



GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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The digital revolution: taking action to promote a better world through
technology

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Topic: Establishing measures to protect labor rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers.

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Introduction

Ever since the 18th century when the process of industrialization spread across the globe, labour and worker rights have been put in the public eye. Maximizing efficiency and profit or supplying workers with appropriate care; two intentions that are incompatible to a large extent. In other words, when companies seek to reduce their expenses, they often sacrifice their worker's well being. In the grand majority of countries, it is compulsory to find said balance and prioritize the health and safety of workers. However, as of today, people are witness to major infractions of said obligation. Exploitation, forcement, unsecure conditions and discrimination are just a few examples of the type of illicit abuse in workplaces around the globe. This is where the issue at hand emerges; it is imperative to ensure and promote secure working environments for all workers, the heart of any business.

The ILO (International Labour Organization) estimates that 2.3 million people around the world succumb to work-related accidents or diseases every year; this corresponds to over 6000 deaths every single day. Worldwide, there are around 340 million occupational accidents and 160 million victims of work-related illnesses annually. Other global estimates place 21 million people under forced labour, that is three in every 1,000 citizens who are coerced into a type of work they cannot leave from. Same estimates calculate that, within these 21 million, 4.8 million are exploited in some form. Work related incidents or minor infractions are common in first world countries, however, serious health and safety infringements, alongside exploitation and abusive conditions, are heavily abundant in continents such as Asia, Africa and South America. It is important to note that these three continents have a greater level of corruption and lack of development and

governmental regulation in comparison to the rest of the world. Once again, this stems from companies and their corresponding factories augmenting production and profit at the cost of basic worker rights.

Definition of Key Terms

Labour Rights

Legal rights and human rights relating to labour relations between workers and employers. These rights are codified in national and international labour and employment law. In places such as Canada and the United States, the three main labour rights are recognized as, but not limited to:

- The right to know what hazards are present in the workplace;
- The right to participate in keeping your workplace healthy and safe; and
- The right to refuse work that you believe to be dangerous to yourself or your co-workers.

These labour rights are generally internationally recognized, particular countries may have certain modifications to their basic worker rights.

Worker Safety

The provision of a safe environment, safe equipment and safe procedures in the workplace in order to ensure workers' health and safety. Workplace accidents, as the name defines, are unplanned or uncontrolled events that cause physical harm to workers on the job. Negligence of worker safety can lead to accidents such as building collapses, spread of infectious diseases, unknown intake of hazardous chemicals, machinery malfunctions and other lethal incidents that have happened in the past and still occur today.

Exploitation

Cases where people are made to work involuntarily or under duress, while their employer withholds their wages, and/or cases where they are made to work under very poor conditions.

Labour exploitation goes beyond poor employment practices. Common exploitation examples between employers and workers include excessive (illegal in some cases) working hours, underpayment, physical and psychological pressure, censorship, poor accommodation and/or freedom suppression.

Worker

An official worker is a person of working age who does a specified type of work or who works in a specified way under an agreed contract. The person committing such work has an official pay and a date in which their determined salary is given. Anything outside these parameters is not an official worker or is under an unlawful form of employment.

Background Information & Significant Events

A Brief Background

As of today, 60% of countries globally are excluding whole categories of workers from labour law and undermining fundamental democratic rights. Corporate interests are constantly being placed ahead of the interests of the workers, in other words, their safety, satisfaction and health status.

In a world which mostly works under a capitalistic economic system, the workers are an essential, if not the most important part which work for the global economy. Even with the automation of our current global market, society still relies on everyday workers to receive their necessary resources.

Labour rights have come a long way since the industrial revolution. Concepts such as maximum working hours, minimum wage, salaries, minimum working age, rest days and sanitary checks were completely abstract merely 100 years ago. Regardless, as demonstrated above, despite being legally instilled, labour rights are violated in companies and industrial institutions all over the world. Ensuring that the rights of workers are granted and guaranteeing they practice their work in a safe, secure environment with ethical working conditions should be all companies utmost priority.

Beginning of Labour Unions

The Great Depression which started in 1929 after a stock market crash in the United States propagated all the way until Europe. During the 1930's, economic disparity, hunger and even death grew as millions of workers were found unemployed. Seeking desperately for a solution, many workers turned to trade and labour unions to find protection and employment. Labour unions had a main aim of protecting workers rights which they did through a strategy called collective bargaining. This strategy basically conditions employers to better their terms of employment because if they decide not to, all their workers will leave. They mainly sought an increase in workers pay, decrease in working hours, better quality safety measures and other benefits which we have today thanks to their persistence and courage. Strikes also became a common theme for the working class, occurring frequently in heavy industrial zones such as Great Britain, the US, the Soviet Union and others. An example of its influence even in contemporary times is the General Motors strike of 2019 where 48,000 employees took it to the streets demanding healthcare coverage and higher wages. In our contemporary society some countries do not have labour unions and others do not permit the creation of such. For instance, the People's Republic of China only allows one labour union called All-China Federation of Trade Union which is controlled by the government, while independent labour unions are illegal and heavily penalized. In fact, in certain chinese factories coworkers are not allowed to know each other's name in order to prevent unions being formed. This is one example out of the many violations of basic worker rights that occur around the world.

Dhaka Garment Factory Collapse

In April 24th of 2013 a bangladeshi factory collapsed due to a structural failure. After conducting a month-long search for human remains, a death toll of 1,134 workers and stand-by citizens was counted, alongside another 2,500 injured. Outraged sparked, exposing the negligence of the factory owners who were fully aware of their building's compromised structural integrity and taking no action to fix it, avoiding the expense this crucial fix would convey. It is important to note that while it was the most significant in regards to damage, it was not the first major incident of the same nature but the definitive one. This tragedy became a symbol for workers to advocate for their necessary rights and put the need for a sustainable reform in the labour world on the spotlight.

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

International Labour Organization

The ILO is a United Nations agency whose mandate is to advance social and economic justice through setting international labour standards. They are devoted to promoting social justice and internationally recognized human and labour rights, pursuing their founding message which explains that labour peace is essential to prosperity. ILO constituents construct labour standards which serve as legal instruments for governments to later apply. They also provide technical assistance and resources to countries who are in dire need of them. Founded in 1919 it is the first specialized agency of the UN. This should be a clear indicator of how prevalent and ongoing the issue at hand truly is.

International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)

With 207 million members from 163 different countries, the ITUC shares similar interests to the ILO. Their primary objective is to “promote and defend workers' rights through international cooperation between trade unions, global campaigning and advocacy within major global institutions.” Protecting 176 million workers in 162 countries they have done an excellent job promoting equality at the workplace, provided thousands of statistics, studies and information, and made efforts to eradicate the gap between the wealthiest 1% and the rest of civilians.

International Training Centre (ITC)

The International Training Centre is the training arm of the ILO. It runs training, learning and development services for governments, employer’s organizations, worker’s organizations and other national or international partners. It primarily works in support of the decent work goal found in the UN’s sustainable development goals.

In general, the ILO, the ITUC and the ITC have been deemed as very successful organizations that have effectively spread the message of good practice, and helped countries which wished to improve to do so. They are very open about their work and keep a comprehensive library of every publication in regards to labour matters. As of today, these three bodies have 187 (ILO), active members from every single continent.

Middle East and North Africa

The ITUC cataloged the Middle Eastern and North African regions as the countries with most violations of worker rights. Countries in these regions have a drastically higher percent of their workforce employed in the manufacturing sector with levels higher than 20%. Whether this may influence it's lack of labour protection depends on a their national governance, however, the following incidents have been reported recently in said nations:

- The denial of basic workers' rights remained in place in **Saudi Arabia**.
- In countries such as **Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen**, conflict and breakdown of the rule of law means workers have no guarantee of labour rights.
- In conflict-torn **Yemen**, 650,000 public sector workers have not been paid for more than 8 months, while some 4 million private sector jobs have been destroyed.
- The continued occupation of **Palestine** also means that workers there are denied their rights and the chance to find decent jobs.
- Conditions in Africa have deteriorated, with **Benin, Nigeria and Zimbabwe** being the worst performing countries - including many cases of workers suspended or dismissed for taking legitimate strike action.

United States

Very close to China, the United States is the second largest manufacturing nation, producing 18% of the global manufactured goods. Many believe that the incompetence companies have with the balance between productivity and ethical worker rights only occurs in the Eastern hemisphere; however, the US, the wealthiest country in the world, does not excel at this either. Business Insider reports that although individual states have their own worker protections, the US lags behind the rest of industrialized nations on a federal level. For instance, they are the only industrialized nation with no paid parental leave, legally companies are not required to give vacation either; there is only 10 days of vacation due to national holidays and a 2017 study reports 3 out of 10 workers do not take these vacation days in fear of losing their job or not getting paid. Also, US citizens work longer hours than workers in Europe and Japan causing high rates of burnout. Lastly, the minimum wage in the United States is incredibly low in relation to its economy and the general living cost. This actively

demonstrates that labour rights have room for improvement not only in sub-developed economies and nations but also in the west.

South America

The South American continent has also been recognized as one of the worst regions for workers, hosting countless infractions in the past years. Some examples include:

- **Argentina** with a spike in violence and repression by the state and private security forces. In one case, 80 workers were injured during a stoppage for better pay and conditions. The build-up of the 2016 Olympic games in Brazil saw a significant increase in labour exploitation, and the dismantling of labour legislation by the new Brazilian government last year caused a sharp decline of labour standards.
- **Ecuador** where union leaders were forbidden from speaking out and their offices were ransacked and occupied by the government.
- **Chile** where, according to the ITUC, there has been a regular violation of worker rights.

Timeline of Events

Date

17th - 19th Century

Description of event

-- The surge of industrialization and urbanization in European nations had a strong correlation with increase in workers. First successful powered continuous production unit (factory) was built in England, the first country to industrialize. The spread was extremely rapid, thousands of factories were set up all over the world by the end of the 18th century. With increase in demand came a need for higher production, hence, more workers. This is recognized as the start of what is labour, employment and/or work. An example of its impact is London, which had merely 100,00 inhabitants and due to urbanization, its population multiplied by 5 by the end of the 17th century.

1794

-- With a day and month unclear, what is known as the first labor union ever established was created in 1794 in Bombay. This was the start of a collective bargaining for better working conditions which today we know as basic labour rights.

April 11th, 1919

---- The International Labour Organization was founded as the first specialized agency of the United Nations. It was established under the Treaty of Versailles after WW1 with a goal of universal and lasting peace. This organization specializes in social justice and labour rights. With 187 member states, they are currently still deliberately active by having conferences and passing resolutions.

March 18th-25th, 1970

March 18th was the day in which the Great Postal Strike of 1970 commenced. Being one of the most notorious protests and demand for improved working conditions, the Great Postal Strike lasted 8 days and recruited over 200,000 postal workers who demanded for better wages and protested against their forbidden right to

strike and collectively bargain for said wages. Being the largest strike in United States history it serves as a model for unsatisfied and maltreated workers to advocate for their rights. It also caused unprecedented changes in the federal government and the NALC (National Association of Letter Carriers), demonstrating the true impact mass gatherings/protests can cause.

April 24th, 2013

On this day the Dhaka Garment Factory Collapsed. This extremely lethal incident was a symbol for the drastic need of improvement and reforms in labour rights, particularly in developing nations.

September 5th, 2013

8 years ago the ILO legally binded with the Domestic Worker Convention treaty. Even today nations are still ratifying the convention and it has reportedly improved lives of 50 million domestic workers, especially in impoverished countries such as Bolivia, Mauritius, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Philippines, and Uruguay. This is particularly relevant today as we face a drastic increase in domestic workers due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Relevant UN Treaties and Resolutions

Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (25/06/1957)

Convened in Geneva by the governing body of the ILO and later adopted by the General Conference of the ILO, this convention was set in order to eradicate all forms of forced or compulsory labour constituting a violation of the rights of man referred to in the Charter of the United Nations. Linked [here](#) are the 10 articles which compose the final resolution of this conference.

Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (18/06/1998)

This convention, adopted by the International Labour Conference at its 86th session in Geneva, later revised on 15/06/2010, had the main aim of mobilizing and encouraging international, regional and national efforts aimed at guaranteeing their workers effective and appropriate conditions. Its pre-ambulatory clauses and main proposals can be found [here](#).

Resolution 2286 (03/05/2016)

A very important resolution is [Resolution 2286](#) adopted on May 3rd of 2016. This resolution had the main aim of eradicating violence against health care workers and encouraging nations to take action on the topic. However, five years after the UNs Security Council passed what was considered a “landmark” resolution, the UNs Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs ([OCHA](#)) [article reports](#) that violence and attacks on health care workers remain unabated and, in some areas, even increased.

Domestic Workers Convention (05/09/2013)

This treaty was adopted by the ILO in 2011 and is the first of its kind. Their main aim was to battle the lack of legal protection domestic workers have and, in turn, their increased vulnerability with little remedies. With 50 million workers worldwide, they sought for the message of increased legal domestic worker rights to be spread across ILO member states. Since the Convention’s adoption, several countries have passed new laws or regulations improving domestic workers’ labour and social rights, including Venezuela, Bahrain, the Philippines, Thailand, Spain and Singapore. Legislative reforms have also begun in Finland, Namibia, Chile and the United States, among others. Several others have initiated the process of ratification, including Costa Rica and Germany.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

International Labour Rights Forum (ILRF)

The ILRF is an organisation that functions alongside labour trade unions and NGOs. They work in coalition with the United States Government and other international groups which strive to support workers. Recently they posted an article in which they share their three main solutions to provide better and safer working conditions around the globe. The main solutions are the following:

1. Holding global corporations accountable for human rights violations in their supply chains.
2. Advancing policies and laws that protect workers.
3. Strengthening the voice of workers through action-oriented research.

The Century Foundation (TCF)

TCF is a research institute, otherwise known as a think tank, located in New York and Washington DC, USA. They specialize in economic inequality and it is important to note that they are mostly recognized as a progressive institution. On September 1st of 2017 they released their article denominated ["Seven Things to do Right Now to Help Workers"](#), which proposes the solutions of raising the minimum wage, encouraging portable benefits, creating good manufacturing jobs, strengthening unions, reining the stock market and implementing a guaranteed paid family leave.

Possible Solutions

Raising Minimum Wage

A campaign that mainly works in the United States and the United Kingdom called "Fight for 15\$", as the name indicates, fights with the objective of raising the minimum wage to 15 dollars in the US. According to an article by The Century Foundation (TCF) this campaign completely changed the labour politics in the country making unprecedented changes such as winning 61.5 billion dollars in wages for more than 20 million un or underpaid workers. This is evidence that raising the minimum wage does indeed improve working conditions and employees overall. A common counterargument is that a raise in minimum wage comes out of governments and businesses pockets and most can't afford it or don't want to make that expense. However, reports show that a modest increase in minimum wage will improve worker productivity and incentive for unemployed workers to seek for labour, in turn reducing unemployment levels. An increase in the amount of workers in the labour force and an increase in incentive for already existing workers turns into higher levels of supply from each company stimulating consumer spending and demand. This solution may be more effective in western first world countries as these nations have the resources to do so; regardless, it is proven that a raise in minimum wage has a chain effect which in turn grows the economy.

Lean Labour

It is no secret that multinational corporations turn to developing countries in Asia for their manufacturing due to its drastically low cost in comparison to other countries. What most people do not realize is that the surprisingly low cost enterprises pay stems from the lack of sanitation, security, pay, labour rights and other essential needs that are looked over in their factories. For instance, China, a country that produces more than 20% of the global manufacturing output and where companies such as Apple, Nike, Adidas, and Amazon (among others) have their highest producing factories, has alarming rates of excessive and forced overtime, denial of social security rights, failure to provide employment contracts, and severe health risks cases. Labour unions are also illegal in all of China. What a recent Stanford study has found is that companies that practice "lean labour" in their factories, a production method that focuses on eliminating waste, emphasizing

flexibility, and enabling skilled workers, is linked to a 33% improved average in labor compliance. It also found that Nike companies which have implemented this method have A level and B level working conditions whereas factories that abstain from practicing lean labour have Cs and Ds. This is a mutual benefit strategy that improves production for western companies and labour conditions in developing countries.

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