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Shaping **the work of the future**

The work of the future is determined not only by technology, but by a combination of technological change, the old structural gaps in the labour market, the productive matrix of countries, their international integration and, fundamentally, the political decisions that will be made.

International trade unionism usually says that **the future of work begins now**. It is necessary to think about work of the future by addressing and solving the problems faced by workers today. It is about the present, not only the future, and part of that present is also the continuous dismantling of labour rights.

The labour market in Latin America is already a highly polarised market. It is characterised by high rates of informality, multiple inequalities and endemic precariousness. In 2018, ECLAC and ILO detected a growth in self-employment, as well as greater informality of salaried employment.

Digital infrastructure is poorly developed in Latin America. Forty-four percent of the continent's homes have access to the internet, with major differences both between countries and between different social strata.

As a Latin American bellwether, Uruguay ranks 42 of 176 in the ICT Development Index, but on many indicators the region is well below North America, Europe and Asia. It is true that in recent years there have been advances that are due to the expansion and modernisation of internet access, but these are aimed primarily at consumption. On the other hand, the expansion of the industrial internet and its use for productive purposes are still in their initial phase.

The current economic model of most Latin American countries is primarily committed to the export of raw materials and agricultural products, and the industrial centres are concentrated in a few countries. Not surprisingly, technological change has a strong impact on the services sector in the region, where it does not replace human labour (in 2018, the sector with the largest increase in employment according to ECLAC / ILO), but it does transform human labour, making it more precarious in many cases.

Building alliances from a progressive perspective

In order not to miss the opportunity to influence the active and progressive configuration of the work of the future, progressive actors in the region have to determine the terminology used to interpret this change and convey their own vision of the future. The current "narrative" of the future of work is entirely neoliberal, individualistic and capitalist. The concept of the collaborative economy is often used to mask the imbalance of power between employers and workers and to evade obligations. It is therefore essential to counteract this narrative through an alternative discourse and **a vision of a digitalised, liberating, inclusive and sustainable modernity.**

It is necessary to seek **alliances** among progressive actors to build an alternative vision that links economic and social issues, which focuses on social and environmental justice, and uses politics to emancipate the people. And when it comes to shaping the future of work, a key ally will be the organisations that represent those who are experiencing these changes first hand, working people. **Without the trade union movement, it will not be possible to formulate a progressive response to the challenges of the work of the future.**

Building a Progressive Agenda

Precariousness is endemic, with multiple forms of employment (temporary, part-time, outsourced, self-employed, zero-hour contract). These are forms of employment that are often intended to hide dependant employment relationships or avoid obligations on the part of the employer.



A trend of management by algorithm can be added to these alterations in employment relationships. More and more companies are transforming their processes to resemble those associated with freelancing platforms. Indirect control by internet or GPS; standardisation of tasks and evaluation processes; communication with management via digital interfaces; the need to compete for each new position or project; variation in the demands of the employer; 24/7 availability; and formal but nonetheless precarious employment relationships are some of the increasingly frequent characteristics of this trend. So the challenge of regulating work of the future is not just an issue of employment via freelance platforms.

To avoid the continued disintegration of the labour market with its social and political impacts, defending the labour rights of workers has to be a priority – regardless of the form of employment. A **universal labour guarantee**, as proposed by the ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work, is needed.

It is undeniable that data and artificial intelligence are factors that already influence our lives and will not disappear. On the contrary, their importance will grow. That is why they cannot be a dark, unknown factor. We have to understand them and discuss how to use them. And this discussion should take place not only in select groups, but with wide participation. We have to advance a "Digital Enlightenment" agenda to ensure that our societies are empowered to shape our own destiny, to ensure that the digital future will be participatory and democratic.

Today, data is an important economic factor, so much so that it is often called "the new oil". But these data are also personal, intellectual rights, and in many cases involve privacy in people's lives. Therefore, it is not just an economic issue that each country looks after the use, handling and commercialisation of the data of its citizens. The current WTO agenda on electronic commerce does not take these issues sufficiently into account and also threatens the development of certain technology sectors in Latin American countries.



It is imperative that national and international tax systems be adapted to new business forms. Like almost every private enterprise, they benefit from the use of infrastructure and public goods, so they should contribute to the revenue of the countries where their profits are generated.

The new world of work demands new qualifications. This challenge must be faced jointly by the state, the business sector and workers. Public education of high quality is needed, an education that is considered an element of development policy.

Likewise, training and continuing education should be expanded to offer new options to those who already have a job. The labour markets of Latin America are characterised by high turnover, low wages and low investment in improving the knowledge of workers. Currently, only 10 % of employed people receive training from their employer. This has to change. It is also a responsibility of a company to invest in the training of its employees.

The array of public policies must take advantage of the transformative potential of new technologies for a progressive economy. It must support not those technologies that replace human labour, but rather those that improve working conditions, that generate wealth for the majority, and that lead to genuinely collaborative efforts. Environmental and social inclusion policies have to be geared towards the incorporation, adaptation and development of incremental innovations of new technologies.

Regional indicators with respect to education, research, innovation and development are incompatible with the goal of generating higher quality jobs and productivity. Despite this, the potential exists for countries in Latin America and the Caribbean to make rapid progress in these areas.

The region has the capacity, for example, to develop its own technology in renewable energies, as well as to design and produce vehicles using this type of energy to transport cargo and passengers. Some countries have shown the feasibility of changing the energy

matrix, as is the case in the electricity sector in Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico and Uruguay.

In the same regard, there is ample space to develop technologies related to the use of natural goods, where environmental and inclusion issues play an important role.

It is about moving towards a new energy and productive pattern through a coordinated set of investments, in which the dimensions of employment, technology and the environment converge.

Only a progressive social and political alliance, which transcends national boundaries and debates the direction of technological transformation in a democratic way, will make it possible for the work of the future to advance on the continent with greater social and environmental justice.