



Ollscoil na hÉireann
National University of Ireland



International Labour Organization



THE PRESIDENT OF IRELAND'S
ETHICS INITIATIVE

Edward Phelan Lecture 2015



The Future of Work

by his Excellency Michael D. Higgins
President of Ireland



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THE FUTURE OF WORK

President Michael D. Higgins

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Opening Remarks

Dr Maurice Manning, Chancellor



It is a great honour for me as Chancellor of the National University of Ireland to welcome you all here this evening.

It is a particular pleasure to welcome our President and Mrs Higgins, both of whom are long-term friends, indeed family members of the NUI. President Higgins was a student, a graduate, a faculty member, an NUI Senator and is of course an honorary doctor of the university.

President, it does the NUI and the International Labour Organization great honour that you have accepted our invitation to be our speaker this evening.

The President has always been a perceptive and often prescient observer of the bigger issues facing our society. His work combines acute academic analysis with an ability not just to raise general principles but to apply them to real life conditions and to real life people.

Some people may have thought that becoming President would make him bland or mute his message. I can assure you that his former colleagues in Leinster House do not think that now – if indeed they ever did. He has shown that he remains on song, speaking clearly, unambiguously and wisely on some of the great issues of our time – as he will do this evening. He may not please everybody and may even make some people uncomfortable, and no harm in that, but whatever he says will be said with that great courtesy which is his hallmark.

It is also our great honour this evening to welcome the Director-General of the ILO, Mr Guy Ryder. Mr Ryder gave the first Phelan Lecture in 2013 and he will reply this evening. In that lecture he described very fully the career and achievements of Edward Phelan, one of Ireland's greatest international civil servants upon whom this university conferred an honorary LLD in 1944. He was a generous benefactor to the NUI and part of his continuing legacy is the prestigious NUI E J Phelan Fellowship in International Law.

I would like to say thanks this evening to Patricia O'Donovan whose idea this event was and to thank her for her continuing support. Patricia, as always you are very welcome.



May I also welcome Minister Ged Nash and former Tánaiste Eamon Gilmore.

May I thank the Registrar and staff of NUI and the staff in Mr Ryder's office for their work in organising this evening and finally a warm word of thanks to the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland for their hospitality and the use of this wonderful room. It is good to have the Vice President of RCSI Professor John Hyland with us this evening as well.

I now call on our President, Dr Michael D Higgins to deliver his lecture.



NUI Chancellor Dr Maurice Manning gives his opening remarks.



From left, Guy Ryder, Director-General of the ILO, Sabina Higgins, Director-General of the ILO, President Michael D. Higgins, Dr Maurice Manning and RCSI Vice President Prof John Hyland.



The Future of Work

President Michael D. Higgins



It is a great honour to have been invited to deliver the second Edward Phelan Lecture. I very much welcome this opportunity to pay homage to the achievements of Edward Joseph Phelan, a man who worked steadfastly to forge international labour standards that were grounded in a universalist vision of social justice; and who made his contribution through decades marked by war, a Great Depression and gross violations of human dignity.

I am also very happy that this lecture takes places under the banner of the President of Ireland's Ethics Initiative, which I launched over a year ago with a view to stimulating discussion across all sectors of society on the challenge of living together ethically.

During the first phase of the Initiative, Irish universities hosted over fifty events addressing a broad range of themes. In a second phase, launched last September, I invited civil society organisations to engage in this national conversation on ethics. The Society of St Vincent de Paul, Dóchas and The Wheel, amongst others, responded positively to this invitation.

Last week, the National Women's Council of Ireland formally joined the initiative by hosting an international conference with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission on the position of women in the world twenty years after the Beijing Platform for Action. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions is, in turn, taking part by launching its own project which will be gathering workers' voices on the significance of ethics in the workplace.

Indeed it is essential that work, in all its facets and in its essence as a shared human activity, be given a central place in the discussion on the values by which, we, as a community, wish to live. The question of "good work" within the broader frame of "the good life" is one of the defining issues of our times. Given Ireland's recent history, which has seen working conditions change dramatically in connection with wider European and global trends, it is most timely to reassess what is meant, today, by "decent work". I congratulate ICTU on opening up this important conversation and I would invite as many people as possible across the island of Ireland to take part in it.



At the outset of this lecture, it is of course necessary to evoke Edward Phelan's role in building an international system of workers' rights. Edward Phelan – who was born in 1888 in Tramore, Co. Waterford – was a key figure in the small group of people who mapped out the basis for the International Labour Organisation (ILO) during the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. As a staff member of the ILO for almost thirty years, and its fourth Director from 1941 to 1948, he belongs to that new kind of international public servant who, from the League of Nations period onwards, played a distinctive part in giving an ethical shape to world affairs.

The work and vision of Edward Phelan also recalls for us in intellectual terms a time when, amongst those with a progressive agenda, the discipline of political economy was grounded in ethical reasoning and economic policy was conceptualised primarily in relation to the social objectives at which it was aimed – in particular, in the 1930s, the objective of full employment. In 1931, for example, Phelan delivered one of the Harris Memorial Lectures at the University of Chicago, speaking with John Maynard Keynes on the topic of “Unemployment as a World-Problem”.¹

As we are, today again, grappling with unacceptable levels of unemployment – ones that undermine social cohesion in Europe and beyond – it is worthwhile to reflect on the significance, for both our present and future, of that impressive body of ideas, principles and legal instruments bequeathed to us by a generation of men and women who were committed to promoting decent and dignified standards for human work. It is also worth reflecting on whether we still have the capacity as they had then to respond within such a framework of values.

Such reflection can valuably inform, I suggest, our understanding of the crucial issue currently facing labour – both organised and not organised – namely that of the means and form of the renaissance of labour rights in the wake of several decades of free market ‘rule’, or, more accurately, ‘deregulation’. This is the subject of my address this evening. How can labour organise itself at national, European and global level, in a context where global financial capital is proportionately more speculative than productive? What are the implications and challenges of a financialised economic version of globalisation? What conceptions of work does contemporary global capitalism allow and encourage? What form of internationalisation should prevail with regard to labour and workers?

¹ Keynes, John M., Pöribram, Karl, and Phelan, Edward J. (1931), *Unemployment as a World-Problem*. Lectures of the Harris Foundation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).



The passage from one form of internationalisation to another – from the international normative framework built in the aftermath of World War II to the current institutional architecture organising global trade – can be illustrated so well through the story of the official gift of the Irish government to the ILO – a huge mural entitled “Irish Industrial Development,” commissioned from Seán Keating.² Gifted in 1961 by then Minister for Industry and Commerce Jack Lynch, Keating’s work faces “The Dignity of Labour”, by French artist Maurice Denis in the grand staircase of the William Rappard Centre.

This Centre was built in the 1920s to house the ILO. It was the first building in Geneva designed to accommodate an organisation of the League of Nations system, a “Palace of Labour” adorned with many donations by trade unions and governments. When the ILO moved to Route des Morillons, in 1975, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) moved in.

The heads of the international trade body were not pleased with the atmosphere of the William Rappard Centre, so that the works of art to the glory of workers and the productive economy were concealed behind wooden screens and forgotten for a while.

It was not until recently, after the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which succeeded the GATT, was authorised to expand within its current complex, that it was decided to uncover the two murals and allow them to be seen. Yet, this gesture did not mark the reconciliation of global trade with “the spirit of Philadelphia” – that emancipatory conception of labour which animated Edward Phelan and his colleagues. The dogma spelt out in the first preambular paragraph of the 1994 Marrakech Agreement³, which established the WTO, casts competitiveness as the ultimate purpose of economic activity, and growth in output and trade as an end in itself: international relations in the field of trade should be conducted, this paragraph states, with a view to ensuring “a large and steadily growing volume of real income and effective demand, and expanding the production of and trade in goods and services”.

² Seán Keating’s mural has a ‘pre-history’: in 1926, Harry Clarke had been commissioned to craft a stained glass window to be gifted by the new Irish Free State to the ILO. The magnificent, so-called “Geneva Window” was completed in 1930 but never made it to Geneva, because of the concern expressed by Irish officials at the “subject matter of certain of the representations” (i.e. uncovered women and drunkards). The windows thus remained in Clarke’s workshop after his death in a sanatorium in Davos in 1931, and were eventually bought to be displayed in the Wolfsonian Museum, Miami. It was not until 1957 that the idea of an official gift resurfaced in discussions between the Irish government and the ILO, then represented by Michael O’Callaghan.

³ The Marrakech Agreement was signed in Marrakech, Morocco in 15 April, 1994 and established the World Trade Organisation which came into existence on 1 January, 1995.



These words stand in stark contrast to those of the seminal Declaration of Philadelphia, adopted by the ILO in 1944 under the guidance of then Director-General Edward Phelan, whose first paragraph affirms, in succinct and compelling wording:

“Labour is not a commodity” (Declaration of Philadelphia, 1-a)

Grounded in a philosophy of human emancipation and asserting a conception of economic and financial policy as being essentially a means of attaining social objectives, the Declaration thus states, in its second paragraph:

“All human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity;” (DP, 2-a)

And then:

“All national and international policies and measures, in particular those of an economic and financial character, should be judged in this light and accepted only in so far as they may be held to promote and not to hinder the achievement of this fundamental objective;” (DP, 2-c)⁴

This hierarchy of purpose affirmed by the Declaration of 1944, whereby economic tools and measures are designed to serve the “fundamental objective” of human development, not only guided the subsequent expansion and legal production of the ILO; it also inspired the early work of the United Nations in the social and economic fields. However, this was not to endure.

We must ask ourselves why – and with what consequences – has this order of priority been overturned in the last three decades by what legal scholar Alain Supiot, in his book *The Spirit of Philadelphia*,⁵ (and in a related article published in 2010 in the *International Labour Review*),⁶ described as “the neoliberal utopia of Total Market”. More precisely, we must address the consequences this abandonment of purpose has had for both the meaning of labour and the actual security of work for the mass of our citizens. If it is the case that social justice,

⁴ http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/...asia/...ro-bangkok/...ilo-islamabad/documents/policy/wcms_142941.pdf (Accessed June 2015)

⁵ Supiot, Alain (2012), *The Spirit of Philadelphia. Social Justice vs. the Total Market*. (London: Verso Books).

⁶ The *International Labour Review* is the journal of the ILO. See Supiot, Alain (2010) “A legal perspective on the economic crisis of 2008” in *International Labour Review*, Vol. 149, No. 2 pp 151-162.



human freedom and dignity have been dropped from the list of objectives, how should citizens respond to their new status as mere consumers within a socially unaccountable version of the economy? Have people come to be considered as means to an end – a resource amenable to consumption by the Market – and no longer as the ultimate beneficiaries of economic activity?

Let me state very clearly that my questions are not aimed at disputing the market *per se*, a social institution which long predates contemporary capitalism. Rather, I am seeking to address the assumptions associated with a brand of economics that recast the market as a general principle for regulating the economy, treating labour, land and money as if they were pure commodities. Alain Supiot refers to Friedrich Hayek's assertion that institutions based on the principle of solidarity derive from "an atavistic call of distributive justice" that is doomed to wreck the "spontaneous order" of 'the' market⁷. There is a great advantage to such direct speak and there is a great advantage too should those who hold these views have the courage to openly state them but there are consequences in the confrontation that would ensue.

The recent economic crisis has shown, on the contrary, that markets do require an institutional framework within which transactions between economic agents can be conducted under the auspices of a third party that guarantees their fairness over the long term of human existence. Without such overarching regulatory authority, contractual relationships would run the risk of reverting to arbitrary logics and the expression of the will of the strongest. There may be those too who would advocate that.

My critique, then, is specifically directed at the fiction of the "self-regulating market", an ideology which, for what concerns me today – *i.e.* the future of labour in conditions of global capitalism – has underpinned the systematic deregulation of national systems of labour and the promotion of competition between them. In what can be described as a form of regulatory Darwinism, democratically elected governments, and politics at large, have been portrayed as impeding the natural order of the market. The institutional foundations of markets have been gravely undermined, with legal systems themselves having come to be seen as just another product competing on the global market.

Indeed in the utopia of "Total Market", not only signs and goods, but also people can all be rendered commensurable and mobilised in the cause of globalised competition: workers and the relationships they establish with their environment are reduced to tradable units of labour that "can all be 'liquidated' in the legal

⁷ Supiot, Alain, "Poverty through the Prism of the Law", in *Field Actions Science Reports*, Special Issue 4, 2012. Available at <http://factsreports.revues.org/1602> (Accessed June 2015).



sense of this term”⁸. Supiot uses the term “Total” in the sense given to that adjective by Ernst Jünger in the aftermath of World War I, a crucial historical juncture in this conversion of people into usable energy fuelling the monotonous functioning of a war machine.

The descriptions of this form of work given by Ernst Jünger in *Der Arbeiter [The Worker]*⁹ find uncanny resonance in some of the conceptions of work prevalent today. I quote from *Der Arbeiter*:

“Our situation is peculiar in that our every movement is governed by pressure to set a record, while the minimum standard of performance we are required to meet is constantly broadening the scope of its expectations. This completely precludes the possibility that any sphere of life might ever stabilise on the basis of some secure and undisputed order. The resulting way of life is more like a deadly race in which all of one’s energy is stretched to the limit lest one should fall by the wayside.”

The emphasis on performance and output, the commodification of labour at the expense of a holistic conception of the worker’s feelings of dignity, security and accomplishment, are discernible in contemporary forms of work. This particular audience is well aware of some of the most disquieting evolutions within labour law, conceded in the name of so-called “economic realism” and a concept of “flexicurity” which, retrospectively, has yielded more flexibility than security.

The effects of the ongoing casualisation of labour on the quality of work, on collegiality and on the morale of workers are of comparable importance to endemic unemployment, I would suggest, in accounting for our fellow citizens’ pervasive sense of anomie and alienation. We cannot be content with this state of affairs. The fact that this is the first systemic crisis without a compelling progressive vision on offer as a response should act as a wake-up call for all of us. All of us who are interested in the future of our countries and of the union and the global society – we might usefully contrast too, the rhetoric of cooperation that was therein the founding treaties of the European Union and the dominant emphasis in recent discourses on competitiveness even at the cost of labour rights.

Today, I would like to focus in particular on one aspect of the problem, namely the fate of large swathes of the active population of European countries who

⁸ Supiot, Alain (2010) “A legal perspective on the economic crisis of 2008” in *International Labour Review*, Vol. 149, No. 2, p. 153. Liquidation consists in making something fungible by converting it into cash.

⁹ Jünger, Ernst (1932) *Der Arbeiter, Herrschaft und Gestalt* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta).



find themselves trapped in chronic job insecurity. The term “precariat”¹⁰ is sometimes used to describe this new “class” that has emerged from the most recent period of globalisation. Unlike the proletariat – the industrial working class on which social democracy was built – the precariat is defined by partial involvement in labour combined with extensive “work-for-labour”, that is, a growing array of unremunerated activities – often internships of various sorts – that are required to get access to remunerated jobs.

In his book *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*,¹¹ Guy Standing, of the University of London, defines the precariat as consisting of, I quote:

“a multitude of insecure people, living bits-and-pieces lives, in and out of short-term jobs, without a narrative of occupational development, including millions of frustrated educated youth ..., millions of women abused in oppressive labour, ... and migrants in their hundreds of millions around the world. They are denizens; they have a more restricted range of social, cultural, political and economic rights than citizens around them.”

The extension of the precariat has been accelerated by the recent financial crisis, which ended an era of illusion during which Western workers’ living standards were propped up by access to cheap credit and, in the Irish case, reliance on asset inflation. The defining turning point is to be located, perhaps, in the mid-1970s, those years when the GATT moved into the ILO’s historic headquarters in Geneva, and when the financialisation of the global economy really took off, gradually outweighing productive enterprise. 40 years later, economic inequalities have increased exponentially, splitting the world into “a plutonomy and a precariat”, to paraphrase the title of one of Noam Chomsky’s articles on the subject.¹²

The shift towards precarious employment is far from being confined to low-skilled jobs. A case in point is the logic at play in universities throughout Europe. In a recent piece entitled “The Casualisation of Labour in Third Level Institutions,”¹³ Micheal Flynn described how, in Ireland today, a considerable

¹⁰ From the contraction between “precarious” and “proletariat”.

¹¹ Standing, Guy (2014), *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, 2nd Edition, (London: Bloomsbury).

¹² Chomsky, Noam (2012), “Plutonomy and the Precariat”. The term “plutonomy” is taken from a brochure for investors published by Citygroup in 2005 and entitled “Plutonomy: Buying Luxury, Explaining Global Imbalances.” The concept was elaborated by a team of Citigroup analysts who argued that the share of the very wealthy in the national income of rich countries had become so large that the trends in these economies and their relation with other economies could not be understood any more with reference to the average consumer.

¹³ Flynn, Michael (2014), “The Casualisation of Labour in Third Level Institutions” in *Irish Left Review*, 12th September 2014.



volume of teaching and research work is carried out by “temporary lecturers”, “adjunct lecturers”, and so-called “teaching assistants” who have no job security at all and must repeatedly resume their elusive and exhausting hunt for the next short-term contract.

As Flynn puts it:

“More academics now understand that researching the working poor does not necessarily require field trips – that sometimes a glance towards the cluttered desks surrounding their own offices is sufficient.”

These questions were explicitly discussed last December during a seminar on the theme of “Ethics in Higher Education” convened by UCD, the University of Limerick and UNITE, with the support of the President of Ireland’s Ethics Initiative¹⁴. It is also worth noting that the Irish government has recently appointed a team from the University of Limerick to investigate the use of so-called “zero-hour contracts”¹⁵, under which employees must make themselves available for work even though they do not have specified or guaranteed hours of work.

As to wage inequality in Ireland today – in an article published in the *Irish Times* earlier this month, Paul Sweeney, chairman of the TASC’s economists’ network, showed that half of all of those in work in Ireland earn an annual salary of less than €28,500, while the top 1% of income earners averaged €373,300.¹⁶

Now if we were to learn from history it is useful to remember that every progressive movement has been built on the needs and aspirations of the emerging “class” of the day. Responding to the needs, the fears and the aspirations of those citizens among us who do not enjoy security of employment is a defining challenge for our times. It is a task not just for those who claim to represent the most vulnerable in society, but for all democrats, for trade unionists in all sectors, for workers’ representatives on permanent contracts, and for tenured staff in our universities.

¹⁴ <http://www.president.ie/en/the-president/special-initiatives/ethics> (Accessed June 2015).

¹⁵ *The Irish Times*, 9th February 2015, “University of Limerick appointed to investigate zero-hour contracts” <http://www.irishtimes.com/business/work/university-of-limerick-appointed-to-investigate-zero-hour-contracts-1.2095940> (Accessed June 2015).

¹⁶ *The Irish Times*, 16th February 2015, “Super rich or super angry where are you on Ireland’s income pyramid” <http://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/super-rich-or-super-angry-where-are-you-on-ireland-s-income-pyramid-1.2104861> (Accessed June 2015).



Were no genuine alternative to be articulated and translated into a plurality of policy options, populist politicians and heinous religious preachers alike will find it easy to exploit the fears and insecurities of precarious workers. This issue lies at the heart of the crisis which confronts European democracy. And again and again one notices the increasing depression of Jürgen Habermas' comments on what he felt like was a democratic deficit which has turned into a legitimation crisis¹⁷. We cannot afford to let social cohesion unravel under the combined effects of the dual movement I have described, of commodification of labour and depoliticisation of economic policy.

Karl Polanyi, the great Austrian economist, has warned us in his own times against the devastating consequences of both. Arguing that labour, land and money are not commodities, Polanyi interpreted the insertion of these "fictitious commodities" in the market, following the ideological revolution embodied by Ricardian England, as a "means to subordinate the substance of society itself to the laws of the market." This, according to him, resulted in a move by society to protect itself and reclaim social control of the economy, whether in benign form, as in the case of the American New Deal, or in the most destructive guise of Nazism and Fascism.

In *The Great Transformation*, first published in 1944, Polanyi analyses the emergence of fascism in the 1930s, as a perverted and opportunistic twisting of the social impulse to control the chaos of the self-regulating market rather than be controlled by it. As he puts it, commenting on the misguided attempts at restoring the gold standard in the wake of World War I:

"the stubbornness with which economic liberals, for a critical decade, had, in the service of deflationary policies, supported authoritarian interventionism, merely resulted in a decisive weakening of the democratic forces which might otherwise have averted the fascist catastrophe. Great Britain and the United States – masters not servants of the currency – went off gold in time to escape this peril."¹⁸

Although the current chaos of the world economy may not be similar to that of the interwar period, the lessons of Polanyi should not be lost for our generation. Distinguishing between populist manipulation of the masses and genuine empowerment of the citizenry through the democratic appropriation of debates

¹⁷ Habermas, Jürgen (1975), *Legitimation Crisis*. (Boston: Beacon Press).

¹⁸ Polanyi, Karl (1944) *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press).



on economic issues, it is important to affirm forcefully that no single economic paradigm can ever be adequate to address the complexity of our world's varying contexts and contingencies. Decisions in the economic and financial fields should always remain amenable to political debate; they should not be abandoned to the automaticity of rigid fiscal rules, even less so as economists disagree over the theoretical soundness of such rules. We need to foster widespread economic literacy, supported by a pluralist scholarship and accountable policy options in a deliberative democracy.

There are some fundamental questions as to our contemporary position that must be faced: What if the moment for 'deliberative democracy' of Jürgen Habermas and others is fading? What if critical capacity is so devalued as to face near rejection? What if there is no normative space, what if the wider issues of life and death beyond work and the capacity to consume within a variety of life worlds cannot find any space in the communicate order? What are the consequences of there being no space for discussing the theoretical assumptions that stand behind policy options often presented as single hegemonic options.

It is thus urgent, as I have argued in the address I gave last month to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, for our elected representatives, trade union leaders and workers representatives to claim back full competence and legitimacy on economic, fiscal and labour matters. Only through a comprehensive strategy enabling the mass of the precarious workers to gain control over their professional lives, acquire social and economic security and get a fairer share of the vital assets of our 21st century society will populism and fundamentalisms of all sorts be defeated. If parliaments continue to lose power to unaccountable forces, if it is accepted that issues of economy and society are as Hayek put it "beyond the understanding of ordinary citizens", then the confrontations with the disempowered will not be handled by mediating institutions; the confrontations will be stark and driven by populism and fundamentalism.

The time has come, then, to proclaim the emancipatory promise of an economy interlinked with ethics, ecology and politics, so as to restore the order of ends and means between human needs and economic and financial policies. The time has come, in other words, to revive "the spirit of Philadelphia."

As we thus work to end human subordination to a false, or at least dubious, economic efficiency and to foster a rights-based approach to labour grounded in an architecture of revitalised multilateral institutions, we can with great benefit draw on the recommendations of the Commission for Human Rights of the Council of Europe in the publication "Safeguarding human rights in times



of economic crisis”.¹⁹ We can build, too, on the tools and principles offered by the ILO’s current Decent Work Agenda²⁰, which takes up many of the challenges the Organisation faced at its inception. And I have to say I am not unaware of the contrast between that which I suggest now and recent decisions of the Court of Justice of the European Union which represents an opposite view.

This concept of “decent work” is based on a holistic understanding of work as a source of personal dignity and freedom, family stability, prosperity in the community and democratic flourishing. It approaches labour as an issue of economics as much as of ethics. It also brings home to us a fundamental principle – one to which the contemporary historical moment lends, once again, full relevance, that is:

“the conviction that social justice is essential to universal peace.” (ILO Constitution)²¹

There are many encouraging signs showing that the fiction of the self-regulating market is breaking down. The recent global financial meltdown has made it plain that it is not sustainable to pretend that labour, land and money are unconnected to workers, the natural environment and the real economy. There are, too, many possibilities for collective action, which we must seize upon, such as, for example, the announcement by the President of the new European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, that a Social Dialogue Summit would be convened in 2015 – the first such Summit in ten years!²²

Another telling illustration of the fact that the previous consensus around economic policy principles is unravelling is provided by the title of the World Bank’s emblematic annual report *Doing Business*, which, this year, bears the title “Going Beyond Efficiency”. In his foreword, the Bank’s new Senior Vice-President and Chief Economist, Kaushik Basu, goes so far as to write:

¹⁹ Commission for Human Rights in the Council of Europe (2014), “Safeguarding human rights in times of economic crisis”

<https://wcd.coe.int/com.instranet.InstraServlet?command=com.instranet.CmdBlobGet&InstranetImage=2664103&SecMode=1&DocId=2215366&Usage=2> (Accessed June 2015).

²⁰ International Labour Organization, “Decent Work Agenda” <http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/decent-work-agenda/lang-en/index.htm> (Accessed June 2015).

²¹ This principle is embedded in the ILO’s Constitution and reiterated in the Organisation’s 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

²² European social dialogue was born thirty years ago (in 1985), with the first meeting convened by Jacques Delors in Val Duchesse, with the aim of developing collective negotiation in a transnational context. A series of discussions ensued, resulting in the proclamation, in 1989, of the Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers (adopted by all Member States except the UK).



“Fortunately, market fundamentalism has, for the most part, been relegated to the margins of serious policy discourse ... Economic efficiency is not the only measure by which we evaluate an economy’s performance.”²³

It is important to recognise, however, that even though their flawed theoretical assumptions are exposed, some of the previous policy prescriptions endure, having taken on a life of their own in institutional thinking, within which trade union discourse is trapped or ensnared.

Let us, nevertheless, rejoice in the small reasons we have to hope that a new era is opening up for human work. It is essential that the ILO plays a leading role in shaping this new era. Ireland faces a historical opportunity to address these issues more actively as in 2017 our country will, for the first time, take up a “titulaire” seat on the ILO’s Governing Body.

It is my hope that all of us, in Ireland and in the ILO, will seize upon these possibilities for action and craft, together, a renewed, emancipatory discourse on labour. I hope that today’s event can act as a spark in contributing to ignite this urgent debate on the future of work – one that opens onto the entirety and full potential of human activities.

May I leave you with the words of philosopher Simone Weil, who captured so well these irreducible connections between work and the other spheres of human achievement:

“Man’s greatness is always to recreate his life, to recreate what is given to him ... Through work he produces his own natural existence. Through science he recreates the universe by means of symbols. Through art he recreates the alliance between his body and his soul. It is to be noticed that each of these three things is something poor, empty and vain taken by itself and not in relation to the others. Union of the three: a working people’s culture (that will not be just yet)...”²⁴

²³ World Bank Group, 2014 “Doing Business 2015: Going Beyond Efficiency” <http://www.doingbusiness.org/~media/GIAWB/Doing%20Business/Documents/Annual-Reports/English/DB15-Chapters/DB15-Report-Overview.pdf> (Accessed June 2015).

²⁴ Weil, Simone (1952) *Gravity and Grace* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul) [original: *La Pesanteur et la grâce*, 1947].



His Excellency President Michael D. Higgins gives his lecture.



From left, Patricia Donovan, Director of International Training Centre of the ILO, Dr Attracta Halpin, Registrar NUI, Guy Ryder, Sabina Higgins, President Michael D. Higgins, Dr Maurice Manning, Prof John Hyland, Heinz Koller, ILO Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia and James Howard, Special Adviser to Director-General ILO.



Response

Guy Ryder, Director-General, International Labour Organization



Mr. President, Chancellor, Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I've already had the misfortune of following President Higgins in his speeches. I was in Strasburg a few weeks ago and had the misfortune to go there the day after President Higgins had spoken to the parliamentary assembly²⁵. I did the same and I fear I suffered by comparison. Now my misfortune is repeated because to respond to this evening's lecture is once more an impossible task when one has been so dazzled by the fireworks of oratory that we have just heard. It is very difficult to find a way to respond and see a way forward but I have a few things that I would like to say. Some of them inspired by the occasion of this lecture; some by what we have just heard.

Firstly I want to express my thanks to the NUI for once again bringing us together for this important event. I also wish to thank President Higgins for having honoured the memory of Edward Phelan, not only a great international civil servant, actually the very first international civil servant, and in so doing, honouring the ILO itself. Thank you Sir. All the more pride is felt by the fact that this event is taking place in the presence of the Irish social partners, Minister Nash, Mr. McCoy and Mr. Begg. It's great to have you all sitting in the front of the hall.

The other thing I want to confess, Mr. President, is that the loss of Seán Keating's magnificent mural to our friends at the World Trade Organisation is something of a sore spot for all of us at the ILO. Reappropriation is not on the cards but you shouldn't think it hasn't occurred to us. We are, nevertheless, somewhat consoled by the magnificent present subsequently given to the ILO by the Government of Ireland as we moved into our new home. There's a wonderful Donegal carpet outside our main meeting hall and I hope Mr. President that you'll come see it with us one of these days.

Mr President, you have addressed profound questions and you have addressed them in profound ways. You have placed these challenges for the future of work

²⁵ Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) during their winter session between 26-30 January 2015.



in their historic context, particularly the context of the work and the achievements of Edward Phelan, not least of which the Declaration of Philadelphia. In so doing, I think that you have highlighted most strikingly the parallels of the issues with which he had to grapple and their relevance for our current circumstances.

You made one reference to a remarkable series of lectures that were delivered in 1931 by amongst others, Edward Phelan and John Maynard Keynes²⁶. I took the trouble to have a look at those lectures and they really deserve our examination. Keynes opened up his lecture on the world unemployment crisis by saying “it was the greatest catastrophe due almost entirely to economic causes of the modern world” and he went on to say that he had been told the view was held in Moscow “that this is the last and culminating crisis of capital and that our existing order of society will not survive it”. Now, we are not party to the views coming from Moscow on this item at the moment, but I think in the light of what has been said, it would do us no harm to consider the impact of our current state of unemployment in the world. More than 200 million people are without work, and we must consider whether our own social order can emerge untouched from that challenge.

That was Keynes’ introduction to those lectures. What was Phelan’s answer? He said, in conclusion to the lectures, that it was true that there is no single remedy for the present crisis of global unemployment, but he went on to say that there is something even more fundamental that we do have. We have proven methods of collaboration based on an ever increasing conviction of the solidarity of human society. We have the tool of international cooperation. If you think to the circumstances of the world in 1931, it took a man of some vision and courage to suggest that international cooperation was a way forward in confronting the challenges of a world of work and a world in crisis at that point.

In light of what President Higgins has said to us, I think that we have to consider whether we are up to the challenge and if, in addressing the current circumstances of the world of work, we are able to meet the example given by the likes of Phelan and of Keynes. President Higgins has argued for placing ethics back at the centre of our approach to these challenges. He has also insisted on the need to “re-people” the discipline of economics and to restore to it the tools, the multiple integrated tools, of political economy.

This leads me to recall that the ILO is an avowedly and unashamedly values-based organisation, dedicated as we are to the promotion of social justice –

²⁶ Keynes, John M., Příbram, Karl, and Phelan, Edward J. (1931), *Unemployment as a World-Problem*. Lectures of the Harris Foundation (Chicago: University of Chicago).



that cannot be otherwise. Our mission is precisely to ensure that human endeavour and economic growth is harnessed to the advancement of social progress and the human condition. What is, in my mind striking, is that this values orientation of our organisation is frequently seen not as a strength but as a weakness, a soft mandate so fuzzy that it blinds us to the hard economic realities and leads us to stray from the proper and necessary policy responses to the problems that we face. I think that President Higgins in his evocation of the spirit of Philadelphia has pointed out that this reductionism is precisely the opposite of the truth.

To boil down our responses to the challenges of the world of work to some type of economic reductionist determinism, to the exclusion of consideration of thoughts of social justice, the real place and purpose of labour in society and the meaning of work in the realisation of human potential as well as the meeting of human needs, is entirely to miss the point and will lead us astray if we do not correct it.

I'm not suggesting that to this reductionist economist paradigm there is a ready made alternative to which we must migrate, far from it, but the ILO has this great potential. It brings together governments and representatives of workers and employers in processes of dialogue which enable us to integrate the competing claims of the actors of the world of work in a way which does contemplate the complexities of the issues before us as we must confront them.

Let me conclude by saying that the ILO is four years from its centenary. It's a moment we will mark not simply in ceremonial style, but by undertaking and completing an in depth and real reflection on the future of work. We want to invite everybody to take part in that reflection and the fact that the government of Ireland will be a member of our governing body at that moment offers us great opportunities here in Dublin. We owe it, I believe, to ourselves, to the people that we represent, to the mission that the ILO has before it, to join together in this endeavour, to be inspired by the message that we have heard and to be equal to the tasks ahead.

Once more Chancellor, President, thank you for this wonderful evening and the honour that you do to our organisation.



Guy Ryder responding to President Higgins' lecture.



Edward Phelan 1888-1967

On the death in May, 1996, of Fernande Phelan, widow of Edward J. Phelan, the National University of Ireland became entitled, through their wills, to a fractional share of their estate, which consisted mainly of a villa on the shore of Lake Geneva. This legacy was to be used to promote the study of international law by appropriate means associated with the name of Mr. Phelan – in his own words “pour promouvoir l’étude de droit international par des moyens appropriés, associés a mon nom”. It is thus a generous as well as enlightened benefaction which the University greatly appreciates.



Edward J. Phelan was an early promoter, later a senior administrator, and finally the head of the International Labour Organization. He was an official advocate of the project at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, became Director in 1941 and Director-General under its new constitution in 1946. He had the crucial responsibility of seeing the ILO safely through the war years when it moved its offices to Montreal to avoid falling under Axis domination and being paralysed or extinguished. He retired in 1948 but he and his wife continued to live in Geneva where his leisure interest was sailing.

When serious problems about the integrity of some UNESCO appointees arose in 1955, Edward Phelan accepted the chairmanship of a special committee which the Director-General of that body had to consult before any appointments were confirmed.

In 1940 Edward Phelan married Fernande Crousaz. Her vivacity and sparkle balanced his more serious, reflective disposition. He died in September, 1967, but she lived on into her nineties. There were no children of the marriage. Edward was born in Tramore, Co. Waterford in 1888 into a seafaring family; his father and grandfather were both ships’ captains. His mother’s name was Carroll and she was from Waterford city. The family moved to Liverpool in 1895 and Edward went to school and University there, graduating B.A. and B.Sc.Hons. and joining the British Civil Service.

All this time, however, indeed throughout his life, he returned frequently to Ireland on holidays. While serving as an international public servant he remained intensely conscious and proud of his Irishness. He was one of the first to apply for an Irish passport and had a number of close Irish friends, including Seán Lester, Acting Secretary-General of the League of Nations and



the League's Commissioner for Danzig (Gdansk), and the former Taoiseach, John A. Costello. Irish visitors were always welcome to the Phelan villa in its beautiful lakeside setting.

In messages of sympathy to Mrs Phelan on her husband's death, President de Valera said that 'Ireland has lost a sincere friend' and the Taoiseach, Jack Lynch, that Edward Phelan's 'work in the cause of social justice will long be remembered in his native land'.

An interesting feature of the wartime move to Montreal (at McGill University) is that Phelan was accompanied on his long drive from Geneva to Lisbon by an official of the ILO named RJP Mortished, who was to become the first chairman of our Labour Court.

The National University of Ireland was pleased that Edward accepted an honorary doctorate (LL.D) in 1944. He was similarly honoured by the Universities of Laval and Montreal. The French Government made him a Commandeur de la Légion d'honneur in 1951. Other honours included the Order of the Southern Cross (Brazil) and Grand Officier, Order of the Aztec Eagle (Mexico). The Journal de Genève recognised Edward Phelan's special gift in an appropriate epitaph: 'il a su combiner les vertus de la réflexion et les épreuves de l'action. C'est à lui plus qu'à quiconque que le BIT doit d'avoir survécu à la guerre et d'avoir sauvé la tradition du service international'. He deserves to be commemorated by the NUI and gratefully remembered in the Ireland he always cherished.

T.K. Whitaker
Chancellor of NUI
January 1997



From left, Dr Maurice Manning, Prof John Hyland and Guy Ryder.



His Excellency President Michael D. Higgins (right), with Dr Maurice Manning (left) and Sabina Higgins.



Biographies

MICHAEL D. HIGGINS, President of the Republic of Ireland

On 11 November 2011, Michael D. Higgins was inaugurated as the ninth President of Ireland.

A passionate political voice, a poet and writer, academic and statesman, human rights advocate, promoter of inclusive citizenship and champion of creativity within Irish society, Michael D. Higgins has previously served at almost every level of public life in Ireland, including as Ireland's first Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht.

Michael D. Higgins was born on 18 April 1941 in Limerick city and was raised in County Clare. He was a factory worker and a clerk before becoming the first in his family to access higher education. He studied at University College Galway, the University of Manchester and Indiana University.

Michael D. Higgins is married to Sabina Higgins, and they have four children. Sabina Higgins attended the Stanislavsky Studio of acting in Dublin and was a founding member of the Focus Theatre.

As a lecturer in political science and sociology in National University of Ireland, Galway, and in the United States, Michael D. Higgins was a passionate proponent for the extension of access to third level education beyond the walls of established Universities. He was centrally involved in the development of extra-mural studies at National University of Ireland, Galway, and he travelled extensively across the West of Ireland to provide accessible evening classes for interested citizens.

A desire to work more directly for equality and justice led Michael D. Higgins to enter public life and he went on to serve as a public representative at many levels from Councillor and Mayor to 9 years in the Seanad and 25 in Dáil Éireann.

As Ireland's first Minister for the Arts in 1993-97, Michael D. Higgins's achievements include the reinvigoration of the Irish film industry, the establishment of Teilifís na Gaeilge, now TG4, and the repeal of censorship under Section 31 of the Broadcasting Acts. He also established a rich network of local arts and cultural venues which brought a crucial access to citizens across Ireland to these facilities. Moreover, he drove the revitalisation of Ireland's canal network, resulting in over 1,000 kilometres of navigable



waterways, supporting thousands of jobs, and creating wealth in many rural and economically-deprived areas of the State.

Michael D. Higgins has, like many in Ireland, seen generations of his family emigrate. He has a strong interest and solidarity with the Irish abroad and has been a regular visitor to Irish Centres in Britain.

Throughout his life, Michael D. Higgins has campaigned for human rights and for the promotion of peace and democracy in Ireland and in many other parts of the world, from Nicaragua and Chile to Cambodia, Iraq and Somalia. In 1992, Michael D. Higgins was the first recipient of the Seán MacBride Peace Prize from the International Peace Bureau in Helsinki, in recognition of his work for peace and justice in many parts of the world.

Michael D. Higgins is also a writer and poet, contributing to many books covering diverse aspects of Irish politics, sociology, history and culture. He has published two collections of essays: *Causes for Concern – Irish Politics, Culture and Society* and *Renewing the Republic*. He has also published four collections of poetry: *The Betrayal*; *The Season of Fire*; *An Arid Season* and *New and Selected Poems*.

Among the other appointments Michael D. Higgins has held are:

- Member of Dáil Éireann for 25 years;
- Member of Seanad Éireann (the Irish Senate) for 9 years;
- Ireland's first Cabinet Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht 1993-97;
- As Minister, he had direct responsibility for the promotion of the Irish language and for the economic and social development of Irish-speaking areas in the State;
- Labour Party Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs in the Irish Parliament and founder member of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs;
- Lord Mayor of Galway on two occasions;
- Honorary Adjunct Professor at the Irish Centre for Human Rights at the National University of Ireland, Galway;
- Regular columnist for the popular 'HotPress' magazine over the period 1982-1992, during which he engaged a young audience on the social issues of the day.



GUY RYDER, Director-General, International Labour Organization

Guy Ryder was born in Liverpool in 1956 and was educated at the Universities of Cambridge and Liverpool. He has some thirty years of experience in the world of work, most of it at international level. He started his career in 1981 with the International Department of the British Trades Union Congress (TUC). From 1985-88, he was Secretary of the Industry Trade Section of the International Federation of Commercial, Clerical, Professional and Technical Employees (FIET) in Geneva.

In 1988, Guy Ryder became the Assistant Director of the Geneva Office of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and became the Director of that office in 1993. In 1998, Guy Ryder was appointed Director of the Bureau of Workers' Activities of the ILO in Geneva. From 1999 until 2002, he held the position of Director of the Office of the ILO Director-General.

From 2002-06, Mr Ryder was General Secretary of the ICFTU in Brussels initiating and leading the process of global unification of the democratic international trade union movement. At the creation in November 2006 of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), he was elected its first General Secretary.

In 2010, Guy Ryder returned to the ILO in Geneva and was appointed Executive Director with responsibility for International Labour Standards and Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work – a position he held until his election as Director-General of the International Labour Organization in June 2012. Mr Ryder is the tenth Director-General of the ILO since its creation in 1919.



Edward Phelan was Director of the ILO from 1941-1948.

Born in Ireland, Edward Phelan had a distinguished career at the International Labour Organization. He was the official advocate of the ILO Project at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, became its fourth director in 1941 and Director-General under its new constitution in 1946. He was the innovator of the ILO 'tripartite' formula which forms the basis of representation at International Labour Conferences.

Each country's delegation includes not only Government delegates, but also representatives of workers' and employers' organisations.



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