Global Social Policy
Forum

Globalization, Labour Issues and the ILO: Guest Editor’s Introduction

This first issue of the second year of *Global Social Policy* is an opportunity to initiate the format of occasional focused issues. The editorial board plans to sporadically focus the resources of the journal on a particular issue, to facilitate in-depth analysis. Each of these issues will be organized in association with a guest editor and will normally contain an introductory guest editorial, a Forum section dedicated to the policy area, at least one article on a similar subject, half of the digest and some reviews of publications in the field. This inaugural focused issue examines labour issues, a future focused issue will examine health policy.

Labour issues – from working conditions to international negotiations – have been prominent in the content of the first year of *Global Social Policy*. In the inaugural Forum, James Howard of the ICFTU and Guy Standing of the ILO highlighted the role that reformed international institutions and attention to redistribution of resources must play in improving the condition of working people. An article by Pearson and Seyfang in the same issue [GSP 1(1)] argued that the process of creating voluntary corporate codes of conduct had highlighted the needs and voices of excluded workers. In the Forum section of 1(2) the divisive issue of a social clause and options for improving workers’ rights was raised, while an article by Huck-ju Kwon suggested that the Korean state had expanded its role by attempting to cushion rising unemployment. Shifting to the advanced industrialized countries, McBride and Williams argued in volume 1(3) that despite globalization and neoliberal policy prescriptions, OECD states continue to follow a range of labour market policies. In this issue we hope to build upon this rich debate about globalization and labour policies by providing more space for discussion in the forum section, raising different issues in a dedicated article and shifting the emphasis of the digest.

The Forum section in this issue varies from the structure of its predecessors. We have asked a smaller set of contributors to write slightly longer notes so that a more substantive debate can take place. The Forum begins with the ILO’s Stephen Pursey outlining the rationale and ambition behind extensive ILO reforms. These reforms
are designed to make the organization more relevant in an environment where labour issues have been raised around trade agreements and corporate campaigns. The issue of ILO reforms and women-friendly global governance is explored by Elisabeth Prugl in the second contribution. Writing from Florida International University, Prugl argues that the ILO has become an important ally for feminists in globalization debates. Brian Langille, a University of Toronto law professor, argues that despite the unwillingness of international organizations to defend core labour standards, such standards remain vital to socio-economic progress. He suggests that the ILO’s new Commission on Social Dimensions of Globalization needs to revisit the issue of core labour standards. The forum concludes with a contribution from the COSATU affiliated research institute, NALEDI. In a provocative note, Alistair Smith and Claire Horton argue that the ILO was more effective in supporting political justice in Apartheid South Africa than it has been in bolstering social and economic justice in the post-Apartheid neoliberal restructuring era.

The article submitted for this focused issue by Leah Vosko delves further into the ILO’s reforms and restructuring. She argues that the ILO’s Decent Work programme, initiatives such as the ‘Social Declaration’ and new conventions such as the ‘Convention on Homework’ and ‘Workers in Situations Needing Protection’ provide an opportunity to improve the working conditions of marginalized workers, and strengthen the relationship between trade unions and labour NGOs. It explores some of the issues raised in the Forum section such as ILO reform, the role of standards and the efforts to address the problem of marginalized workers.

Finally, the second half of the digest section focuses on labour related issues. In addition to reporting some of the developments at key institutions, we have tried to review activity among some civil society groupings. For example, along with brief descriptions of the activity of key organizations such as the ILO we have included the often less visible activity of groups such as WIEGO and SIGTUR.

We hope that readers enjoy this focused issue and look forward to hearing your views.

Robert O’Brien, McMaster University

STEPHEN PURSEY

International Labour Organisation (http://www.ilo.org)

The Decent Work Agenda: Modernizing the ILO’s Mission

(stephen pursey is Senior Economic Policy Adviser at the ILO.)

The International Labour Organisation has been part of the multilateral ‘furniture’ for over 80 years. Surprisingly for some, it has recently started to
reinvigorate its role in the international policy debates about globalization, drawing the attention of commentators who had forgotten, or never knew it existed. The symbol of this revival is the phrase ‘Decent Work for All’ – proposed as its mission in the 21st century by director-general Juan Somavia in his first report to the Organisation’s annual conference in 1999. Two years on, the concept is being developed and refined as a method for organizing what the ILO does, and connecting it to the debate about the governance of globalization.

Somavia, a former Chilean diplomat and the first director-general of the ILO from a developing country, is not modest about what he thinks the ILO should be doing. ‘We need to make decent work a reality in our countries and embed this goal in the global economy’ (Somavia, 2001). His definition of decent work is equally ambitious – ‘The goals of the ILO should be the promotion of opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity’ (Somavia, 1999).

Translating the concept into the work programme of the ILO has entailed a reorganization into four strategic objectives. The first ‘pillar’ relates to the development and implementation of standards for labour and social policy. Built around the 1998 ‘Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up’, it has been the core of the institution’s mandate since it was created with the objective of promoting social justice and dignity at work. The standards system based on the adoption and ratification of conventions and a sophisticated supervisory and complaints mechanism, has an important influence on national law and practice all over the world and thus influences the development of the legal framework for the realization of the goal of decent work for all.

The second ‘pillar’ is the creation of more and better jobs. Along with fundamental human rights, access to employment is probably the most widely shared aspiration of people everywhere. Employment is the first step in escaping poverty and social exclusion. The employers’ and workers’ organizations, which along with governments make up the unique tripartite structure of the ILO, are the frontline actors in the creation of a favourable climate for investment, the establishment and growth of enterprises and the generation of employment.

The third strategic objective is social protection. Traditional systems of social protection apply to a limited number of citizens in the developed world, and a few in the developing world. But most people, particularly those working in the informal economy, have few if any means of providing for themselves if unable to work. A major challenge for the ILO is to find ways to extend reasonable social protection to those sectors where it does not exist, at the same time as reforming established systems. The goal is to insure people against the major risks to their earning power, and prevent accidents and work-related illnesses.
The fourth area is tripartism and social dialogue. Focused on the mechanisms of information exchange, consultation and negotiation by which conditions of work and life are improved, it aims to better the processes by which differences of interest are resolved and common aims identified and pursued. Capacity building of employers’ and workers’ organizations, labour ministries and labour administrations is key in this area. Completing the reconfiguration of the ILO’s agenda are the topics of development and gender (equality for women) which constitute crosscutting issues in all four strategic objectives.

An important part of the thinking behind the decent work concept is that it connects to the important aspirations in people’s lives; employment and security for themselves and their families, the ability to provide their children with education and opportunities in life, health and other care when needed, a voice in their community and their working environment, and the dignity that comes from respect of their rights at work.

The choice of the word ‘decent’ is deliberate and is used to capture both the notion of sufficiency and of desirability. A decent job is thus one that meets individual’s expectations and those of the community, but is not exaggerated – it falls within the reasonable aspirations of reasonable people. And the word ‘work’ is used because it is wider than employment or a job, including not only wage employment, but also self-employment and homeworking. It embraces the wide range of activities in the informal economy and the importance of participation in the economy and the community. Decent work therefore has a floor, but no ceiling. What is seen as decent embodies universal rights and principles, but reflects the values and possibilities of each society. In that sense it provides a moving target, a goal that evolves as the possibilities of societies also evolve, so the threshold advances with economic and social progress.

One of the key building blocks of the Decent Work agenda is the ILO’s 1998 ‘Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up’. The Declaration is based on eight highly ratified conventions on freedom of association and the rights to organize and bargain collectively, forced labour, child labour and discrimination in employment. It is designed as a universal instrument for the promotion in all member countries of respect for rights which enable all working women and men ‘to claim freely and on the basis of equality of opportunity their fair share of the wealth which they have helped to generate, and to achieve fully their human potential’.

Increasingly the ILO’s activities are geared to helping its tripartite constituents to develop their own decent work strategies as part of an integrated approach to economic and social policy, and in particular the reduction of poverty. It is also placing a strong emphasis on partnerships with other international agencies to strengthen the social dimension of globalization. These themes are likely to figure prominently in the work of a
new World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization which will bring together a number of eminent persons to prepare a report by early 2003 for the ILO’s governing body.

Scarcely a high level international meeting these days fails to highlight the need to make globalization work for all. The Decent Work agenda is positioning the ILO to play a major role in designing the policies needed to spread the potential benefits of international economic integration, and share its costs more evenly within and amongst nations. Not for the first time in its proud history the ILO has shown a capacity to modernize and innovate. Whether it can achieve its ambitions in the years ahead is likely to have a considerable impact on the credibility of the multilateral system’s response to the challenges posed by globalization.

EliSABETH PRUGL
Associate Professor of International Relations at Florida International University
(http://www.fiu.edu/~Einthrel/about.html)

Global Governance, Women-Friendly: The Promise of the ILO


The neo-liberal economic policies of the 1980s and 1990s, anchored in theories of unconnected and disembodied profit-seeking men, produced disastrous results for a vast number of women, particularly poor women in the global South. While championing women’s flexible labour, the polarizing effects of these policies also furthered tendencies of women’s marginalization. In this context, the current debates about the social dimensions of globalization inspire cautious hope for realizing a vision of more women-friendly rules of global governance. Of the multilateral organizations participating in these debates, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has emerged as one of the most valiant standard-bearers of feminist concerns.

Involved in issues concerning women and work from its inception, the ILO has throughout the 20th century served as an arena for debating the status of women in the world of work. Its commitment to protective legislation before World War II, and its siding with the preferences of labour union women over those of equal rights feminists, has been widely commented on. Since the 1950s, however, the organization has produced a number of policy instruments geared towards advancing equal rights for women, most importantly the equal pay convention (1951), the convention against discrimination in employment and occupation (1958), the convention on workers with family responsibilities (1981), the part-time work convention (1994), and the homework convention (1996). Non-discrimination in employment and occupation is now one of the core labour
standards as defined in the 1998 ILO ‘Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work’ that seeks to establish a floor of labour protection in globalized economies.

Despite this formidable record, the understanding that women are equal workers came to the ILO with difficulty. Until the 1970s, the prototypical worker in ILO conventions was the supervised male worker in a public space with no caring responsibilities. Thus, the 1965 recommendation on ‘women’ with family responsibilities indicated the understanding that men did not have such responsibilities, and was superseded only in 1981 by a convention on ‘workers’ with family responsibilities. Similarly, home-based workers were long defined as non-workers not deserving protection, largely because of the location of their work and the intermingling of homework and housework that it invited. Within the labour regime that the ILO helped institutionalize, being a worker meant operating in a masculine social space. The ILO thus contributed to constructing male breadwinner and female housewife identities, denying attention to a vast number of ‘housewifized’ workers that did not fit the notion of a subordinate (because supervised in a public space) worker (Prugl, 1999; for the notion of housewifization see Mies, 1986).

Should women then trust the ILO to work towards more women-friendly institutions of global governance? Two basic issues need consideration in weighing the question. The first is the current policy climate at the organization, a climate that is unusually receptive to feminist concerns. Elected in 1999 with a mandate to modernize the organization, the ILO’s new director-general, Juan Somavia, made gender equality a key aspect of his agenda and gender mainstreaming a high priority. Framed around the pursuit of ‘decent work’, the agenda includes gender equality as an issue that cuts across other priority areas such as rights at work, employment, social protection and social dialogue. Somavia has shown his commitment to the goal of gender equality by strengthening the internal women’s machinery, changing the Office of the Special Advisor into the Bureau for Gender Equality with a direct reporting line to himself, and increasing its human and financial resources in an era of zero-budget growth. The ILO’s senior management has adopted an action plan, and the director-general has issued a circular on gender equality and gender mainstreaming, demonstrating high-level support for the issue. There are now ‘gender teams’ in each technical sector that, under the guidance of sector executive directors, seek to influence programming and build capacity. Considerable effort has gone into training staff on gender issues, and departments have completed assessments on the degree to which gender issues have been included in their procedures. At the technical and operational level there was 156 percent increase in resources allocated to gender mainstreaming from the 1998/9 to the 2000/1 biennium (ILO, 1999, 2000; Murray, 2001; Zhang, 2001). Where the ILO, despite its policy record, was once a laggard in responding to the
demand for mainstreaming formulated at the UN women’s conference in Beijing, it has become one of the most aggressive.

But there is another issue to consider in assessing the ILO’s potential to produce women-friendly rules of global governance. This issue concerns one of the institution’s key commitments, i.e. its commitment to tripartism. Unique among multilateral organizations, ILO decision-making processes demand civil society participation. But, reflecting the legacy of Fordism, such participation is limited to employers and unions, and tripartism in this way functions to exclude. Not represented in ILO deliberations are the vast majority of workers in the world; informal sector workers and those who work at home and in the fields with or without remuneration. A disproportionate number of those excluded are women. The effects of this lack of representation were seen in the near-breakdown in negotiations about a convention on home-based labour in 1996, and a de facto breakdown of negotiations about a convention on contract labour in 1998. One can only speculate to what extent the dynamics of these negotiations would have been changed by the presence of interest representations of employers and workers in the informal sector.

If tripartism has hindered the development of a labour code for the informal sector, it is encouraging that the ILO’s current focus on gender issues has brought to the fore the role of the informal sector in the global economy. The report of the secretary-general to the 2001 International Labour Conference emphasizes this, insisting that the focus of the ILO needs to be not just on ‘employment’, but on the more encompassing area of ‘work’, because it includes the self-employed as well as homeworkers (both categories are comprised disproportionately of women). The report recognizes that informal sector workers are the ‘silent majority’ with the biggest need, and that they should be high on the list of ILO priorities. Importantly, the report also acknowledges the link between women’s disproportionate representation in the informal sector and their caring responsibilities together with the need to put the relationship between work and family at centre stage (International Labour Conference, 2001).

All this sounds right to feminist ears. There is a lot of good thinking in the revived ILO. But if the silent majority of the world’s workers should become a vocal majority, the new ILO will have to overcome the institutional obstacles of tripartism. With women and informal sector workers severely under-represented in unions and employer organizations, this will not be an easy task. For example, at the 2001 International Labour Conference, women made up only 20 percent of all delegates, down from 21 percent the previous year. Moreover, of 410 speakers in the plenary only 12 percent were women (Zhang, 2001). It is encouraging that the institution itself keeps track of these figures and considers them problematic. But they also indicate the immense task yet to be accomplished.

Because it offers an alternative to neo-liberalism, and because it has
gendered the goal of social justice, the ILO has become an important ally for feminists in globalization debates. At the same time, the organization remains a target of movement struggle. Built on the institutions of a past era, the renewal of the ILO and its value as a feminist vanguard will depend to no small degree on the potential for renewal among unions, employer organizations and governments.

BRIAN LANGILLE
Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Toronto (http://www.law.utoronto.ca/index.htm)

Down and out in Doha – and Geneva? In Defence of Core Labour Rights

(BRIAN LANGILLE is Dean of the Graduate Program, University of Toronto. He is author of ‘Eight Ways to Think About International Labour Standards’, Journal of World Trade 31: 27–53.)

We affirm our declaration made at the Singapore Ministerial Conference regarding internationally recognized labour standards. We take note of work underway in the International Labour Organisation on the social dimension of globalization (WTO, 2001).

To those familiar with the ‘trade and labour standards debate’ this limp diplomatic formulation emanating from Doha was not inspiring, not unexpected, but also not meaningless. From Singapore to Seattle to Doha, the trade and labour issue even when reduced to a discussion of core labour rights, has been a ‘no go zone’, guarded most zealously by a large block of developing countries. As many have noted – and many more will post-Doha – this position is quite striking for two obvious reasons. First, there is the transparently different attitude to other ‘trade and . . .’ issues including trade and international environmental obligations, not to mention investment and competition policy. Second, there is the obvious point that the more the WTO asserts a hands-off position on the trade and labour issue, the more rational souls recall that the WTO is already intimately involved in this issue through, among other things, the very powerful constraints its agreements place upon its members’ abilities to address labour rights violations in the world. Policy consistency and conceptual clarity have not always been the hallmarks of this debate.

It is of course a mistake, albeit a common one, to limit the international labour standards debate to the WTO. The broader issue is the role and appropriate scope of labour policy in a world of deep economic integration, and the rules governing increasingly global systems of production and consumption. Our problem is not simply a trade problem but part of a larger complex involving investment, finance, immigration, sovereignty, democracy, foreign aid and development strategies. There are also regional versions of
our problem. While all of this is clear, we also know that there is no escaping the fact that it is in part a trade problem, if only because the WTO is already actively involved for the reason mentioned earlier. Then why do we continue to get results such as these contained in the Doha declaration? The most important answer is the distributional struggle between the developing and developed world which overlaps with the distributional struggle between capital and labour in complex ways to produce our current policy gridlock. It is certainly true that the liberal trade regime does have a set of legitimate concerns – not the least of which is controlling members’ protectionist instincts which can be disguised as well-meaning human rights or other legitimate initiatives. While labour rights activists must acknowledge that there is much to be thankful for in the international community’s overcoming of the beggar-thy-neighbour protectionist regimes of the 1930s, it is also necessary for defenders of the liberal trading order to acknowledge that concern for the protection of labour rights is a legitimate part of the world. The trick is to advance both agendas without throwing out any ‘babies’ with either of the ‘bathwaters’ involved. Simply put, curing for protectionism does not mean not using the trading system as an instrument in the effort to cure for labour rights abuses (the vice to be avoided is protectionism, not labour rights). Yet this is what the status quo endorsed at Doha does – with resulting loss of a potentially important ‘baby’.

Progress on this front post-Doha will in the medium term have to take place elsewhere, in other institutions such as the ILO’s recently announced International Commission on the Social Dimensions of Globalization. Although the ILO itself has long sworn off any trade linkage, what should the Commission say if it were to rethink this issue? It should identify this specific trade and labour issue as a subset of the larger problem we have identified which itself must be put into perspective. To achieve this perspective the Commission should draw inspiration from two Nobel laureates who have recently lent support to the ILO and its mission – Sen and Stiglitz. Following Sen the commission would advise clear thinking about our true ends as opposed to the various policy instruments used to achieve them. Separating ends and means is hard for human beings, who seem to have a knack for getting lost in the interstices of intermediate institutions and losing sight of the purposes they were designed to serve. Our true goals are not the creation of either a liberal and rules-based trading regime, nor an international labour code, (nor increased FDI or GDP per capita for that matter) as ends in themselves. Rather, these are means to our true goals, as Sen puts it, of increasing human freedom conceived of as the real capability to lead lives we have reason to value. And, as Sen argues, human freedom is both the destination and the path. Following Stiglitz, the commission would see development as a process of changing how human beings see the world and their relation to it. This vital normative is the foundation required for any important assessment of the social dimension of
globalization. On this view, the Commission would have a strongly positive view of the evolution of the international consensus on core labour rights and their salience for our times. This is because the core rights resonate deeply with Sen’s concept of human freedom and Stiglitz’s conception of development.

In taking up the cause of core labour rights, the commission will have to fend off detractors from both left and right. Labour supporters will object that the idea of core rights gives up too much contested terrain; that by definition it relegates all other issues to a second-class status on the periphery – that it not only gives up ground, but moves the debate to the opponent’s field of market-friendly discourse. Defenders of a Doha-like status quo will resist the insight that the shift from substantive standards to a set of process rights undercuts the prime argument of hidden protectionism. They will argue that this is an effort to inflict a set of OECD levels of entitlement upon a developing world which cannot afford them. The commission should in principle reject all of this and openly explore all of the ways in which the core labour rights can be promoted and protected. This is for a number of reasons. Firstly, they are basic human freedoms and as Sen advises, constitute both the goal and the way to it. Secondly, because they aim at a fair process they solve for context, levels of developments, and allegations of foreign imposition of standards. Thirdly, concentration on the core reminds both sides of the debate of the fact that they share common normative ground. Fourthly, far from abandoning other labour standards to the periphery, protection of the core rights to process is, even in the OECD nations such as Canada, really the most effective way of delivering other entitlements.

But what of the concrete issue the Commission may or may not take up – a response to the Doha declaration? The status quo reflected is one that essentially says that one of our goals, labour rights, must give way to another set of values we hold dear – the values embodied in the trading system. This is basically because of the threat of hidden protectionism. This policy result is only of significance if there is some potential gain in using the trade system to advance the labour rights agenda. As a matter of principle there is reason to think that the ‘carrot’ of access to the system as well as the ‘sticks’ of exclusion and sanctions would be potentially useful in this regard. One need only think of the ILO’s recent struggle for a remedy to the Burma forced labour problem as an example. Thus there is a cost in the Doha status quo. The task then is to design institutions capable of achieving both our goals of liberal trading and promotion or core rights without injury to either. This would require methods for detecting protectionist smokescreens and identification of core rights violations which are so significant that lesser remedies have failed. The ILO is the appropriate institution for the latter, and the WTO the former. It is obviously possible in principle to construct a system which avoids the very real problem of aggressive and unilateral
application of trade sanctions. Whether it is in the interests of the Commission to say this remains to be seen.

ALISTAIR SMITH AND CLAIRE HORTON
National Labour and Economic Development Institute (http://www.naledi.org.za)

A Southern View on the ILO’s Effectiveness
(alistair smith is Global Policy Coordinator and claire horton is the Labour Markets Coordinator at NALEDI. NALEDI is a non-governmental organization carrying out labour and economic research. It is an initiative of the Congress of South African Trade Unions, COSATU.)

Much has been written about the role and effectiveness of the ILO approach as an instrument for the welfare of workers. From an African perspective, the twin challenges of democratization and globalization has again brought this debate under the spotlight. This article briefly examines the role of the ILO in South Africa before and after the democratic transition.

THE ILO AND APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA
South Africa was a founding member of the ILO when it was created as part of the Treaty of Versailles. The South African government withdrew from the ILO in 1964, the year of the ILO’s ‘Declaration against Apartheid in South Africa’. Withdrawal was a result of political pressure brought to bear due to its policy of apartheid. During the 1980s South Africa resumed its reporting obligations on conventions it had ratified. Up until then it had ratified 12 conventions, with various conditions attached and with some conventions not requiring reporting obligations.

The democratic labour movement in South Africa has its antecedents in the spontaneous struggle of workers during the early 1970s. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s black trade unions emerged through a process of shopfloor struggles based on worker democracy. In 1985 the bulk of the democratic labour movement consolidated organizationally around the formation of COSATU. Its key principles were based on shopfloor organization and democracy, and one union one industry. Through its militancy and organization many COSATU unions made massive gains in terms of collective bargaining at plant and central levels. Throughout this period, the unions operated in a hostile political-institutional environment in which the formal ILO approach was either ineffective or irrelevant. However, this does not imply that the ILO played no role in promoting workers rights and living conditions.

In 1981 the ILO adopted an updated mandate on apartheid called the ‘Declaration of Apartheid of 1981’. This formed the basis for its programme of action against apartheid, which involved four components: monitoring action or failure to take action by ILO constituent members; research and
information dissemination on apartheid in labour and social matters; actions to defend human rights and implementation of international labour standards; and technical and educational assistance programmes. These actions played a complementary role to the independent struggles of the emergent unions. They were useful as instruments of political and moral pressure. For example, the ILO voice was important in calling for the release of trade union leaders imprisoned during the 1986 state of emergency. The ILO conventions were important to trade unions as a reference point for many of their demands and campaigns. In addition to the core labour standards, the conventions on overtime and shift work served as basic guidelines for many union campaigns. According to an ex-union official of South African Commercial and Catering Worker’s union, ‘paradoxically the fact that these conventions were not ratified by the apartheid government served to strengthen our arguments and also helped us to mobilize our members’. But as this official also points out, ‘the ILO conventions could also act as a double-edged sword’. For example, the South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union has led the struggle for maternity and paternity rights. Through its collective bargaining power it managed to negotiate substantial maternity and paternity rights, and benefits for its members. However, its struggle for these rights was weakened by employers who argued against conditions and rights which exceeded the standards set by the ILO. Similar cases appeared in the metal and engineering industry on casual and temporary labour, and in the mining industry on health and safety.

Prior to 1994, much of the ILO’s assistance centred on political and technical support within the region and the liberation movement. Politics was implicit in the technical assistance in the form of education and training given in preparing leaders for the incoming government. From a regional perspective, assistance was provided to front-line countries to deal with the effects of South Africa’s programmes aimed at destabilizing the region. An example of a regionally-based programme was the Southern African Team for Employment Promotion in the early 1980s.

THE ROLE OF THE ILO IN THE POST-APARTHEID ERA

Post-1994 the focus of the ILO has become increasingly technical and more internally orientated on South Africa with increasing support given to the South African government. After the transition to democracy, the ILO could deal with South Africa as a legitimate member and carry through its mandate in terms of its decent work programme focused on issues of labour standards, social protection and employment promotion. Indeed, South Africa ratified all the core labour conventions.

The ILO has played a vital role in terms of South Africa’s Labour Legislation, in particular in areas of labour relations and dispute resolution; basic conditions of employment; social dialogue and tripartism in the form of the National Council of the National Department of Labour.
important area of engagement for the ILO has been support for tripartism in South Africa. The encouragement of social dialogue is likely to be an important area of ongoing work, and will help to solidify achievements in terms of democracy, core labour rights, labour standards, social protection and socio-economic justice.

The ILO’s strategic priorities for South Africa include a contribution to the clarification of employment promotion through the integration of micro and macro factors, and job creation strategies involving various spheres of government including trade unions, the private sectors, and the Departments of Labour and Trade and Industry. It has also contributed to the consolidation of labour standards and social dialogue. However, achieving these objectives is made more difficult in light of ‘globalization’ with the resulting move away from formal employment, both in terms of the growth of the formal sector and the informalization of the formal sector with the rapid rise in non-standard forms of employment.

A preliminary investigation into the ILO before and after the democratic transition shows a shift in the emphasis of ILO activity, from ‘passively political’ to ‘actively technical’. However, the extent to which the formal ILO approach is directly relevant to the promotion of political and socio-economic justice appears limited. It is paradoxical that as the legal-institutional environment has become more favourable, the socio-economic environment has become more adverse. It appears that the formal ILO is extremely limited in terms of promoting socio-economic justice.

REFERENCES


Zhang, Jane Youyun (2001) Phone interview with Elisabeth Prugl, 10 July.