international labor standards aimed at promoting opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and dignity.

## **2. History**

While the ILO was established as an agency of the League of Nations following World War I, its founders had made great strides in social thought and action before 1919. The core members all knew one another from earlier private professional and ideological networks, in which they exchanged knowledge, experiences, and ideas on social policy. Prewar "epistemic communities", such as the International Association for Labor Legislation (IALL), founded in 1900, and political networks, such as the socialist Second International, were a decisive factor in the institutionalization of international labor politics.

In the post–World War I euphoria, the idea of a "makeable society" was an important catalyst behind the social engineering of the ILO architects. As a new discipline, international labor law became a useful instrument for putting social reforms into practice. The utopian ideals of the founding members—social justice and the right to decent work—were changed by diplomatic and political compromises made at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, showing the ILO's balance between idealism and pragmatism.

Over the course of the First World War, the international labor movement proposed a comprehensive program of protection for the working classes, conceived as compensation for labor's support during the war. Post-war reconstruction and the protection of labor unions occupied the attention of many nations during and immediately after World War I. In Great Britain, the Whitley Commission, a subcommittee of the Reconstruction Commission, recommended in its July 1918 Final Report that "industrial councils" be established throughout the world. The British Labor Party had issued its own reconstruction program in the document titled *Labor and the New Social Order*. In February 1918, the third Inter-Allied Labor and Socialist Conference (representing delegates from Great Britain, France, Belgium and Italy) issued its report, advocating an international labor rights body, an end to secret diplomacy, and other goals. And in December 1918, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) issued its own distinctively apolitical report, which called for the achievement of numerous incremental improvements via the collective bargaining process.

## **3. IFTU Bern Conference**

As the war drew to a close, two competing visions for the post-war world emerged. The first was offered by the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), which called for a meeting in Bern, Switzerland, in July

1919. The Bern meeting would consider both the future of the IFTU and the various proposals which had been made in the previous few years. The IFTU also proposed including delegates from the Central Powers as equals. Samuel Gompers, president of the AFL, boycotted the meeting, wanting the Central Powers delegates in a subservient role as an admission of guilt for their countries' role in the bringing about war. Instead, Gompers favored a meeting in Paris which would only consider President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points as a platform. Despite the American boycott, the Bern meeting went ahead as scheduled. In its final report, the Bern Conference demanded an end to wage labor and the establishment of socialism. If these ends could not be immediately achieved, then an international body attached to the League of Nations should enact and enforce legislation to protect workers and trade unions.

#### **4. Commission on International Labor Legislation**

Meanwhile, the Paris Peace Conference sought to dampen public support for communism. Subsequently, the Allied Powers agreed that clauses should be inserted into the emerging peace treaty protecting labor unions and workers' rights, and that an international labor body be established to help guide international labor relations in the future. The advisory Commission on International Labor Legislation was established by the Peace Conference to draft these proposals. The Commission met for the first time on 1 February 1919, and Gompers was elected chairman.

Two competing proposals for an international body emerged during the Commission's meetings. The British proposed establishing an international parliament to enact labor laws which each member of the League would be required to implement. Each nation would have two delegates to the parliament, one each from labor and management. An international labor office would collect statistics on labor issues and enforce the new international laws. Philosophically opposed to the concept of an international parliament and convinced that international standards would lower the few protections achieved in the United States, Gompers proposed that the international labor body be authorized only to make recommendations, and that enforcement be left up to the League of Nations. Despite vigorous opposition from the British, the American proposal was adopted.

Gompers also set the agenda for the draft charter protecting workers' rights. The Americans made 10 proposals. Three were adopted without change: That labor should not be treated as a commodity; that all workers had the right to a wage sufficient to live on; and that women should receive equal pay for equal work. A proposal protecting the freedom of speech, press, assembly, and association was amended to include only freedom of association. A proposed ban on the international shipment of goods made by children under the age of 16 was amended to ban goods made by children under the age of 14. A proposal to require an eight-hour work day was amended to require the eight-hour work day or the 40-hour work week (an exception was made for

countries where productivity was low). Four other American proposals were rejected. Meanwhile, international delegates proposed three additional clauses, which were adopted: One or more days for weekly rest; equality of laws for foreign workers; and regular and frequent inspection of factory conditions.

## **5. Interwar period**

Greenwood, Ernest H. (of the United States – Deputy Secretary general of the conference) / Secretary General: Mr. Harold B. Butler (Great Britain) / Deputy Secretaries General: Mr. Ernest H. Greenwood (United States) / Dr. Guido Pardo (Italy) / Legal Adviser: Dr. Manley O. Hudson (United States) / with staff of the first International Labor Conference, in Washington, D.C., in 1919, in front of the Pan American Union Building

The first annual conference, referred to as the International Labor Conference (ILC), began on 29 October 1919 at the Pan American Union Building in Washington, D.C. and adopted the first six International Labor Conventions, which dealt with hours of work in industry, unemployment, maternity protection, night work for women, minimum age, and night work for young persons in industry. The prominent French socialist Albert Thomas became its first director-general.

Despite open disappointment and sharp critique, the revived International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) quickly adapted itself to this mechanism. The IFTU increasingly oriented its international activities around the lobby work of the ILO.

At the time of establishment, the U.S. government was not a member of ILO, as the US Senate rejected the covenant of the League of Nations, and the United States could not join any of its agencies. Following the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt to the U.S. presidency, the new administration made renewed efforts to join the ILO without league membership. On 19 June 1934, the U.S. Congress passed a joint resolution authorizing the president to join ILO without joining the League of Nations as a whole. On 22 June 1934, the ILO adopted a resolution inviting the U.S. government to join the organization. On 20 August 1934, the U.S. government responded positively and took its seat at the ILO.

## **6. Wartime and the United Nations**

During the Second World War, when Switzerland was surrounded by German troops, ILO director John G. Winant made the decision to leave Geneva. In August 1940, the government of Canada officially invited the ILO to be housed at McGill University in Montreal. Forty staff members were transferred to the temporary offices and continued to work from McGill until 1948.

The ILO became the first specialized agency of the United Nations system after the demise of the league in 1946. Its constitution, as amended, includes the Declaration of Philadelphia (1944) on the aims and purposes of the organization.

## **7. Cold War Era**

In July, 1970, the United States withdrew 50% of its financial support to the ILO following the appointment of an assistant director-general from the Soviet Union. This appointment (by the ILO's British director-general, C. Wilfred Jenks) drew particular criticism from AFL–CIO president George Meany and from Congressman John E. Rooney. However, the funds were eventually paid.

On 12 June 1975, the ILO voted to grant the Palestinian Liberation Organization observer status at its meetings. Representatives of the United States and Israel walked out of the meeting. The U.S. House of Representatives subsequently decided to withhold funds. The United States gave notice of full withdrawal on 6 November 1975, stating that the organization had become politicized. The United States also suggested that representation from communist countries was not truly "tripartite"—including government, workers, and employers—because of the structure of these economies. The withdrawal became effective on 1 November 1977.

The United States returned to the organization in 1980 after extracting some concession from the organization. It was partly responsible for the ILO's shift away from a human rights approach and towards support for the Washington Consensus. Economist Guy Standing wrote "the ILO quietly ceased to be an international body attempting to redress structural inequality and became one promoting employment equity".

In 1981, martial law was declared in Poland. Activities of Solidarnosc were interrupted and many of its leaders and members were detained. The ILO Committee on Freedom of Association revised the case and filed a complaint against Poland at the 1982 International Labor Conference. A Commission of Inquiry was established to examine the case and it found the ILO Conventions No. 87 on freedom of association and No. 98 on trade union rights, ratified by Poland in 1957, were violated. The ILO and many other countries and organizations put pressure on the Polish government who finally gave legal status to Solidarnosc in 1989. During that same year, there was a round table between the Government and Solidarnoc to agree on the terms of the realization under ILO principles. They also agreed to hold the first free elections in Poland since the Second World War.

## **8. Programs**

The ILO is a major provider of labor statistics. Labor statistics are an important tool for its member states to monitor their progress toward improving labor standards. As part of their statistical work, ILO maintains several databases. This database covers 11 major data series for over 200 countries. In addition, ILO publishes

a number of compilations of labor statistics, such as the Key Indicators of Labor Markets (KILM). KILM covers 20 main indicators on labor participation rates, employment, unemployment, educational attainment, labor cost, and economic performance. Many of these indicators have been prepared by other organizations. For example, the Division of International Labor Comparisons of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics prepares the hourly compensation in manufacturing indicator.

The U.S. Department of Labor also publishes a yearly report containing a List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor issued by the Bureau of International Labor Affairs. The December 2014 updated edition of the report listed a total of 74 countries and 136 goods.

### **9. Training and Teaching Units**

The International Training Centre of the International Labor Organization (ITCILO) is based in Turin, Italy. Together with the University of Turin Department of Law, the ITC offers training for ILO officers and secretariat members, as well as offering educational programs. The ITC offers more than 450 training and educational programs and projects every year for some 11,000 people around the world.

For instance, the ITCILO offers a Master of Laws program in management of development, which aims specialize professionals in the field of cooperation and development.

### **10. Child Labor**

The term child labor is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, potential, dignity, and is harmful to their physical and mental development.

Child labor refers to work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children. Further, it can involve interfering with their schooling by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school, obliging them to leave school prematurely, or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work.

In its most extreme forms, child labor involves children being enslaved, separated from their families, exposed to serious hazards and illnesses and left to fend for themselves on the streets of large cities – often at a very early age. Whether or not particular forms of "work" can be called child labor depends on the child's age, the type and hours of work performed, the conditions under which it is performed and the objectives pursued by individual countries. The answer varies from country to country, as well as among sectors within countries.

## **11. ILO's Response to Child Labor**

The ILO's International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC) was created in 1992 with the overall goal of the progressive elimination of child labor, which was to be achieved through strengthening the capacity of countries to deal with the problem and promoting a worldwide movement to combat child labor. The IPEC currently has operations in 88 countries, with an annual expenditure on technical cooperation projects that reached over US\$61 million in 2008. It is the largest program of its kind globally and the biggest single operational program of the ILO.

The number and range of the IPEC's partners have expanded over the years and now include employers' and workers' organizations, other international and government agencies, private businesses, community-based organizations, NGOs, the media, parliamentarians, the judiciary, universities, religious groups and children and their families.

The IPEC's work to eliminate child labor is an important facet of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda. Child labor not only prevents children from acquiring the skills and education they need for a better future,

## **12. Exceptions in Indigenous Communities**

Because of different cultural views involving labor, the ILO developed a series of culturally sensitive mandates, including convention Nos. 169, 107, 138, and 182, to protect indigenous culture, traditions, and identities. Convention Nos. 138 and 182 lead in the fight against child labor, while Nos. 107 and 169 promote the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples and protect their right to define their own developmental priorities.

In many indigenous communities, parents believe children learn important life lessons through the act of work and through the participation in daily life. Working is seen as a learning process preparing children of the future tasks they will eventually have to do as an adult. It is a belief that the family's and child well-being and survival is a shared responsibility between members of the whole family. They also see work as an intrinsic part of their child's developmental process. While these attitudes toward child work remain, many children and parents from indigenous communities still highly value education.

## **13. Issues**

The ILO has considered the fight against forced labor to be one of its main priorities. During the interwar years, the issue was mainly considered a colonial phenomenon, and the ILO's concern was to establish minimum standards protecting the inhabitants of colonies from the worst abuses committed by economic interests. After 1945, the goal became to set a uniform and universal standard, determined by the higher awareness gained during World War II of politically and economically motivated systems of forced labor, but

debates were hampered by the Cold War and by exemptions claimed by colonial powers. Since the 1960s, declarations of labor standards as a component of human rights have been weakened by government of postcolonial countries claiming a need to exercise extraordinary powers over labor in their role as emergency regimes promoting rapid economic development.

In June 1998 the International Labor Conference adopted a Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its follow-up that obligates member states to respect, promote and realize freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labor, the effective abolition of child labor, and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

With the adoption of the declaration, the ILO created the InFocus Program on Promoting the Declaration which is responsible for the reporting processes and technical cooperation activities associated with the declaration; and it carries out awareness raising, advocacy and knowledge functions.

Since its inception, the SAP-FL has focused on raising global awareness of forced labor in its different forms, and mobilizing action against its manifestation. Several thematic and country-specific studies and surveys have since been undertaken, on such diverse aspects of forced labor as bonded labor, human trafficking, forced domestic work, rural servitude, and forced prison labor.

One major tool to fight forced labor was the adoption of the ILO Forced Labor Protocol by the International Labor Conference in 2014. It was ratified for the second time in 2015 and in November 9 2016 it entered into force. The new protocol brings the existing ILO Convention 29 on Forced Labor, adopted in 1930, into the modern era to address practices such as human trafficking. The accompanying Recommendation 203 provides technical guidance on its implementation.

In 2015, the ILO launched a global campaign to end modern slavery, in partnership with the International Organization of Employers (IOE) and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). The 50 for Freedom campaign aims to mobilize public support and encourage countries to ratify the ILO's Forced Labor Protocol.

#### **14. Minimum Wage Law**

To protect the right of labors for fixing minimum wage, ILO has created Minimum Wage-Fixing Machinery Convention, 1928, Minimum Wage Fixing Machinery (Agriculture) Convention, 1951 and Minimum Wage Fixing Convention, 1970 as minimum wage law.



## **15. HIV/AIDS**

The International Labor Organization (ILO) is the lead UN-agency on HIV workplace policies and programmers and private sector mobilization. The ILO recognizes that HIV has a potentially devastating impact on labor and productivity and represents an enormous burden for working people, their families and communities. ILOAIDS is the branch of the ILO dedicated to this issue.

The ILO has been involved with the HIV response since 1998. In June 2001, the ILO's governing body adopted a pioneering code of practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work, which was launched during a special session of the UN General Assembly.

In 2010, the 99th International Labor Conference adopted the ILO's recommendation concerning HIV and AIDS and the world of work, 2010 (No. 200), the first international labor standard on HIV and AIDS. The recommendation lays out a comprehensive set of principles to protect the rights of HIV-positive workers and their families, while scaling up prevention in the workplace. Working under the theme of Preventing HIV, Protecting Human Rights at Work, ILOAIDS undertakes a range of policy advisory, research and technical support functions in the area of HIV and AIDS and the world of work. The ILO also works on promoting social protection as a means of reducing vulnerability to HIV and mitigating its impact on those living with or affected by HIV.

ILOAIDS is currently engaged in the "Getting to Zero" campaign to arrive at zero new infections, zero AIDS-related deaths and zero-discrimination by 2015. Building on this campaign, ILOAIDS is executing a program of voluntary and confidential counselling and testing at work, known as VCT@WORK.

## **16. Migrant Workers**

As the word "migrant" suggests, migrant workers refer to those who moves from one country to another to do their job. For the rights of migrant workers, ILO has adopted conventions, including Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 and United Nations Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families in 1990.

## **17. Domestic Workers**

Domestic workers are those who perform a variety of tasks for and in other peoples' homes. For example, they may cook / clean the house and look after children. Yet they are often the ones with the least consideration, excluded from labor and social protection. This is mainly due to the fact that women have traditionally carried out the tasks without pay. For the rights and decent work of domestic workers including migrant domestic workers, ILO has adopted Convention on domestic workers on 16 June 2011.

## **18. ILO and Globalization**

Seeking a process of globalization that is inclusive, democratically governed and provides opportunities and tangible benefits for all countries and people. The World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization was established by the ILO's governing body in February 2002 at the initiative of the director-general in response to the fact that there did not appear to be a space within the multilateral system that would cover adequately and comprehensively the social dimension of the various aspects of globalization. The World Commission Report, *A Fair Globalization: Creating Opportunities for All*, is the first attempt at structured dialogue among representatives of constituencies with different interests and opinions on the social dimension of globalization, aimed at finding common ground on one of the most controversial and divisive subjects of our time.

## **19. Future of Work**

The ILO launched the Future of Work Initiative in order to gain understanding on the transformations that occur in the world of work and thus be able to develop ways of responding to these challenges.

The initiative begun in 2016 by gathering the views of government representatives, workers, employers, academics and other relevant figures around the world. About 110 countries participated in dialogues at the regional and national level. These dialogues were structured around "four centenary conversations: work and society, decent jobs for all, the organization of work and production, and the governance of work."

The second step took place in 2017 with the establishment of the Global Commission on the Future of Work dealing with the same "four centenary conversations". A report is expected to be published prior to the 2019 Centenary International Labor Conference.

The aim of this Commission is to set the basis for the delivery of the "social justice mandate" in the 21st century. It will analyze the proper manner of structuring the world of work which is constantly transforming so that it responds to the values of social justice.

There are 28 members in the Global Commission who are all eminent individuals with outstanding personal achievements and vision. They represent a balance of geographical regions and experiences, with equal participation of women and men.

## **20. Conclusion**

The ILO organizes once a year the International Labor Conference in Geneva to set the broad policies of the ILO, including conventions and recommendations. Also known as the "international parliament of labor", the

conference makes decisions about the ILO's general policy, work program and budget and also elects the Governing Body.

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### **Author Details**

**Sanabil Almubidin** is a PhD student in Department of Financial Economics at Hashemite University, Jordan. He passed his B.S.S & M.S.S successfully from University of Zarqa. He is very interested in social and international economy concerning national and international economic growth and welfare of societies. He engaged himself in scientific research in the field of economy.