



## The Right to Work: Towards Full Employment



**Plenary Session 23-26 April 1997** – Over the last two years the Academy has concentrated its efforts on reaffirming the most central tenet of social teaching on work and employment, namely "the right to work", by exploring how this can be realized given dramatic changes in "industrial society" and the shift to a global economy. Simultaneously our contributions have also taken as their point of departure the principle of the "priority of labour over capital", as has been reiterated with increasing emphasis in the more recent social encyclicals.

In a very broad sense, our previous volume *The Future of Labour and Labour in the Future* (from the 1996 Plenary meeting) is a dialogue with *Laborem exercens* and its concern with the scandal of unemployment and accompanying social marginalization. In an equally broad sense, the present volume addresses more closely the agenda set by *Centesimus annus*, namely how to ameliorate if not overcome this situation.

The outcome of *The Future of Labour and Labour in the Future* was predominantly descriptive, pin-pointing the quantitative dimensions of unemployment, but also highlighting those qualitative changes in the active population which seemed durable in the foreseeable future. Many of these changes constituted a dual challenge. On the one hand, they pointed to the replacement of the model of "industrial society" which was the reference point of *Laborem exercens*, given the displacement of industrial production, both sectorally towards service work and geographically towards the Third World in the quest for cheap and unregulated labour markets. On the other hand, these changes themselves were focal points for the next meeting of the Academy in 1997, and challenged us to consider how fulfilling and nonexploitative work could become more available to all people in this transformed socio-economic context.

Our former study documented how the functioning of modern economies and the rapid transition to a global economy does not currently enable, much less foster, the employment of large tracts of the population, whether in the developed or less developed countries. However, *Centesimus annus* did not systematically examine the issues arising from the world crisis in unemployment in the context of radical changes affecting all three factors of production – labour (shifting from industrial to service work), capital (increasingly invested in technology and its development, or increasingly detached from production in speculative finance markets), and land (which now constitutes a global terrain where bad economic stewardship can ecologically denude the face of the earth).

The present study takes up the question of what means could be entertained to achieve the greatest possible participation of the entire population in the world of work, but particularly by those groups who figure disproportionately among the unemployed, namely the young and unskilled, and those whose occupational opportunities are severely hampered, particularly women and ethnic groups. One undoubted limitation of our work is its over-concentration on the developed world: a balance which it is essential to rectify in the future. Our aim in the papers which follow is to evaluate different types of contributions to the reduction of unemployment.

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