

Opening Remarks – Manfred Warda

Thanks Raquel, thanks Dan. Thanks to ACTRAV for facilitating this meeting I welcome, and thanks to everybody for coming to address and discuss an issue with us, that we believe is not only of highest relevance to workers and their unions worldwide, but also to the future status of ILO conventions and the policy of the office.

We are indeed gathered here at a time when precariousness has struck the financial infrastructure of the global economy. It is a much different issue than the problem of precarious work that we will be discussing this afternoon, but are a few things in common; one is that both reflect a “hands off” attitude by governments and blind faith that the market, on its own, can deliver prosperity, if not justice. Another is that, in both cases, many of the same people will pay the price for policy failures and greed and, for workers; there will be no golden parachutes to brake their fall.

I am here today not only as the General Secretary of the ICEM. However, but also as the Chair of the Work Relationships Group of the Council of Global Unions. That group has been examining the complicated and varied issues that we will touch on today. In fact, this meeting is a result of the work of that Group.

The shift of large numbers of workers away from regular employment and into temporary or insecure or precarious work has been happening for many years. It is having an enormous and growing impact on workers and their families and on larger society.

For workers, it means the erosion of the very basis for the coverage of labour law, the employment relationship. It can undermine, directly, the principles of international labour conventions, including freedom of association, the right to organise, and the right to collective bargaining.

But, it can also indirectly undermine the right to organise. One of the main reasons that many workers are reluctant to form or join unions is that they are afraid. Precariousness may increase the need for union representation, but it often robs workers of the will and capacity to act.

So, at the same time, one sees a formal violation of the right to organise, as demonstrated so clearly by the Korean case decided by the Committee on Freedom of Association in June as well as having a less formal, chilling impact on the effective right to organise; something that is easier to sense than to measure.

For families, it can bring a permanent feeling of insecurity and tension. Constant concern about the present clouds the future. It often kills hope that children will have better lives than their parents.

For society, it is a form of social disposability where workers, rather than waste, are tossed on the rubbish heap or employed only one time. And, when individuals feel threatened and vulnerable, is it any wonder that there are social and political

consequences? It often pits generations as well as ethnic or religious groups against one another as the scramble to string together the pieces of jobs that are available?

This afternoon, the ICEM and other Global Unions will be presenting some of their experiences and concerns and the efforts that they have been making to resolve some of the problems through legislation and industrial relations, and organising.

That said, let me emphasize that these presentations are examples of what unfortunately is happening in all regions globally and in all different sectors. Other industries, the private as well as the public services sectors, are indeed no less affected by precariousness than the sector that we selected to be presented here today.

It is important to bear in mind that for workers without union representation and without collective bargaining, the situation is even more desperate. They find themselves, purely and simply, merchandise with no real power to shape their futures. We will also be presenting materials that we have developed to help our affiliated unions and their officials to fare the challenge and be prepared for action in the interest of their members and workers affected.

This meeting is not for the purpose of telling you what should be done, but rather to outline the problems and suggest that, together, we seek solutions. We have a few, initial suggestions for ILO action, but our main mission today is to demonstrate that the issues of precariousness are fundamental to the *raison d'être* of the ILO. We want you to engage your knowledge and apply your creativity to these central questions.

But, we are not content to limit ourselves to addressing the International Labour Office. We also seek a serious dialogue with employers' organisations and governments of the International Labor Organisation. Isn't there a value to employers to have workers who feel that they have a stake in their jobs and in their employers? Isn't there a value in having loyalty in both directions? And, for governments, isn't there a risk that the erosion of employment structures is going to make societies ungovernable and unsustainable?

Introduction of first and subsequent speakers.

Final, Closing session – introduction of Marcello for remarks preceding the discussion.

We are now going into the conclusion of our programme, a discussion that we hope will continue over the months and years to come in real and practical ways. As you may know, October 7 is the international trade union movement's day of action, called the "World Day for Decent Work". An important aspect of that day is an effort to call attention to precarious work. Although all Global Unions are concerned about this issue, the campaign is being led by the International Metalworkers Federation with the support and participation of others. My colleague, Marcello Malentacchi, will conclude the trade union presentations on behalf of the IMF, but also for the rest of us. His task is to launch

this discussion with the ILO secretariat. We are looking forward to your reactions and contributions. Marcello...