ILO's 75th Anniversary

The future of ILO standards

ILO standards have formed the basis for much social and labor legislation enacted in this century; however, to ensure a role for the organization in the future, more visibility, clear goals, reexamination, and consolidation are essential

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The International Labor Organization (ILO), created in 1919 by the Treaty of Versailles, has as its agenda the maintenance of social peace and improvement of the situation of the world's workers. First among the organization's tools for achieving its aims are international labor standards. Often called the "International Labor Code," these standards have helped form the basis for many social and labor laws in most of the countries that have gained their independence since 1919—that is, most countries in the world.

The ILO's mission, as designed by its founders, was to parallel that of the League of Nations: the League was to keep the physical peace, the ILO was to keep the social peace by adopting standards that would improve the situation of workers. In the aftermath of the Russian Revolution and the fear that if action was not taken to relieve the inequalities and injustices suffered by workers around the world, the entire social order was threatened, ILO's goal seemed as ambitious as that of the League. The League did not survive, but the ILO has.

Many observers thus consider the ILO standards to have a long and illustrious past, but wonder if they have a similar future. This article looks at problems facing the ILO and offers some possible solutions.

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75 years of standards

The "Declaration of Philadelphia" in 1944, which was a renewed statement of purpose, marked the beginning of the ILO's period of greatest creativity in the adoption of standards—1948 to 1964. During this time, the ILO addressed freedom of association, equal treatment, abolition of forced labor, minimum wages, treatment of indigenous and tribal peoples, and employment policies, among other issues. These standards (along with the Forced Labor Convention, adopted in 1930) have become fundamental to worldwide labor and human rights legislation. The ILO's body of standards has continued to develop since then.

There are now 175 ILO Conventions and 182 Recommendations setting forth labor standards. (See box on page 4 for explanation of Conventions and Recommendations.) The Conventions have received more than 6,000 ratifications, forming a huge "web" of international law and setting the social and labor agenda for most countries in the world. Today, the ILO provides standards on social security systems, protection against occupational hazards and disease, and regulation of working conditions and hours of work. However, not all ILO standards cover "workers' rights"; a significant number provide guidance for the establishment of labor admin-

istration and provide basic instructions for labor inspection and occupational safety and health systems. There also are special standards for occupational groups such as nurses, seafarers, and dockers. In short, ILO standards have provided inspiration for labor legislation worldwide—including that of emerging states of Africa and Asia—and are used as a point of reference for countries trying to change their social and labor systems (such as those in Eastern Europe and Latin America).

ILO standards are adopted in tripartite discussion among representatives of workers, employers, and government. This feature was a novel concept when it was first put forward, and is still unique in international affairs today. This tripartite system increases the likelihood that ILO standards will take into account the problems workers face, the capacity of employers to comply, and the possibilities that governments will adopt the regulatory and supervisory systems necessary to implement the standards on the national level. The ILO, like other international human rights bodies, has no "enforcement" procedure. (Enforcement cannot work in the international sphere, as no coercive means are available.) It relies on a system of regular reporting by government members before the annual session of its supervisory body.

More than 2,000 government reports are examined each year. They are sent to employers' and workers' organizations in the country concerned, who have the right to comment (about 10 percent of the countries do so each year). Then, the reports are examined by the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, an independent body of 20 experts which meets annually—recently included among the U.S. members were Benjamin Aaron, specialist in labor law, mediation, and arbitration; Frank McCulloch, former chairman of the National Labor Relations Board; and Earl Warren, former U.S. Chief Justice. Members from other countries are of the same level of eminence. Problems noted by the experts are discussed in the tripartite Conference Committee on the Application of Standards, before which some 50 governments are summoned to appear at each session of the International Labor Conference. This system, although far from 100-percent effective, essentially works to persuade, cajole, and often embarrass governments into keeping the promises they have made voluntarily.

Complaints mechanisms. The usual international system permitting states to complain against other states that have ratified the same instrument applies also in the ILO; however, it is rarely used and is supplemented by other possibilities. First, the ILO Governing Body or any delegate to the International Labor Conference can engage the most formal complaints procedure. Second, a less formal, but more frequently used, procedure allows any employers' or workers' organization to bring a "representation" against a state alleging that the state is not applying a Convention it has ratified. And third, a special procedure allows complaints related to freedom of association violations to be brought against member states of the ILO, whether or not they have ratified the relevant ILO Conventions, simply on the basis of constitutional obligations and even against nonmember states with their consent.

Today's challenges

While undoubtedly successful in many areas, the ILO has always had problems getting its message across. For example, the former Communist countries had taken what the ILO had to offer in a very selective fashion: they adopted the social protection and unemployment prevention measures wholeheartedly, but they interpreted "freedom of association" in their own special way. The developing countries, too, have had reservations about accepting the ILO's point of view in many cases. Often they do so because of sheer poverty—many still argue that they cannot afford to restrict child labor, for instance—but also because the installation of a so-called "western" viewpoint has been at odds with authoritarian attitudes carried over from earlier times, before "democracy" became a byword. Sometimes, there have also been more fundamental differences of approach. In the United States, for example, if the ILO is not well known, even among labor specialists, this could be attributed to the fact that labor law has developed in a more *sui generis* fashion to establishing social and labor legislation in the country than that in most of the rest of the world.

In general, however, the ILO has rarely been challenged as much as it is today. Particularly after the Communist world began to crumble, some said that the ILO's day had passed, and that its future is questionable. Can the ILO regain and maintain the influence it had in the past? And indeed, should it? Obviously, the ILO's role and the way it works should undergo some fundamental reexamination.

The problems

Competing organizations. When the ILO was established, and for a long time afterwards, it was the only international forum for setting standards for the workplace. In fact, in the earliest years of the ILO, there was only one other organization

that set any standards at all—the League of Nations—and the division of labor was clear between the two organizations: the League was dedicated to political/military peace and the ILO, to social peace.

World War II and the establishment of the United Nations system created a broader system, introducing new complexities. At first, these complexities could be negotiated fairly easily. In the early 1950's, however, the complexities began to increase when international technical cooperation was established and the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund—agencies created as an outgrowth of the Bretton Woods economic conference—rose to ascendancy. When "money" became part of the international agenda, there was different turf to contest, and the organizations with financial power tried to impose what they perceived as economically sound solutions to profound social problems.

As part of this widening organizational scene comes a larger group of actors charged with setting standards. The United Nations began to concentrate on international human rights standards in one comprehensive set of instruments, culminating in 1966 with the adoption by the General Assembly of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The adoption of these two separate Covenants showed that there already existed a certain confusion about the quality of different "categories" of human rights, which the international socioeconomic system has been trying to reconcile for almost 30 years.

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of regional arrangements to deal with human rights problems. For example, the European Convention on Human Rights has given rise to an active supervisory machinery and the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe has adopted human rights standards for its members that differ from those adopted in the universal organizations. The human rights policing apparatus in the United States has been in existence for many years, and the supervisory mechanism for this system is very good. In Africa, there also is a regional instrument, although the machinery it contemplates does not actually function. By comparison is the case of Asia, which has never been able to adopt any such instrument and encompasses many national governments that object to the imposition of "outside" standards. Obviously, this diversity further complicates the search for unity among human rights standards.

Competing standards. Another phenomenon in this area has been the adoption of U.N. standards in areas that would appear to be under the direct mandate of the ILO or other organizations. A recent example was the 1990 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and the members of their families. This Convention has received only two ratifications (it needs 20 to become adopted), but there are periodic requests by the General Assembly, the World Conference on Human Rights, the Human Rights Commission, and other organizations, for states to adhere to it. Another example is the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1990 and already ratified by more than 130 member states. However, this Convention is unlikely to cause problems of interpretation or conflict with the ILO because it touches very briefly on child labor in one article.

Another form of standard-setting that is more difficult to deal with is the United Nations Development Program's attempt to adopt the "Human Freedom Index," designed to measure adherence to a limited group of political rights, and to rank states accordingly. The index created a storm of protest, and the United Nations Development Program dropped it immediately.

Another instance of the creation of standards, by a different route, is the adoption of "operational guidelines" by the World Bank and other development agencies. In adopting these guidelines, international agencies lay down conditions that must be met before they will give financial or technical assistance, at the same time providing themselves with instructions on how the assistance projects will be implemented. While more conventional technical assistance operations eschew placing conditions on a country, and promote standards independently of assistance provided, this method imposes linkages which are sometimes difficult to discover and certainly difficult to debate. Moreover, these guidelines often deal with the same subjects as do the human rights and other standards adopted by the ILO, the General Assembly, and others.

Competing visions. If the standards scene has changed in recent years, so has the basic vision that animated their adoption. The concept of international regulation of working conditions has lost some ground over the last few years, corresponding with the rise of opinion that deregulation is the solution to many economic issues. Indeed, no one could argue with the positive effects deregulation has had in many spheres, but like most policies, it tends to be taken as the entire solution to a problem when it is only a portion of it. Although there is now a certain rebound in thinking, both national governments and international financial institutions have sometimes lost sight of the idea that the focus of economic reform should be people, not the economy itself.

This is, of course, a manifestation of the natural human tendency to concentrate on a simpler concept at the expense of a more complex one, but the possible damage to human beings caused by the removal of regulatory protection has perhaps been too widely ignored.

The human cost of wholesale deregulation can be high. There is no argument, for instance, that using government service to provide employment might lead to inefficiency, and that rigidities in the labor market can stifle economic creativity and flexibility in some countries. Over-regulation of the economy can have terrible costs if, for instance, bureaucracy makes it too expensive to establish a small enterprise legally, and the only way to do so is in the so-called "informal" (or unregulated) economy.

And yet, the ILO's side of this discussion—the side that is represented by international labor standards—can be neglected too easily. At the extreme, the cost of moving into the informal economy can be that workers have no protection whatsoever against the abuses the ILO was created to control: child labor, long working hours, no limit except the market on the level of wages, and no protection against workplace hazards. Even where laws exist, lack of enforcement can turn what is nominally the formal sector into a close facsimile of the informal sector. If the laws are maintained on the books, but there are no labor inspections, will employers continue to provide safe and healthy labor conditions? If the legislated minimum wage is abandoned, or if it is allowed to fall so low that it bears no relation to living costs, will a worker be able to feed himself or herself and a family by putting in what we have come to consider a "normal" work day?

There is thus a balance to be struck. The arguments at the national level find their echoes in the ILO. There are many who believe ILO standards are too complex, too restrictive, too expensive for employers— and this might be true if all standards were applied directly and to all situations, without distinction. But the standards were not intended to function that way.

Weakening constituents. The last few years have seen a weakening of trade unions in many parts of the developed world. Trade union membership in the United States is below 15 percent of the labor force, and is even lower in some other developed countries. Reasons for this are many, but certainly owe much to changes in economic patterns in these countries. The manufacturing industries, in which trade unions are traditionally the strongest, have declined in importance and have been hit hard by recessions. Unions cannot bargain effectively for improved conditions for their members when the entire economy is under siege, and consequently they lose strength.

The other nongovernmental leg of the ILO's constituency is employers. The ILO's structures were designed at a time when an employer was at most a nationwide entity, but this has changed greatly. The model of employers who can regulate wages and conditions of work at the national level has decreased with the expansion of the global economy: many employers in the developed world either are now multinational or are competing in international markets. The prevailing economic climate is such that employers' calls for reviewing the ILO standards system, for deregulation in general, and even for changing the accumulated "jurisprudence" of the ILO supervisory bodies, are receiving increasing attention.

Even governments have changed, as the basis of international relations begins to shift from unqualified national sovereignty to multilateralism. Individual governments no longer set internal labor standards, uninfluenced by others. Instead, their policies may be affected by such arrangements as the European Union and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and even the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), although labor standards are not now part of GATT. Concomitantly, there are various initiatives around the world (as in the Caribbean countries) to unify labor legislation on a regional basis, a process that can sometimes lead to modification of legal power to act in international fora.

An interesting example of unified labor legislation may be found in recent discussions within the European Community/Union over the continued ability of individual states within the Union to submit ILO Conventions to the "competent authority" (a procedure required under the ILO Constitution, whereby member states must make recommendations on ratification of each newly adopted Convention to the body competent to legislate on it). As legislative authority on many labor matters is transferred to the European Union, the Union in turn argues that states should not continue to make these submissions to their national parliaments when a matter is within Union legislative power.[1] Discussion continues on the competency of a given authority to ratify ILO Conventions. If this power no longer belongs to the individual states, a constitutional question of fundamental importance is raised for the ILO, as well as for many other international organizations.

The ILO should re-examine its constituencies and consider redefining them. This discussion may not be taking place publicly as yet, but it is continuing in many different fora and often in the guise of a different discussion.

ILO standards. The ILO remains a standard-setting organization, as it was conceived to be in 1919. As noted, by this, its 75th year of existence, it has adopted 175 Conventions and 182 Recommendations, and has a long list of other subjects on which standards might be required.

Why has the ILO found so many standards to adopt? The answer lies in two areas. The first is that as patterns of work and of the economy change, new forms of protection are required, making others obsolete—or at least, applicable to fewer situations. An early ILO Convention on "trimmers and stokers" (persons who work on steam-driven cargo ships) is now irrelevant. Protection of women from having to work at night is now seen as preventing women from having access to the same range of occupations as men. When the ILO began adopting standards, asbestos was not known to be poisonous, and workers were therefore not known to require protection from it. Also, part-time work was not a widespread phenomenon as it is today, and its expansion will have led to the adoption of standards to regulate this kind of work.

The second reason for the existence of so many ILO standards is that they are unique in being subject to revision—no other international organization allows its standards to be revised. Many existing ILO Conventions are revisions of earlier ones. Even in the first two decades of its existence, the ILO was already reviewing and revising standards that had proven not to be workable, and it has continued to do so as the thresholds for different kinds of protection have risen. The first child labor Convention was adopted at the first session of the ILO Conference, in 1919; the eleventh and most recent, in 1973. The instruments on nightwork for women, mentioned earlier, were first adopted in 1919, revised in 1934 and 1948, and revised further in 1990. In fact, more than half the instruments adopted during the last 15 years have been revisions of earlier Conventions or Recommendations.

There are, however, advantages and disadvantages to revising ILO Conventions: revised Conventions remain valid for states which ratified them at a certain time, but have not ratified newer and more modern standards on the same subject. For example, on "child labor," the earliest ILO Conventions set the minimum age for entry in employment at 14 years, and were adopted among industries. A second wave of Conventions raised that age to 15 years. The Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), took a global approach, covering all sectors of the economy, and adopted a more complex and realistic formula linking minimum age and compulsory schooling. Thus, a state's ratification of Convention No. 138 may replace as many as five earlier ratifications, some of which may, in their turn, have replaced earlier ratifications. However, there are many countries still bound by Conventions adopted in 1919.

Some say that ILO standards no longer present a unified and clear vision of what "international best practice" is or should be. There is a certain truth to this, if one looks at the entire range of standards. ILO standards present a range of choices for all nations, at different levels of development and with different economic models. For instance, as some countries move toward establishing a 35-hour week, others are still struggling to extend the 48-hour week to large parts of their economies (an idea embodied in ILO Convention No. 1). Some countries find ILO standards to be obsolete, and indeed some of them are very old—but it would damage the ability of the ILO to provide guidance if all standards were geared to U.S. or European economic conditions, overlooking the problems of less developed economies.

A related problem is the weight of the ILO's supervisory procedures. The ILO's supervisory mechanism is excellent, and is unmatched among international organizations for keeping close track of national developments, for carrying out objective and impartial supervision, and for advancing constructive proposals on how states can meet the standards voluntarily ratified, with concrete help from the ILO. Nevertheless, these procedures require a great deal of time, effort, and expertise by national governments, as well as the ILO secretariat and supervisory bodies.

Possible solutions

If the ILO's work is to continue to be fruitful, some changes are required. However, it is also necessary to ensure that such changes do not weaken what has proven to be a powerful and useful tool to promote human rights and social justice. The following are some possible solutions to previously highlighted problems.

Competing organizations. The proliferation of organizations with different visions of, and solutions to social problems will certainly continue, and the ILO's clear position as the leader in the social field is therefore subject to continued question. While no other U.N. organization has announced a clear intention to take the lead in these areas, this has been happening by attrition as the financial institutions, various bodies of the United Nations itself, and others gradually move to occupy part of the same terrain. However, the ILO itself appears not to have clearly enunciated and defended its own particular vision. For instance, the investment of the ILO in relations with

the other organizations of the global socioeconomic system has been limited.

The ILO must be clear that its message deserves to be communicated. When officials and deliberative bodies of other organizations are informed of ILO standards and procedures, the most frequent response is that they are excellent, but are not truly authoritative if they have not been adopted by the United Nations itself. The ILO must ensure that its standards and vision are not undercut by, but conform with, the work of other organizations. This will require a more constant ILO presence in meetings of other deliberative bodies. The second strategy is for the ILO to articulate a clear and persuasive message for the future throughout the global economy.

This task relates in large part to the eventual resolution of the problem of competing visions but it also requires that the ILO make itself better known. Also necessary are more discussions on the ILO's work in such fora as academic circles as well as in discussions between the United States and other countries on compliance with international standards on workers' rights.

Competing visions. The opinion that "deregulation is the solution to all economic problems" is no longer as popular as it was, but a great deal remains to be done to define the limits of deregulation and re-regulation. The ILO itself has been doing this for the past 2 years in a special Interdepartmental Project on Structural Adjustment.[2]

In a report submitted to the June 1994 session of the International Labor Conference, Michel Hansenne, ILO Director-General, noted that neither developing nor developed countries are inclined to reinforce or even to maintain previous levels of social protection if substantial costs are involved. He has therefore proposed that the ILO proceed along three lines to review standard-setting work: (1) The ILO should better adapt its standard setting to real and pressing needs; it has to allow for situations of member states, whose increasingly different circumstances and needs sometimes make it difficult for them to adhere to a common code; (2) Conventions should be reexamined to define a general framework of obligations that states can implement in a way compatible with their own legal systems and stages of development; this does not mean that ILO standards should take a "lowest-common-denominator" approach, because this would weaken the purpose of standards—to promote social progress—and would perhaps accelerate the trend toward creating regional standard-setting bodies; and (3) ILO should consolidate existing standards, and perhaps revise groups of Conventions, replacing them with a single standard per subject, and perhaps adopt "soft laws," which are statements of principle, to serve as guidance on some subjects.

The employers' group in the ILO has long been the most vocal critic of ILO standard-setting. A March 1994 paper by the International Organization of Employers states that standards are "not necessarily the best means by which to achieve the Organization's objectives . . . [but this] does not mean putting the validity of this activity to question." The employers call for a slower pace of standard-setting and for more general obligations, with instruments limited to the essentials and devised for sufficient flexibility. Moreover, the employers believe the ILO should give greater attention to nonbinding standards, declarations, Recommendations, and other forms of policy guidance.

The view of the workers' group is in a 1994 publication[3] by Bill Brett, a public sector union official from the United Kingdom and chairman of the Workers' Group of the ILO Governing Body: "There may be a case for attenuating the rhythm of bringing standards forward, though this needs further consideration, but there is not a case for moving away from the ILO's juridical approach . . . The idea of 'sub-standards' (i.e., soft law) was raised in the context of African nations in the 1970's but it was quickly shot down . . . Declarations of intent, codes of conduct, [and] non-binding commitments may have a role to play, but they represent a dangerous turn away from the ILO's strength which is its declaration of international labour law."

The ILO recognizes that if it is to defend its own vision, it must do so more aggressively. At the World Conference on Human Rights (held in Vienna in 1993), the ILO proposed that human rights concerns be incorporated into the work of all U.N.-system organizations—the first time that this concept has been stated so clearly. The ILO is also working to insert its point of view into the deliberations leading up to the Social Summit, the World Conference on Population, and the Fourth World Conference on Women, all to be held in the coming months.

On the issue of inserting human rights concerns into development activities, the ILO has been stirred into action since a 1985 internal survey concluded that its standard-setting and technical assistance activities had become steadily more distant from each other since technical cooperation was begun in the 1950's. ILO policy now states that all of its activities—research, technical cooperation, and policy advice—must have as their principal objective the promotion of the values contained in the Constitutions and the standards adopted by the constituents. This may be compared with the rest of the U.N. system, which is only beginning to pursue the idea that the system's development activities should

have some organic link with the human rights standards adopted by the General Assembly. This approach has been reinforced by the ILO adoption of the "Active Partnership Policy."

Weakening constituents. Over the years, certain changes have weakened older ideas of the relations among labor, capital, and government, but conditions may be beginning to settle down. Trade unions, in particular, are emerging from a situation in which they had gained enormous politico-economic power in some countries, then lost it. In Western countries, trade unions are returning to their original mission of protecting workers against exploitation. This will be easier when there is an economic upturn in the developed world, and unemployment diminishes. In addition, the loosening of the political bonds on trade union organization in Eastern Europe and in Latin America should lead to a revitalization of the international workers' movement. Something similar might occur in Asia as increasing prosperity of employers leads to growing demands for equity from a working class that has not been vocal, but that increasingly has reasons to demand its part of a growing economic pie.

Governments, too, are reorganizing. As economies become more international, governments will have to find ways to protect citizens against exploitation, and to regulate the conduct of those entities having considerable economic power. In addition, there will be a continuing need to set rules of trade and of treatment of workers across national and regional borders. It thus is likely that ILO standards will remain the basic set of rules, if they can be reordered as indicated earlier.

The employers' role may be the most difficult to restructure in a renewed ILO. Nevertheless, employers will continue to have two fundamental interests in the organization. The first is to influence the impact that regulation of working conditions and labor costs may have on their economic interests. (There is another aspect, however, which is often not fully considered. Employers have an interest in a stable set of expectations and in partners with whom they can discuss on a regular basis.) Second, employers wish to protect themselves against each other—that is, to ensure the steady raising of working standards in developing countries, so that employers subject to stricter regulation are not undercut in global markets. In all probability, these and other concerns will keep employers fully represented in the ILO so long as it functions.

ILO standards. The continuing growth in the number of ILO standards has occasioned a close look at the need to unify and consolidate the International Labor Code. Employer and government delegates to the ILO have stated that the Organization's conference needs to concentrate on revision, while worker representatives point out that the changing world of work commands the need for more and better standards. One way or another, the code needs a thorough review, and there are several ways to do this.

On the procedural side, the problem of the reporting burden is being tackled. In November 1993, when the ILO Governing Body adopted proposals to require less frequent reporting for most Conventions, while retaining a 2-year reporting cycle for 10 fundamental human rights Conventions and allowing the Committee of Experts to call for more frequent reports when needed. These reforms also are designed to get the ILO supervisory bodies to concentrate on the most serious problems, leaving others to provide technical assistance and advice. This should ease the burden on ratifying countries, as well as on the Secretariat, and follows earlier decisions to create greater spacing of reports.

There is also a constant call to update ILO standards, as well as to contain targets that are attainable by a wide range of countries. This call may be somewhat redundant in that the ILO's standard setting for more than 15 years has been almost equally divided between new points and the revision of older Conventions and Recommendations. Nevertheless, the need continues. Abrogation of older standards is not provided in the ILO's wide range of options, but there are other ways to update concepts for the modern world.

In particular, there should be global reviews of the standards already adopted on particular problems. For instance, the 10 earlier Conventions on child labor were revised in 1973 to adopt the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138). However, this, in itself, proved not to be a panacea. Only about 40 countries have ratified Convention No. 138, while most ILO members remain bound by one or more of the narrower Conventions with lower standards adopted since 1919. Thus, a concentrated ratification campaign must be carried out to replace older obligations and avoid undertaking new ones, whenever revised standards are adopted.

Do standards have a future?

The future direction of ILO's standards is not yet clear, but it is evident that standards remain fundamental to the organization's purpose. However, as pointed out, problems exist in the relations between different organizations, between different visions of the organization and its aims, and among the ILO's own constituents.

An emerging debate both within and outside the ILO involves "social clauses." This corresponds to the United States attempt to insert the

question of the relationship between "internationally-recognized workers' rights" and international trade into the agenda of GATT and the new World Trade Organization. The ILO Director-General recognizes that many perceive the promotion of social clauses as a protectionist ploy, but also that the ILO cannot remain isolated from this problem. This debate will continue both inside and outside the ILO. The Organization's own constituents do not agree with each other, making it impossible for the ILO to act collectively at this time. The Director-General has stated that the only answer the ILO can adopt is to "rely on cooperation rather than coercion in its efforts to promote social progress. The ILO's vocation is to help its members realize the objective of social progress . . . through an ongoing debate to remind member States of their obligations."

This discussion, with its potential to dismantle the ILO's standard-setting system while simultaneously recognizing that ILO standards are the only credible guidelines for the international regulation of workers' rights, may have more influence on the ILO's future than any of the internal changes that might occur.

If the ILO can face the problems and resolve internal conflicts, as well as conflicts with the rest of the international system, it has a long and influential future ahead. There is a pressing need for international labor standards to achieve rational and humane economies—this, at least, is a common thread among the ILO's constituents as they argue about the appropriate focus—the proper balance between regulation and guidance. What they do not debate is the need to adopt the principles set in ILO standards in situations such as Eastern Europe's adoption of market economies, the transformation of the Occupied Arab Territories into some form of independent entity, and South Africa's struggle with the aftermath of apartheid. The discussions among ILO delegates and with other interested parties during this anniversary year should do much to determine whether the organization will be able to resolve its internal difficulties and move ahead with confidence.

Footnotes

[1] For the latest developments, see *Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations*, Report II (Part 4A) (Geneva, International Labor Organization, 1994), para. 85.

[2] See Roger Plant, *Labour Standards and Structural Adjustment* (Geneva, International Labor Office, 1994).

[3] Bill Brett, *International Labour in the 21st Century: The ILO — Monument to the Past or Beacon for the Future?*, (United Kingdom, Epic Books, 1994), pp. 96–97.