



The Future of Workers and the Industry

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A few days ago in Paris an international conference was held about the steel and metals industry and the impact of new technologies on the development and future of nations and workers¹. The session was organised by the world's largest trade union, IndustriALL Global Union, and was attended by many of its most important leaders, provoking a series of broad and powerful discussions that all delegates found engaging. It allowed us to analyse what the union's role is - and will be - in terms of promoting justice, fairness, democracy and respect for fundamental workers' rights, which, as I pointed out, include among others the right to freedom of association, a universal right in the context of the world's current economic, social and technological climate.

In today's world, globalisation and market competition have created real challenges and issues for many countries, not just economic in nature, but also political and social. The global landscape is far from looking positive and the tactics employed by big international corporations, in cahoots with conservative governments and political corruption, have cast an even greater shadow over many organisations, by tightening alliances and actions that tend to generate greater injustices and inequalities between nations and between sectors and members of society.

A key issue at the heart of the current situation is unfair trade and free trade agreements which have not worked, having moved away from their original intended objectives. This is as well as the fact that promises of moving towards a better world and development levels equivalent to more advanced nations were never kept. They ended up being just a ploy, a betrayal of people's hopes and, for that matter, a means of promoting inequality and the appalling distribution of wealth that exists in humanity today.

There is no doubt that negative practices of exports at subsidised prices from countries with excess capacity, like China, Korea, India or Brazil, have had an effect on our national industry's forecasts and plans, and have unleashed a trade war that affects employment at a fundamental level and exacerbates the lack of opportunities in countries which have experienced disruption to their systems of production and growth. Faced with this reality, an exchange of ideas arose during the Paris talks about what the right response would be from trade unions, and what would coordination is

¹ The 83rd Session of the OECD Steel Committee, 28-29 September 2017, <https://www.oecd.org/sti/ind/83rd-session-of-the-steel-committee.htm>



needed to challenge or prevent these disloyal practices, which completely fail to take into account the interests and rights of affected workers and communities.

As a result, we discussed different ways of preparing ourselves to consolidate our voices, to recruit and organise new members, to set up well-defined, strategically located workers' groups, and to strengthen our collective bargaining techniques, as a way of better defending and protecting the basic agenda of democratic and progressive trade union groups. These options were considered as alternatives that could contribute to bringing about greater social equality, stability and peace. All of this means that global framework agreements, campaigns and initiatives that bring together multiple interested parties are absolutely key aspirations, and these were the agreements adopted to reinforce trade union solidarity and labour relations at a global trade network level.

One of the topics that drew the most attention during the meetings was the presentation given by Kemal Ozkan, deputy general secretary of IndustriALL Global Union, concerning digitisation and the Industry 4.0 initiative, and the effects it is already having on employees and institutions, companies and corporations which have already started to roll it out widely, such as in the automotive and white goods manufacturing sectors, amongst others. The process of robotisation is leading to major changes in productive relations, as I have previously mentioned in a recent article for *La Jornada*, as well as in people's private lives.

The widespread use of this technology today, based on artificial intelligence, digitalisation and cybernetics, is transforming the entire industry through web-based systems and services to providers and consumers, generating more precise and effective statistical data. This is a very important subject for the future of training and capacity-building programmes, as well as for industrial development levels and areas of work.

The scarcity of people who are skilled and ready to take on board these new technologies is going to increase as a result of their increasing development and implementation, which will lead to the fate of millions of workers, their families and communities being decided from centres for planning and controlling human minds, rather than by each country or society. This is what the future has in store for us and we need to be ready for it, and quickly.

Postscript: During the tragic events in Mexico, the product of earthquakes, hurricanes and the human and physical devastation that occurred as a result, we the miners, members of this proud and strong National Union that I lead, dispatched several rescue teams, with specialists from combined health and safety committees drawn from mines across the country. As the same time, we received solidarity from members of other trades across worldwide, who offered to add their support to the rescue efforts if needed. We would like to express our deep and heartfelt gratitude to them all, and in



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particular the United Steelworkers of the USA and Canada, Unite in the UK and the CGT in France, Italy, Spain, Germany and Latin America.