

INTRODUCTION

Controversial questions surrounding employment abound, but many of them revolve around the closely related issues of insecurity, flexibility and the role of market forces. All the articles here relate to those issues. The authors take up, in turn, concepts of work and the prospects of work for all, the relevance of collective bargaining in an era of globalization, and the effect of employment security and unemployment benefits on employment. All help to clarify the ways in which constructive social policy can contribute to good employment outcomes consistent with economic logic and the pursuit of globalization.

First of all, and in a continuation of our attempt to encourage multidisciplinary inquiry, the article by *G. M. Kelly*, a barrister, sets out his reflections on concepts of work as typically presented in cultural, economic and statistical form. The “archaeological” sweep of “Employment and concepts of work in the new global economy” is a *tour de force*. It takes the reader from early Christian writings that valued work but not the gains through the Reformation and the Calvinist ideology of work on to “the secularization of work as a factor of production in the industrial machine”, the Marxian view that placed work at the centre of economic forces, and the commodification of labour. This all has relevance for the very contemporary debate on morality and economics, and on the place of work among fundamental values. After underlining the instrumental, individual, ethical, social and institutional dimensions he takes up the major theme, the question of the right to work and the prospects for full employment, enumerating the enabling, disabling and negative influences on those prospects. He believes that in the long term, “the market clearing orientation is likely to be seen more clearly as offensive to human rights and dignity and thus found unsustainable”. The current hold of work-centred values is strong, but with a revival of the concept of the political community we might well make progress “on the road back from radical individualism [and] the sovereignty of greed”.

Next, *Bernard Gernigon*, *Alberto Otero* and *Horacio Guido* underline the contemporary importance of collective bargaining in “ILO principles concerning collective bargaining”. The dramatic developments of the past decade in the world economy and in political systems have had their impact on the form and style of bargaining but have not undercut its value. On the contrary. In a world of widespread insecurity and unrestrained capital flows the protection afforded workers by freely entered collective agreements with management assumes great

importance. The authors demonstrate that the ILO has not been idle in this area, that it has in fact supported the practical evolution of the application of the enduring principles of freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. This is a welcome addition to what the *International Labour Review* has published in recent years on fundamental rights, including all the articles in the special issue “Labour rights, human rights” (Vol. 137 (1998), No. 2) and the earlier article by the same authors, “ILO principles concerning the right to strike” (Vol. 137 (1998), No. 4). Taken together they constitute a significant body of information on the views and relevance of the ILO in this crucial field.

The strictness of employment protection is a frequent target of those who advocate the primacy of market forces. That view typically rests on the argument that priority to employment security contributes importantly to unemployment and discourages job creation. Quite apart from the fact that employment protection tends to constrain both firings *and* hirings — job creation *and* destruction — the discussion on this question is severely hampered by seriously inadequate measures of protection. And that is the important subject addressed here by *Giuseppe Bertola, Tito Boeri and Sandrine Cazes* in “Employment protection in industrialized countries: The case for new indicators”. The topic may seem esoteric, but many have rushed to endorse outdated and simplistic indicators that are deeply flawed. If we have no useful indicators of the extent of protection, then policies formulated on the basis of those poor indicators are themselves suspect. Particular attention is given here to patterns of legal recourse and judicial decisions. The authors demonstrate that “available rankings of employment protection are too imperfect and imprecise to inform the debate on ... reforms and cannot be used to monitor structural reforms in the labour market”. Yet indicators are indeed needed because the question of relative flexibility cannot be avoided in the analysis of comparative employment performance. Thus serious research to develop indicators that capture the complexity of employment protection must be a priority.

Then *Vincenzo Spiezia* addresses another presumed villain in the poor employment performance of a number of industrialized countries — the generosity of unemployment benefits. In “The effects of benefits on unemployment and wages: A comparison of unemployment compensation systems” he makes a strong theoretical case for examining the impact of assistance and of insurance separately, and shows that there is no reason to expect unemployment insurance to contribute to higher levels of unemployment. If assistance is the instrument of choice for promoting social equity, then generous unemployment compensation can be consistent with a superior employment performance. This is a finding of substantial practical importance in support of the moral case for social policy in this age of flexibility.

Finally, the *Books* section highlights a great many important themes. Starting with the argument for global public goods, reviews and notes take up an examination of “the therapeutic corporation” and the requirements for combining social and economic efficiency, the economics of child labour, labour and democracy in Namibia, images of poverty, the French employment debate,

occupational health — the case of black lung disease, industrial incentives in the United States, and health in the Americas. New ILO publications include books on employment and labour in South Asia, employment-intensive infrastructure programmes, labour market successes in Europe, the future firm, labour flexibility in Latin America, freedom of association, the right to strike, guidelines for seafarers' working arrangements, economic integration in the Caribbean, vocational training systems, employment in open economies, and sexual harassment — a survey of company practice, as well as reports for the International Labour Conference on maternity protection, cooperatives, and safety and health in agriculture.