

Guest Editors' Introduction

The Future and Praxis of Decent Work

Phoebe Moore, Middlesex University, United Kingdom
with
Charles Dannreuther, Leeds University, United Kingdom
Christian Möllmann, University of Kassel, Germany

Introduction

This Special Issue was inspired by an event that I proposed to hold and then co-organised with Christoph Scherrer, Charles Dannreuther and Christian Möllmann at the University of Kassel's International Centre for Development and Decent Work (ICDD) on 13–14 February 2013. Funding came from various sources: the ICDD offered to fund and co-organise a large part of this event; further funding was awarded from the European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) Action IS0 902 'Systemic Risk and the Financial Crisis'; the International Political Economy Group (IPEG), a research working group convened by Moore for the British International Studies Association from 2011 to 2014. We invited and received contributions for a possible special issue at that time.

Later, in 2014, together with Conor Cradden, I co-organised the event 'Regulating for Decent Work' for the European Workshops in International Studies at the European International Studies Association in Izmir, Turkey. This allowed us to recruit further articles.

So co-editors have run events, developed article submissions, and worked on various drafts of this introduction, and I can't thank them enough for their contributions. I also want to thank all reviewers for reading and reviewing articles, and for Guy Standing for giving me comments on this introduction.

While editing this Special Issue has been a long process, it has been a riveting one as we watch how changes to the global world of work have included the exposure of unfree labour, and how the economic crisis continues to depress the labour market. The question of social clauses and labour standards in trade relations becomes more urgent as the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is debated. The case studies in this Special Issue demonstrate the application of International Labour Organisation (ILO) principles of decent work at the national level, and continue to promote the ideals of international solidarity advocated by the ILO but in much weakened national labour markets. Further, there are significant strategic and substantive differences in terms of agendas, organisation and resources. Showing the limitations as well as potentials for decent work as a 'game-changer', Felix Hauf first discusses the relevance of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda for labour union strategies in Indonesia, drawing on related fieldwork. Hauf compares two seemingly contradictory approaches to decent work in Indonesia, looking specifically at the garment, textile and shoes industry. Antonella Mennella and Martina Lavagnini next discuss the basic-relations-fairness proposal in Italy, framed from the debate on decent work as an instrument that could measure specifics of human development. Jamie Morgan and Wendy Olsen then look at the case of India for absences of decent work, where forced and unfree labour are

exacerbated by the economism of the neo-liberal global system and by an age-old local caste system. Rafael Peels and Marialaura Fino examine the question of social clauses and labour provisions in trade agreements to identify to what extent this can facilitate decent work reforms in the face of the proposed EU–US Transatlantic Trade and Investment Agreement. Dragan Tevdovski's contribution addresses two main questions: First, what is the current situation of decent work? Secondly, what policies and measures should be taken in order to ensure decent work conditions from the perspective of a Western Balkans country, the Republic of Macedonia, in the context of the financial and economic crisis unfolding the region since 2008? Finally, Lore Van den Putte suggests that the involvement of civil society is the way to promote the decent work agenda comparing the US and EU approaches in the case of South Korea.

Decent work and related issues have received significant attention in the *Global Labour Journal* and many of the themes of this Special Issue resonate with previous discussions (Routh, 2011; Rosewarne, 2013; Munck, 2010; Hennebert and Bourque, 2011; Srivastava, 2012). However, previous contributions have not explicitly nor extensively addressed how the concept of decent work has been utilised in country-specific projects and policy, nor has this concept been fully reconsidered in the most recent context of global crises we have faced. The decent work agenda is not a finished project, we claim, and we are interested in any potential for praxis and social change that a rethink as well as a renewed commitment to this agenda may initiate. In particular, a return to the concept of dignity at work as seen in the original documentation informing the foundations of the ILO is perhaps a way to revisit and refresh this increasingly important agenda as management continues its drive for accumulation and as multinational corporations continue their race to the bottom. Crisis often results in an assumed lowering of standards around what people can expect at work, and perhaps decency is not enough.

So this Special Issue's articles provide critical and up-to-date case studies looking at Indonesia, Italy, India, the Republic of Macedonia and South Korea around specific analytical dimensions: the making and experience or absence of decent working conditions, socio-political organisation of workers, the involvement of civil society, and the creation and application of policy knowledge about decent work and struggles for decent-work-oriented societal transformations. This issue thereby seeks to identify both limitations and emancipatory aspects of decent work as part of the ILO's mandate and as a policy instrument. Despite calls for the ILO to take a more oppositional stance to global capital (Cox, 1971, 1973, 1977; Standing, 2005, 2008, 2009; Elliot and Freeman, 2003; Selwyn, 2013, 2014) and significantly critical schools of thought including the Social Movement Internationalism school, the Strategic Misdirection school, the Organisational Challenges school, and the more general ILO school (Hughes and Haworth, 2011: 96), there are several factors that prevent the ILO from currently going beyond endorsing a minimal level of decency for the workplaces we cover in the case studies in this Special Issue.

In this introduction our aims are to provide an overview of the trajectory of events throughout the history of the ILO from the point at which dignity and social justice drove the organisation through to the current era of decent work, during which time we can also identify the modernisation of this organisation. We aim to identify whether there is a chance that decent work as a policy goal can ever have transformative potential given the prevailing and indeed intensifying power of neo-liberal capitalism. At its inception the formation of the ILO introduced the idea that peace and stability could be achieved through social justice and human rights. The composition of the organisation conflicts with most preceding orthodoxy, and the United Kingdom invited voices from non-state actors that led to its tripartite formation, which was an original social experiment for its time. However, 'pluralism says nothing directly about privilege... the more privileged are the better organised, the best able to profit by the interplay of interests... pluralism and tripartism are synonymous ideological terms expressing the corporative reality' (Cox, 1977: 394).

Here we outline a history of the ILO. At its inception, its normative position was based on international cooperation. It moved on to deal with the negative pressures of globalisation, to become an increasingly standardised, professionalised organisation that focuses on *core standards* rather than *the world of work* and *principles over rights*. We are interested to know whether decent work as a policy instrument poses limits to the full application of rights-related frameworks in national context, or whether it has been as flexible toward national aims as was intended. In the period of the ILO's founding and the interwar years, there was a recognised need for a workforce to rebuild the infrastructures and societies torn apart by battle. A militarised proletariat was seen as a threat by some, though many workers themselves were interested in a socialist future. Various trade union meetings had been held in combating and neutral countries during the war. The formation of the ILO was led by the United Kingdom (with France), where opinions on labour issues were as a matter of course recorded by the UK Ministry of Labour's Intelligence Department. After the Declaration of the Bulgarian Armistice on 29 September 1918, the Ministry began to consider its position and strategy in discussing what could be done to manage the perceived threat. It appeared from intelligence recordings that domestic forces favoured international labour regulation rather than traditional state regulation of labour, reflecting the rising strength of 'mass society's position' (Symons, 2010: 20).

Two visions for the future of global labour organisation were tabled in 1919 by two large labour union federations, the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) and the American Federation of Labour (AFL). Each Federation organised its own meeting for related discussions. The IFTU had been preceded by the International Secretariat and was the forerunner to the Socialist International. At its meeting in Bern, the IFTU took a specific line in discussions toward setting up a labour organisation, and its Constitution reflected left-leaning perspectives. The AFL, on the other hand, had been the first workers' union in the United States of America (USA); it was set up in 1886 by a number of craft unions whose members elected Samuel Gompers, head of the Cigar Maker's International Union, as president. Several unions left this federation because it opposed industrial unionism, a debate that continued throughout the period of industrialisation and demonstrates its more right-leaning tendencies. So the AFL took a less radical orientation at the Peace Conference in suggestions for the establishment of a labour organisation.

Discussions at the Peace Conference circled around US President Wilson's 14 points. They included whether non-labour specialist diplomats were appropriate for ILO decision making, who and how many representatives were necessary to make decisions, and the relative importance of collective bargaining. Perhaps the most controversial discussions at the Peace Conference were on the questions of unemployment and distribution, because at that time employment was closely linked to the availability of many materials given the necessity for post- (or what turned out to be inter-) war reconstruction. Baldesi of the Italian delegation requested a fair distribution of raw materials but this was not enacted; indeed, 'the majority of the Committee was against him... [this kind of action would] raise suspicions about the real nature of the ILO, especially producer nations... To impose a system of raw material distribution would interfere with the rights of private and national property, and would be useless if the selling prices and rates of exchange between the selling and buying nations were not also fixed' (Alcock, 1971: 45). So private property, which is a key feature of capitalist values, was prioritised in this decision.

At the Peace Conference the question was also raised as to what incentives there would be to agree to principles that could potentially hamper countries' competitive status in post-war industry, and how labour obligations could be introduced without having access to thorough, ongoing studies of each involved countries' situation. The conclusion was that these tasks were insurmountable, so a better strategy would be to organise an International Commission which would review and research possibilities for international regulations of labour conditions. However, this alternative was not an absolute panacea, given the complexities that configuring any international commission would raise:

Who would attend as decision makers? Would attendance be required or optional? What representation powers would states have and how would a hierarchy be decided? Would representatives of both workers and employers attend? How would decisions be enforced? Without complete answers to these questions, discussions continued. Focus was placed on the prescient forces of communism and the Bolshevik faction of the Marxist Russian Social Democratic Party, a revolutionary group that intended to represent Russia's working class and that aimed to neutralise and steer workers away from this force.

In this light, Samuel Gompers drew up the Constitution, following a preliminary draft Labour Charter he had also coordinated. The following Peace Treaty principles were voted and established in this Labour Charter:

1. That labour should not be regarded merely as a commodity or article of commerce
2. The right of association
3. The payment of an adequate wage to maintain a reasonable standard of living
4. An aimed eight-hour day or forty-eight hour week
5. Abolition of child labour
6. A weekly reset of at least 24 hours
7. Equal pay for equal work
8. Equitable economic treatment of all workers in a country (i.e. for immigrants as well as nationals)
9. Inspection system to ensure the enforcement of laws for worker protection.

Significantly, several items that the socialist-leaning IFTU had hoped for after its own Berne February Resolutions did not appear in the Labour Charter. Oversights included what the IFTU had hoped would be phrased as a required eight-hour day rather than an aimed-for day of this length, the suppression of all laws oppressing the right of association, a thirty-six hour rest period, a minimum wage, struggle against unemployment, and the complete lifting of immigration restrictions. The Preamble was organised around two principles, one of which is the duty to promote social justice and the second to address a 'risk of revolutionary agitation and contagion' (Maupain, 2009: 832). Alcock (1971: 36) states that it was hoped that the ILO would set an example of 'class co-operation', where no one class would emerge victorious, but the 'cause of the revolutionaries received a rebuff which they did not forget'. Indeed, to a large extent the ILO was formed as a counter-revolutionary entity in the face of rising communist uprisings and Bolshevism. The tone for ILO work and values was thus set. The ILO was not a socialist organisation, but it endorsed a democracy of tripartism and 'fair competition' (Novitz, 2003: 97). So at the outset, the liberal voice won. Hopes for socialism were dashed. The ILO was born.

Desires to prevent conflict through the setting up of internationally cooperating organisations were dashed with World War II. On 10 May 1944 in Philadelphia, the ILO announced its Declaration Concerning Aims and Purposes, listing some of the values for its mandate that foreshadowed the United Nations Charter but that were seen as important given the circumstances. Of particular interest is the first item mentioned in the second section, which was headlined with a statement about social justice and peace, stating: 'all human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and [and] of economic security and equal opportunity'. *Dignity* is mentioned here, but *decency* is not. Dignity at work is very different from decency. Dignity is a term used in philosophy. Nietzsche asked whether labour could be dignified at all, given that the state form has been built on a broad base of slaves (Wilson, 2013:275; Rosen, 2012: 41–46). But the concept of dignity is linked to a human rights agenda, and dignity of work is something that can be challenged in courts of law

(Rosen, 2012: 63–125). Decency, on the other hand, as we see below, is linked to *principles* rather than the rights that now drive the ILO mandate.

Moving into the 1940s, nationalised industries and decentralised public utility institutions increased and the trade union movement was comparably strong. The proposed Havana Charter in 1948 included discussions to establish an International Trade Organisation that would cooperate with the ILO, deal with complaints about unfair labour conditions, and utilise the ITO's dispute settlement procedures (Orbie, Gistelinck and Kerremans, 2009). However, the ITO failed to materialise. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), replaced by the WTO in 1994, was founded instead. Neither GATT nor the WTO included full protections of labour rights.

Into the 1950s and 1960s, decolonisation led to an increase in ILO membership although the trade union movement waned. The Cold War propagated an East/West divide and largely paralysed all United Nations agencies. A strong North Atlantic bias was prevalent during this period in any research that looked at the US and the USSR. The postcolonial era brought a South/North discussion to the fore, which brought about an interest in the ILO's capabilities to push a broad multilateral effort toward universal human rights. The debate centred on the 'supposed dichotomy between universalism and diversity, or the problems of reconciling a wide international membership with the specific needs for the regions (Latin America, Asia and Africa)' (Van Daele, 2010: 28). ILO research during that period began to focus on the legal aspect of member states' compliance with international labour standards, rather than looking closely at the technical aspects of the work of the ILO throughout the 1970s. This meant that some detail was lost and inherent power relations were largely overlooked (Van Daele, 2010: 28). Ernst Haas (1958) noted that international organisations do not simply take on assigned activities, but that their technocrats play an active role in 'task expansion', and that the lack of politically informed research reflects the ILO's role in avoiding detailed analysis of local technical work.

The 1970s saw a rapid turnover of Directors General. The USA left the ILO after the ILO condemned Israel for violation of trade union rights in occupied territories (Van Daele, 2010: 27), and due to its disagreements with the way that workers were represented by socialist countries, which was not seen to cohere with the model the ILO and AFL advanced. Cox (1977: 388) called the model that was advanced by the ILO and more generally in this phase the 'corporative state'. The USA's exit reduced the ILO's budget considerably and exacerbated this period of relative stasis. ILO research focused on the 'power and prestige of individual states within international organizations' during the Cold War (Van Daele, 2010: 27) rather than the technical work of the organisation.

Robert W. Cox, who was the Director of the ILO's International Institute for Labour Studies and who had served other roles in the ILO over time, left the organisation after a disagreement with Director General Wilfred Jenks about the autonomy of research publications and the intellectual freedom of the Institute itself. Cox described the ILO in terms of hegemonic relations and argued that although the organisation operated as a 'limited monarchy', hegemonic international powers strongly determined how autonomous the ILO could be. Daily organisational activities ceased to be linked to the ILO Constitution and mandate in the context of Cold War tensions, whereby unions were weakened or sided with dominant interests such as the AFL, known for its embrace of American free enterprise (Cox, 1977: 394). Meanwhile, industrial sectors in the richer state members of the ILO were at risk as developing areas offered a supposed comparative advantage of underpaid labour and outsourcing, and racing to the bottom became a very real alternative. What were once non-negotiable objectives agreed by trade unions and management increasingly became negotiable. This included 'workforce reductions and plant closures, wage curbs, work intensification, [and] the replacement of collective bargaining over many issues by joint consultation' (Hyman, 1987: 51).

In the 1980s, the Keynesian model of full employment, still hoped for by some ILO members, was forcibly replaced by the Washington Consensus with the Reagan and Thatcher governments

navigating towards deregulation and inflation targeting. ILO members were polarised, and the ILO during this period suffered a crisis of legitimacy, not because it had lost its 'role in world society' (Van Daele, 2010: 29) but because its operations were, and of course still are, subject to hegemonic state influence over values and the issue of financial support. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 opened the possibility for rethinking the ILO's position in the world and provided a chance to divorce from hegemonic values. But the next moment for labour rights bargaining at the international level occurred in April 1994, at the final session of the Trade Negotiations Committee at Ministerial level held at Marrakesh, Morocco, when the WTO was set up as a replacement for GATT. The WTO was asked to include labour rights in trade agreements it would procure, but it refused and instead appealed to the ILO to do so by stating: 'the ILO is the competent body to set up and deal with these standards, and we affirm our support for its work in promoting them' (WTO, 1996). This statement had a surprisingly positive effect on the ILO, 'boosting the ILO's prestige and morale' (Charnovitz, 2000: 158). However, it did not mean that the ILO tightened its approach to standards enforcement, despite ILO Director General Michel Hansenne's warning in his annual report that 'an unbridled liberalisation of trade can work against the social objectives of the ILO' (ILO, 1994: 58).

To respond to WTO discussions, the ILO published the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights of Work and its Follow Up in 1998. The Declaration acknowledges the rise in informal workers, migrants and unemployed individuals, and consolidates four categories to promote universal principles, regardless of a countries' level of development, four goals that became known as core labour standards:

- Freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining
- Elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour
- Effective abolition of child labour
- Elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

Two follow-up procedures were also put into place that, in the absence of a legislative mechanism, would ensure implementation of these standards. At this time, the ILO consciously became an increasingly results-based organisation. While Article 33 of the Constitution actually gives the ILO authority to take action against countries that fall out of compliance membership obligations, it has rarely used this authority and has preferred supervisory and technical assistance. There is limited impact that the ILO can have in actual enforcement, and these introduced follow-up procedures rely on soft promotional techniques (Alston, 2004: 457). 'Procedures' are, to be precise, set as a requirement that governments failing to ratify a convention must report regularly 'on the state of their law and practice and on the difficulties that were preventing or delaying ratification' (Charnovitz, 2000: 153). Secondly, the ILO Director-General is required to write an annual report about one of the four principles in the Declaration, to be discussed by the Governing Body and at the ILO Conference (Chamovitz, 2000: 153–154). These enforcement mechanisms were seen as 'nothing short of revolution in legal terms', claimed in one case to attain '*jus cogens* status' (Alston, 2004: 460) despite not being as forceful as the special procedures that were put into place by the ILO in 1951 to hold governments to account for contraventions to the Freedom of Association.

While the term 'core' was not itself used in the 1998 Declaration, the concept of core labour standards is now essentially ubiquitous. The implementation of standards that are seen as 'core' demonstrates a shift in attempts to create a hierarchy of standards, which is a 'very significant departure from the insistence within the international human rights regime on the equal importance of all human rights' (Alston, 2004: 460). Indeed the official UN position is that all 'human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated' (Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, para. 5, cited in Alston, 2004: 460.). The Declaration also refers to 'principles' which may

have been influenced by the North American Agreement on Labour Cooperation (NAALC) where the 11 standards are called 'guiding principles'. The use of this term was critiqued because principles are not identical to 'rights'.

The Declaration was viewed with further scepticism, as an attempt to assuage a growing interest in social clauses and because it was seen to crystallise the reformist character of the ILO rather than to challenge global capital. Juanita Elias (2007: 46–47) argues that core labour standards are largely voluntarist and driven by neo-liberal values, focusing on supposed equal *opportunities* and *access* rather than addressing globally structural gender inequality. Guy Standing, who was a senior ILO official for more than 30 years, was part of the transition team at the time Juan Somavia took office in 1998. Standing was keen to see the ILO act as more than an arbiter of core labour standards. He argued that the post-1994 transition, which focused on these standards rather than promoting a system that would defend workers' rights, and in particular freedom of association, was misguided, and would lead to the ILO's failure. He stated that the 'Global Transformation yearns for a body establishing and inducing implementation of rules, codes of conduct and Conventions promoting equitable practices... like it or not... labour is a commodity and the ILO cannot do much about it' (cited in Hughes and Haworth, 2011: 98). Standing's (2009) point was that the framework concept should be Dignified Work, and advocated seven forms of work-related security. The concept of 'work' should effectively replace 'labour', with all forms of work included.

Given the publication of the core labour standards, then, the new agenda toward *decent work*, which Juan Somavia introduced at his election as Director-General, was well timed. Somavia's report to the International Labour Conference (ILC) in Geneva in 1999, and his 'Reducing the decent work deficit: a global challenge' report to the ILC in 2001 demonstrated a specific value-modernisation programme. Somavia prioritised employment creation, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue as the four core features of a Decent Work Agenda (DWA). The Agenda was intended to provide a malleable set of principles that could be applied with local relevance, but it led to some attrition of senior officials, including Guy Standing. Indeed, decency is a relatively vague concept. Somavia noted that 'the invisible hand of the market needs to be guided by a caring eye... decent work is not defined in terms of any fixed standard or monetary level... But everybody, everywhere, has a sense of what decent work means in terms of their own lives, in relation to their own society' (cited in Vosko, 2002: 26). The malleability of the term demonstrates the need to mediate between global capital and specific member states of the G-77 and unions, but the reference to the invisible hand provides a mirror for normative posturing. Buchanan and Keohane (2006) view organisations that provide benefits based on a 'minimal moral acceptability' as falling into the category of legitimate, which fits well with the decision to emphasise decent work rather than perhaps more criteria such as pushing for higher standards of living, a living wage, the elimination of underemployment through elimination of zero-hours contracts, and the renewal of social protections (Moore, 2014).

The concept of *decency* as a labour condition is at risk of being seen as simply a minimal standard of what can be expected by workers rather than, as evidenced in earlier key ILO documents, *dignified* work. Standing (2005: 94) refers to work as dignifying in an anecdotal reference to a discussion he had with a young Jamaican man who told him, 'I want a work, not a job', meaning that he wanted 'an occupation which would lead to his being secure and respected in his community and family, with status, a sense of dignity and the possibility of self-improvement'. Where the term has had most impact is in the Domestic Workers Convention. Suggested in 2008, in 2010 the Convention was placed on the Conference agenda with the view to set decent work standards for domestic workers. It re-entered the Agenda at the 100th Session and entered into force in September 2013 with a notable rate of success.

The principles of the core labour standards and the DWA do not explicitly deal with the pressing issues around whether promotional activity would be enough to ensure conventions are

ratified and implemented. The problematic shift away from the concept of *rights* to a less encompassing terrain of *principles* and the ever-important but unresolved social clause question could appear to be linked to avoidance in addressing the North–South divide that was sharpened at the Marrakesh GATT trade ministerial conference, the Singapore ministerial conference and the Uruguay round of negotiations. Who would be responsible for ensuring the enforcement of labour standards after Somavia's election, and for making decent work available? If not the ILO, then who? G77 representatives had been reluctant to accept a role for the WTO in this process and, apart from very specific cases in South America, states have not been widely known for independently implementing legislation to protect workers from the worst impacts of globalisation.

The next deliberate approach to managing globalising capitalism occurred in 2008 with the introduction of the Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization. The Declaration was upheld as a significant document intending to modernise the governance of the ILO by establishing better ties across members (Maupain, 2009). The idea was that the ILO could update and modernise its message through a Declaration building on the emerging dynamics implied by the concept of decent work. Not all involved in the shift in outlook agreed with the need for a review of governance or with a change in practices. One school of thought around this time was that the implementation of result-based management techniques, which were becoming increasingly expected and normalised in the ILO, should be enough to deal with any issues arising and no further governance review was needed. Others endorsed a clearer system of review and reporting of fundamental rights that would 'rationalise the work and agenda of the international labour conference' but would not overhaul the ILO's message or mandate (Maupain, 2009: 830).

In 2005, Decent Work became target two of the Millennium Development Goals 1: 'Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people' under the category 'Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger' when it was noted that there did not seem to be many practical solutions to eradicating poverty and hunger, and that employment would potentially address that issue. In 2009 the International Labour Office published the Guide to the New Millennium Development Goals Employment Indicators, including the full set of Decent Work Indicators, addressing questions for how specific values are reflected and dealt with, such as those driving private sector investment and international development. Moving ahead to 2015, decent work will remain part of the UN's Post-2015 Development Agenda. But at the same time a range of new trade and investment arrangements are being discussed, including a range of bilateral trade and investment agreements. China is negotiating bilateral trade and investment agreements with the US and India is in discussion with the EU. Discussions between the EU and Canada for a Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), and between the EU and the US on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) are occurring. However, there is no guarantee that these trade and investment agreements will include international labour standards, a concern that is fuelling international dissent. TTIP would cover almost half of the world's GDP and so a large percentage of the world's workforce. The War on Want's Executive Director points out that the European Commission has already demonstrated that TTIP is in all likelihood going to bring 'prolonged and substantial' dislocation for European workers because companies will source goods and services from the US, where American labour standards are lower and trade union rights are limited (Hilary, 2014: 15–16). Statistics in July 2014 show that 23.850 million men and women in the EU-28 (18.409 in the Euro area) were unemployed. The highest rates of unemployment are in Greece (27.2%) and Spain (24.5%), environments not particularly buffered for imminent strains, as is well documented by job losses resulting from the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the 1990s.

In 2015, there have been 1,200 ILO member state ratifications of the Fundamental Conventions, which demonstrates 86% of the number of ratifications possible. But as Seabrooke (2007: 256) notes, the international political economy of the past is 'radically different' from the

issues organisations face today. The ILO today faces a world of significantly decreased trade union membership and deregulation of employment protection law including flexicurity measures and austerity driven dismissals (Shömann, 2014). An institution that incorporates plural views beyond the state is more likely to satisfy normative criteria beyond the state through capturing participation and accountability (Bernstein, 2011: 22), but it is not necessarily going to eliminate capitalism. As identified, the ILO is a tripartite institution made up of member governments, countries' employer associations, and representatives of workers. Actors in a tripartite configuration within a capitalist system will never have an equal footing, because owners of capital inherently control labour. Furthermore, states comprise the organisation's membership base and provide funding for its operations, meaning that at times conditionalities are imposed. The ILO can act as a reformer and as a monitoring institution to buffer the worst impacts of employment relationships within capitalism, but the requests for the extent of action that have been articulated from critics on the left including Cox, Standing, Selwyn and others for more than this, will not be met as long as capitalism remains dominant.

Global Issues

For the Global Issues section of this issue we requested contributions from two keynote speakers at the Future and Praxis of Decent Work conference held in February 2013. Dave Spooner, who is an active international trade unionist and Co-Director of the Global Labour Institute, talks about the 'future for decent work'. His hands-on experience of the world of work reveals that decent work is in fact, very rarely seen. Peter Waterman then brings a challenge to the idea of decency in work if we are still committed to a labourist framework as linked to mainstream developmental concepts.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

PHOEBE MOORE is a Senior Lecturer in International Relations and Global Political Economy at the University of Middlesex Department of Law and Politics. [Email: p.moore@mdx.ac.uk]

CHARLES DANNREUTHER is a lecturer in European political economy at the School of Politics and International Studies, University of Leeds. [Email: ipicd@leeds.ac.uk]

CHRISTIAN MÖLLMANN, political scientist, works as project coordinator at the international doctorate programme on Global Social Policies and Governance, and as a research coordinator at the Graduate School of Socio-Ecological Research for Development at the International Centre for Development and Decent Work (ICDD). [Email: moelmann@uni-kassel.de]