



**Gerry Rodgers, Eddy Lee, Lee Swepston, Jasmien Van Daele**  
**The International Labour Organization and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919–2009**  
**Geneva, 2009**

[http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/ilo-bookstore/order-online/books/WCMS\\_104643/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/ilo-bookstore/order-online/books/WCMS_104643/lang--en/index.htm)

**Francais:**

[http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/ilo-bookstore/order-online/books/WCMS\\_104645/lang--fr/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/ilo-bookstore/order-online/books/WCMS_104645/lang--fr/index.htm)

**Espanol:**

[www.ilo.org/global/publications/ilo-bookstore/order-online/books/WCMS\\_104680/lang--es/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/ilo-bookstore/order-online/books/WCMS_104680/lang--es/index.htm)

Despite the ILO's long history, its mandate, role and policy still appear to be little known. This book reviews the development of the oldest organization of the UN-family over the last 90 years.

**Human rights and rights at work**

From the beginning the ILO's concern with social and economic human rights was wide and varied, laid down in its Constitution from 1919. After WWI the ILO was founded in the belief that social justice is an essential foundation of universal peace. The Declaration of Philadelphia (1944) was its second landmark document, addressing: freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, forced labour, discrimination at work and child labour; all subsequently anchored in the 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work as core labour standards.

**The quality of work**

The drive to create the ILO came in large part from the urgent need to improve the appalling working conditions faced by large parts of the working class during the Industrial Revolution. Generally, the ILO's engagement with working conditions has been concentrated on protection, risk and vulnerability. On hours of work, the ILO has contributed substantially to policy debates and advocated the 40-hour week as early as the 1930s. On wage policy, the ILO was an important actor for many years, even though its presence in policy debates weakened after the 1970s. An effort to remedy this situation has started recently with, for example, the annual publication of the "Global Wage Report". Today, there is an agenda to be developed on the positive dimensions of the quality of work – creativity, engagement, social inclusion, participation, fulfilment. They fit well into the more integrated and coherent approach that is promoted under the Decent Work Agenda, and could perhaps revive the framework that brings together ILO work on employment, social protection, rights at work, and social dialogue.

### **Income security and social protection**

The ILO's history of action to secure social protection was reflected in the flagship Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention No. 102 (1952). However, it is still only 20 per cent of the population worldwide who enjoys adequate social protection. While the coverage rate is comparatively high in industrialized countries, in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia it is only from five to 10 per cent. In this context the ILO has underlined the huge practical difficulties involved in promoting the implementation of universal social security, and has developed the concept of a Social Protection Floor (SPF). The idea of the SPF is supporting different models of social protection, adapted to the local context: social assistance, universal schemes, social insurance and public or private provisions.

### **Employment and poverty reduction**

In the period during the two Wars, the ILO's work on employment was at the forefront of progressive thinking on economic and social policy, opposing disastrous laissez-faire policies and connecting with the development of what has become known as Keynesian economics. In the first decades after the Second World War the ILO's role declined. The bulk of the ILO's advisory and technical assistance no longer focussed on basic issues such as the relationship between development strategy and employment policy, but on niche areas such as vocational training, labour productivity, and manpower planning. By launching the World Employment Programme (WEP) in 1969, the ILO put employment creation and basic needs at the heart of international development policy through an integrated "redistribution with growth" strategy. Unfortunately, the ILO was not able to maintain this momentum into the 1980s, partly due to a change in the dominant political and economic ideologies. It lacked the technical capacity and political consensus to successfully formulate more socially-oriented alternatives to conventional neo-liberal thinking and the structural adjustment programmes promoted by the leading political and economic powers. Fortunately there are rudimentary signs that this situation is changing again, given the promotion of the Global Jobs Pact and the reaction to recent publications such as the Global Employment Trends Report.

### **Decent work and a fair globalization**

Building a coherent and integrated approach that brings together social and economic policies on a global level has always been a challenge. The goal of decent work is now the frame of reference for the ILO's action, and it has been widely endorsed, both as a way of incorporating a social dimension in the process of globalization, and as a way of structuring the ILO's work at the national level. The ILO's 2008 Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization takes this process further and consolidates the Decent Work Agenda in the ILO's structures and programmes. The notion of decent work has raised the profile of the ILO as a global player, but some tough issues still lie ahead. In the ILO's history, the key times of change, for better or worse, have followed war, economic turmoil or political crisis. We may again be entering such a period, and how the ILO responds, not only in its policies, but also in its structures and methods, will surely make a difference to whether the emerging global economy meets the goals of people around the world for rights, jobs and security.