India, the ILO and the Quest for Social Justice since 1919

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Examining the interactions between the International Labour Organisation and India, one of its founding members since 1919, this paper observes that the strength of the relationship has varied over time, but has often benefited both sides. Looking ahead, it points out that the ILO and India face common challenges arising from the increasing inequalities caused by globalisation, the difficulty of implementing a universal social and labour policy in an economy where the bulk of workers are outside the formal sector, and the need to better integrate social and economic policy across different arms of government. These problems call for improved patterns of organisation, influence and dialogue at the national level, but they also define an international agenda for the ILO.

1 Introduction

In October 1947, just two months after India’s independence, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) held its first Asian Regional Conference in Delhi. It was opened by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Three years earlier, the ILO had adopted the Declaration of Philadelphia, which laid out a framework of social goals and universal rights for the post-war world. Nehru endorsed this Declaration, “As I read it, I feel that if the world were governed by the principles laid down in that Declaration there would hardly be any major problems in this world” (ILO 1948: 1-2). And he called on the ILO to shift its attention away from Europe and to address the grave economic problems of development, with a particular focus on agriculture and land, while finding ways to ensure that poor industrial relations did not hinder development.

Almost 40 years later, Rajiv Gandhi addressed the 1985 ILO conference in Geneva as prime minister. In his speech there were echoes of his grandfather’s words, for he highlighted the consistency between ILO principles and Indian development goals. He called for the ILO to pay more attention to the poor and unorganised. “My question is what more can the ILO do to make these segments of labour a major focus of its activity?” (ILO 1985: 20-22). He also warned against protectionism and called for a code for multinational enterprises, issues which were not on the political agenda in 1947.

These examples illustrate the expectations that the political leaders of India have had of the ILO, an organisation of which it was a founder member in 1919. India has played a prominent role in the ILO’s work, sometimes taking advantage of the organisation’s capabilities, sometimes influencing its policies, sometimes using it as a platform to promote national goals. India has been active in the governance of the ILO – it is a permanent government member of the Governing Body, and Indian representatives have also frequently been included in the worker and employer groups on the Governing Body, effectively giving Indian representatives three votes out of 56. The ILO has drawn on Indian policy and scientific communities for ideas, evidence and staff, while many ideas that it has developed or pursued have also penetrated the Indian domestic agenda.

This article examines the interactions between the ILO and India since the ILO was founded in 1919. Section 2 outlines the principal features of the ILO and its trajectory over the last 90 years. Section 3 reviews the participation of India in the ILO’s work – the attitudes, objectives and outcomes on each side. It looks in particular at the dominant themes during three periods:
first, the colonial period in the first three decades of the ILO’s existence; second, the decades after independence, when new forms of collaboration developed; and third, the period since the late 1970s, marked by the expanding international economy and India’s growing economic and political weight.

2 Origins and Development of the ILO

The ILO was born in the wake of the first world war. It arose out of two major concerns. First, at the beginning of the 20th century there were increasing demands for effective social policies to counter the visible and evident evils of unregulated capitalist development, including excessive working hours for miserable wages, intolerable, often dangerous conditions of work, lack of respect for human rights and extensive exploitation of labour. Such policies needed to be coordinated across countries if competition in international trade were not to undermine national attempts to raise standards. The first steps towards common international standards were taken in the early 20th century, but they needed a stronger institutional framework to be effective.

Second, growing social unrest both during and after the war was leading to increasingly radical political movements, and there were great fears among political leaders of the time that the Bolshevik Revolution would spread. Workers on both sides of the conflict had contributed to the national war effort, and once it was over, they were expecting that promises made to them of better living standards and improved working conditions would be respected. There was widespread support for the idea that peace had to be built on social justice, and that this called for an international organisation that could channel and respond to the demands of workers.

The Paris Peace Conference of 1919 took up this challenge. In creating the ILO, it adopted a series of radical and innovative ideas. First, the new organisation had the power to develop international labour standards, and to supervise their implementation by sovereign countries once those countries had ratified them – and even to some extent in the absence of ratification. There was no precedent for such an organisation – before that date, the few existing international organisations had been much more limited in character. Second, it gave workers’ and employers’ representatives equal decision-making power with governments in the new organisation, a remarkable model that has not been replicated in any other major intergovernmental body since. Third, the new organisation was built on a principle of achieving progress and overcoming conflicts of interest through dialogue and cooperation, in a model of harmonious capitalist development that attempted to counter the appeal of socialist revolution.

The new organisation rapidly started to build a framework of standards. In its first 10 years, it adopted 28 conventions covering hours of work, safety and health, protection of vulnerable groups, social insurance and other labour issues. The organisation also started to build a base of knowledge and statistics, and pursued an active political agenda with strong support from workers and much more prudent and selective support from employers. Although global in scope, in practice, the ILO was centred on a European policy agenda; the US did not join until 1934, and most of Asia and Africa was still under colonial rule or domination.

The international context changed radically in the 1930s. The pace of ratification of international labour standards dropped sharply in the face of the Great Depression. But the ILO emerged as an important player in promoting active economic policy to counter the growth of unemployment, including internationally coordinated programmes of public works, and opposing cuts in wages on the grounds that these would adversely affect growth.

The capacity of the organisation was sharply diminished by second world war, and its survival was in doubt. But as was the case after first world war, in the wake of the second world war there was widespread belief in the urgency of action in favour of social justice. In a major declaration in 1944, the Declaration of Philadelphia, the ILO positioned itself as the guardian of universal human rights in the world of work and a key actor in ensuring that international economic policy was directed to social ends, in particular to the reduction of poverty. The ILO still had to overcome an attempt by the USSR to deal with international social and labour policy through the Economic and Social Council of the newly created United Nations (UN), by-passing it; and responsibility for international economic policy, where the ILO claimed a role, was largely assigned to the Breton Woods institutions. But in the post-war world, the ILO retained the core of its work as a specialised agency of the UN.

Before the war, the ILO had not been an active participant in the debate on decolonisation, for it was largely controlled by the colonial powers, but as membership expanded after the war, it became an important platform for independence movements, first in Asia and later in Africa. The renewed emphasis on human rights led to the adoption of a series of international labour standards on key rights at work, including freedom of association and collective bargaining, as well as freedom from discrimination, from forced labour and from child labour. Today these are the most widely ratified ILO conventions. But this apart, the ILO devoted less attention to the development of new standards and more to providing assistance to the newly independent nations through an expanding programme of technical cooperation.

This had begun with social insurance in Latin America before the war, but it rapidly grew to cover occupational safety and health, management development, training, cooperatives and a variety of actions at the sectoral level. Assistance was also provided in the development of labour codes and legislation, with the result that in many countries today the national legislative framework is to a great extent inspired by their corresponding international standards. In the 1970s, the World Employment Programme highlighted the central role of employment in the development agenda, and the ILO developed a substantial programme of research and action to help define and implement employment strategies.

During this period, the ILO became a truly global organisation, with an infrastructure of staff and offices on all continents. The ILO’s model could be characterised as a social market economy, based on dialogue, social protection and the sharing of the benefits of growth, a perspective that was widely shared in both industrialised and developing countries. However, politically the ILO was harnessed by the cold war, which led to bitter debates in its governing organs, a temporary withdrawal of the US from it in the late 1970s, and difficulties for the organisation to intervene in some fields, such as European integration or international economic policy.
The increasing influence of neoliberal economics after 1980, the collapse of Soviet communism and accelerating globalisation generated new challenges for the ILO. Neoliberal market models treated many labour standards as inefficient intervention in efficient markets, and the demand for “labour market flexibility” came into vogue. The forces promoting these models were powerful, and the ILO lost ground. It had little influence over the design of the new economic systems that replaced the socialist economies in central and eastern Europe, although it did support the emergence of independent organisations of workers and employers such as Solidarity in Poland.

In the 1980s, the revival of globalisation led to intensified efforts to promote a social clause in international trade. The connection between social standards and international trade was an important reason for the creation of the ILO in 1919, but in the ILO of the 1980s it was difficult to build a consensus on this issue. The dividing lines in the ILO’s constituency separated developing countries and employers, who were opposed to making trade dependent on social standards, from industrialised countries and workers, who were in favour of such a tie-up. Efforts to build a social clause were in practice concentrated not on the ILO but on the design and mandate of the new World Trade Organisation (WTO). But these efforts failed, for the first ministerial meeting of the WTO in 1996 reasserted the ILO’s primacy in the domain of labour standards; trade would not be conditional on social standards. Instead, the ILO developed a universal declaration of fundamental principles and rights at work which should be respected by all (ILO 1998), discussed by Sankaran in this issue; and in 2002 launched a World Commission to suggest ways to strengthen the social dimension of the global economy. For, there was much controversy over the impact of globalisation, and concern about the unequal distribution of its benefits. At the same time, the goal of “decent work” was formulated, as an integrated objective that included adequate employment levels, respect for rights at work, satisfactory conditions of work and social dialogue.

The ILO has proved to be an adaptable organisation. Some issues, such as the role of social standards in international trade, are not greatly different in concept today from what they were in 1919, even if the global economy is now much more complex. But in many other respects the world has changed radically. There has been depression and development, war and cold war, decolonisation and globalisation, industrialisation and political upheaval, changes in class structure and in gender relations. The ILO has sometimes thrived, sometimes suffered, but its model of tripartite governance – workers, employers and governments – around a social agenda has proved to be resilient. While the ILO has not always succeeded in imposing its view of the world, it has frequently been an influential actor.

3 India and the ILO

3.1 The Colonial Period

India was a founder member of the ILO, the only non-independent country to be so. Indeed, this was not much appreciated by some other founder members, who regarded it as a way of giving an additional vote to the British Empire. Nevertheless, in 1922, India became a permanent member of the ILO’s Governing Body. In the early years, the Indian government’s position in ILO debates was of course set in London, and that position was often one which subordinated India’s interests to Britain’s. For instance, the idea of holding an Asian regional conference in India emerged in the 1920s, but met with resistance from the British government.3 By 1929, India had ratified 11 of the 28 Conventions adopted at that date, but it has been suggested that the rapid pace of ratification reflected in part the interests of British industry, keen to limit competition from India (Kaul 1956; Bhattacharya 2008).

Indian employer and worker representation in the ILO was to a greater degree rooted in India. The creation of the ILO, and the need for international representation, provided an important incentive for the creation of national organisations of employers and workers, which had not earlier existed. In the initial years, employer delegates to the International Labour Conference (ILC) came from the Associated Chambers of Commerce of India and Ceylon, formed in 1920. But this organisation was European-dominated, and in 1926, the Indian Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry was established, which also sent employer delegates to the ILC (Kaul 1956). G D Birla, who was an employer delegate in 1927, was bitterly opposed to European representation in the Indian employers’ delegation.4 However, a dual pattern of representation lasted until independence.

For trade unions, rather weak and local in nature before the war, participation in the ILO was the stimulus for the creation of the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) in 1920, and an important factor in legitimising the development of an independent trade union movement in British India. The AITUC was very close to the Indian National Congress (INC) in the 1920s, indeed it was presided over by top party leaders (including Nehru in 1929). Gandhi – described by V V Giri as the founder of the modern trade union movement – was an important influence. He argued for a model of trade unionism based on responsibility, fair demands and dialogue, and arbitration where necessary, arguably quite consistent with the ILO’s philosophy (Chatterjee 1970: 219-22); and his Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association, also created in 1920, pursued this philosophy. There were two meetings between Gandhi and Albert Thomas, the first director of the ILO, in 1931; though Thomas died soon after and there is no evidence of whose thinking influenced whom.

In 1928, the ILO opened a branch office in Delhi, the first in Asia. Its first director, P P Pillai, wrote,

The history of the decade that has followed India’s entry into the ILO shows that the hostility of the employing classes to labour has been tempered down to a considerable extent...labour itself has been galvanised into life ... the preponderant influence in inspiring the new social policy of India was that of the ILO (1931: 117).

Pillai may have been somewhat self-serving because he was himself an actor in this process, but his correspondence with Geneva shows that the ILO was active in Indian debates. For instance, the Indian ILO contributed to the debate on the 1929 Royal Commission on Labour and attempted to influence its course. Pillai was concerned that labour be a central subject, not a state one, and that ratified labour standards be extended to the princely states, concerns which were shared in the Indian trade
union movement. N M Joshi, Indian worker representative in the ILO in its first conference and on many subsequent occasions, corresponded with Thomas on these issues. He also asked for and received ILO advice on how to address the minimum rights of workers in the Indian Constitution, in preparation for the Constitutional Round Table in 1931 in which he participated. The INC included in its platform a demand for minimum rights of labour, which reflected several ILO priorities, including a living wage, limited hours of work, healthy conditions of work, protection against the economic consequences of old age, sickness and unemployment, freedom from serfdom, protection of women workers, prohibition of child labour and the right to form trade unions.

Atul Chatterjee, High Commissioner of India in the UK from 1925 to 1931, took a close interest in ILO affairs and chaired its conference in 1927 and the Governing Body in 1932-33.

There was thus some contribution to Indian debates. Indian labour legislation was also influenced by ILO standards, as Menon (1956) and Kaul (1956) have shown. But, on the whole, Indian affairs were not a priority in the ILO, which employed few Indian officials (see Krishnamurty’s paper in this issue). When Harold Butler, who succeeded Thomas as Director, visited India in 1938, the first by an ILO Director, he concluded that the problems were different from those on the European agenda.

It is clear that the introduction of industrialisation is breeding the same problems in the East as the West, but against an eastern background their order of importance appears in a different light. The western mind is mainly preoccupied with questions of wage rates, working hours, unemployment, social insurance, protection against industrial accidents and disease, the safeguarding of women and children against exploitation, the organisation of factory inspection, relations between employer and worker, to which have been added in comparatively recent years the questions of housing, nutrition and vocational training. All these problems have made their appearance over the eastern horizon...Nevertheless...it would be misleading to suggest that these problems, important as they are, dominate the social consciousness of the East. They necessarily yield priority to the fundamental and interlocking problems of population, poverty, illiteracy and disease (ILO 1946: 67).

This notion that the issues were different in “non-metropolitan territories” had taken a particular shape in the work of the ILO. Several of the early ILO standards had separate provisions with lower requirements for China, India, Japan and some other countries, which varied according to the instrument. For instance, Convention 1 on hours of work specified a general limit of 48 hours per week, but 57 hours for Japan and 60 for India, and the situations of China, Persia and Siam were left for later consideration. During the discussions on Convention No 33, 1932 (concerning the minimum working age in non-industrial employment), the workers demanded that Indian children have the same protection as other children, but the employers and some governments argued for “a principle of gradualness” (ILO 1932: 402-04, 406-14, 474-77). Similar arguments were used about forced labour, even though the ILO’s Convention No 29, 1930 did aim at its eventual elimination. On other occasions it was argued that India’s developing industrialism should not be “stifled and hampered” by regulations developed for entirely different conditions by countries that were competitors to India.

The outcome was a dual framework, accepting lower standards in colonial territories, which became known as the “native labour code”. It reflected, of course, that in the 1930s the ILO was dominated by the colonial powers, and with the exception of India, the colonial territories were not directly represented in the ILO. There was always opposition to this differentiated approach, and it grew over time. Indian representatives in the ILO were vocal participants in this debate. In 1941, Shanmukham Chetty, the Indian government delegate, said,

“We in the East often get a feeling that when European statesmen speak of democracy, self-determination and standards of living, they have mainly the white races of the world in their minds (ILO 1941: 33; qtd in Maul 2007).

Perhaps even more than by government delegates, the double standards were repeatedly criticised by Indian worker delegates, notably by Joshi, as Indian worker representative in the Governing Body from 1934 to 1944. Workers kept up the pressure even when, as in the Philadelphia conference in 1944, the INC was not represented in the government delegation. The native labour code was finally abandoned as decolonisation began after the war.

3.2 Independence and After

Independence brought a radical change in the relationship between India and the ILO. The first ILO Asian conference, held in New Delhi in 1947, discussed several major reports on aspects of development and institution-building. Nehru not only supported the ILO’s stand on human rights, as noted earlier, but also called for the ILO to abandon its Eurocentric standpoint and embrace the problems faced by Asia. He called for greater activity in all areas of agricultural labour, and, above all, demanded assistance with industrialisation, not out of generosity but as a moral obligation.

As Maul puts it,

India’s size, its economic potential and the confidence of its government, which intended to establish the country as the leading power in Asia, brought increased pressure on the ILO to change. India’s position was exceptional in that by the time it obtained independence it already had long experience of the ILO…Since the 1930s, India had increasingly used its position to establish itself as the mouthpiece of the colonial world within the international arena. At the same time, its special standing had allowed its representatives to gain a wealth of diplomatic experience before independence and to profit directly from the ILO’s expertise in drafting legislation and political guidelines. ... What [India] wanted now was to leave behind its niche existence in the ILO and to shift the focus of the Organisation’s work to the problems and needs of the Asian continent. India wanted to ‘decolonise’ the ILO (2007: Chapter 3).

In 1957, Nehru again addressed an ILO regional conference in Delhi. This time he was especially concerned with overcoming labour-management conflict, considering it to be a major constraint for development. He looked to the ILO to help.

While labour has every right on matters of principle, etc, to take united action and even to strike, it must be realised that every strike is a blow not only at the opponent but at itself. This applies also in a much greater measure to management. We have therefore to seek some approach which is not one of bitterness and hatred and of conflict but a cooperative approach (ILO 1958: 7).

India had adopted the ILO’s tripartite principle early on. In 1942, the Government of India set up a permanent Tripartite
Labour Organisation, which included a committee on Conventions to examine ILO standards, and an Indian Labour Conference modelled on the ILC (ILO 1943; Menon 1956). The tripartite Indian Labour Conference continued to meet after independence, and has now held 42 meetings, which suggests that, even though it has only advisory status, it is a useful mechanism for social dialogue on labour matters.

The tripartite approach has also been reflected in the role and influence of Indian employer and worker representatives in ILO debates. For example Naval Tata, who represented the Indian employers in the ILO for 40 years, carried over to the ILO the long Tata family tradition of social responsibility at the enterprise level. When he retired as president of the Employers’ Federation of India in 1985, he summed up the results of his long experience in a five-point solution for achieving industrial peace (Nath and Vithalani 2004). These are (1) the right to work should be recognised as a fundamental right; (2) the right to strike should also be recognised if the employer does not agree to voluntary arbitration; (3) symmetrically, employers have the right to lockout; (4) state governments should be willing to accept the verdict of national commissions on labour; and (5) in case of violence, labour laws should cease to apply to those concerned.

During the two decades after World War II, there was a considerable expansion of ILO technical cooperation programmes. Some of the most important innovations in this programme occurred in India, especially around vocational training and occupational safety and health. ILO-India collaboration was particularly important in the case of the latter. The goal was to create national institutions with the technical capacity to research and oversee occupational safety and health policy, and successful programmes in India were subsequently emulated elsewhere (Robert and Parmeggiani 1969). In India’s new economic strategy, productivity growth was seen as the key to successful industrialisation, and this was also a priority for the ILO’s new Director-General, David Morse. The ILO helped to set up the National Productivity Centre and supported the National Productivity Council. It also contributed in fields as diverse as occupational rehabilitation, wage policy, labour statistics and workers’ education. By 1960, in the Director-General’s Activities Report for that year, there were more references to India than to any other country (ILO 1960). As national institutions were strengthened, calls for ILO assistance diminished and the scope for technical cooperation narrowed after the 1960s. But new programmes continued to develop, including a substantial effort on population and labour.

Substantively, a basic question was whether the ILO’s work on labour standards was consistent with its work on development policy, or whether progress in development was a precondition for raising standards. Even within the ILO, in the 1960s and 1970s, there were divergent views on the subject (Maul 2008). India’s view on labour standards was expressed on a number of occasions in the International Labour Conference. For instance, in 1971, Minister of Labour R K Khadilkar talked of standards “becoming increasingly unrelated to the conditions prevailing in the developing regions of the world” and called on the ILO “to meet the new challenges through programmes of practical action rather than through the elaborate enunciation of norms and standards”. This has been a frequent theme; speaking of the same issue in 1981, Indira Gandhi said, “Let not the better be the enemy of the good”. Even today, India has only ratified 15 of the 76 “up to date” conventions, since many of the 41 ratifications are of older conventions that do not correspond fully to today’s realities. However, technical problems with some conventions apart, this position seems to reflect a reticence to accept international obligations in matters to do with domestic policy rather than an unwillingness to legislate on labour and social policy matters; indeed, the Indian Labour Code is very extensive.

The growth of the World Employment Programme in the 1970s moved the ILO further towards a broad development agenda. The World Employment Programme had strong political support in India, being seen as an example of “practical action” to support development strategy. Several leading Indian economists were involved in the programme. K N Raj, perhaps the most prominent among them, directed the ILO’s Asian Regional Team for Employment Promotion (ARTEP) for a year at the end of the 1970s, and a stream of young economists from India and other parts of South Asia worked with ARTEP as well as in other ILO programmes. ARTEP, initially based in Bangkok, moved to Delhi in the mid-1980s and produced a series of books and papers on employment policy issues of relevance to India, such as labour market policy, industrialisation, international migration, labour force participation, child labour, poverty reduction and rural employment, among others.

India has continued to argue for a focus on development in the ILO’s work. That could be seen in Rajiv Gandhi’s speech to the ILC in 1985, quoted earlier, which demanded that greater attention be paid to unorganised workers. Indeed, the need for the ILO to address the problems of unorganised workers and the informal sector was a regular theme in the speeches of Indian labour ministers to the ILC (Sangma 1994). But the ILO has always had difficulty reaching the informal sector. The dominant presence in ILO forums of employers’ and workers’ representatives from the modern sector, which in many countries represents only a fraction of the economy, tends to reinforce this tendency in the organisation’s work, and this remains true in India as elsewhere.

Since the 1980s, the ILO has continued to make a variety of contributions to thinking about India’s development problems, with publications by ILO staff members on poverty, labour markets, social security, child labour, gender equality and a variety of other issues. At the same time, Indian economists such as Amartya Sen, Ashok Rudra, T S Popa, Y K Alagh, Amiya Bagchi, L K Deshpande, Deepak Nayyar, Amit Bhaduri and others have made major contributions to the ILO’s work. There has therefore been a great deal of intellectual exchange. The extent to which this has been reflected in policy is hard to demonstrate, but that is true of analytical work within India as well. Much policy impact comes through informal interaction, participation in research and policy conferences, and the preparation of publications on current policy issues. It can reasonably be considered that thinking on labour and social policy, particularly on
employment policy, both in India, and at the international level, has benefited from this exchange.

3.3 The ILO and India in a Globalising World

In recent years, the ILO’s technical cooperation programme in India has become more diverse, with a particular focus on the elimination of child labour since the late 1990s. In the early 1990s, Artep was transformed into a multidisciplinary team responsible for technical work in south Asia and ultimately merged with the New Delhi administrative office to form a wider south Asian office. One consequence is that the ILO undertakes less advanced policy research today than it did during the peak periods of technical cooperation in the past.

On the other hand, India’s political role in the ILO has, if anything, strengthened over time. As noted earlier, India played an important role in the struggle for decolonisation in the early years after independence, including the fight against racism in South Africa. India was an active participant in the debates that led to the ILO Declaration on the Policy of “Apartheid” in 1964 and the withdrawal of South Africa from the organisation.

From the 1970s onwards, Indian government positions in the ILO increasingly turned towards global economic issues. In the 1970s, concern was frequently expressed about the role of multinational companies and the need for an effective code of conduct. This led to the adoption of a Declaration on Multinational in 1977 (ILO 1977), which emphasised the need for multinational companies to contribute to national development goals, albeit in a voluntary framework.

India was also an important supporter of the goal of a New International Economic Order in the 1970s, intended to ensure that the global trading system met the development needs of low-income countries. Indian government delegates raised the issue repeatedly in ILO forums. But results were meagre in the face of opposition from industrialised countries, and by the early 1980s, it was clear that little progress could be expected on that front. The battleground shifted to international trade negotiations. As noted, this generated a difficult issue for the ILO – the question of the linkage between trade and labour standards.

India’s position on this matter was clear from the start. The government was totally opposed to any linkage between trade and labour standards, or even discussion of the possibility of such a linkage. The main concern was that labour standards would become a surrogate for protectionism, and a means for economically powerful countries to leverage Indian domestic policy. From 1983 on, this became a major bone of contention in trade negotiations in the face of efforts by the US and other countries to promote the linkage. Indian employers supported the government position. Trade unions were more ambivalent. The international trade union movement as a whole was strongly in favour of a social dimension to trade, but it was dominated by unions from industrialised countries and workers’ organisations in many developing countries sympathised with their government’s views.

As noted, in the end, efforts to link trade and labour standards failed. Apart from the issue of protectionism, from the point of view of India and other developing countries, the proposal to make trade conditional on social standards had another major flaw – it did not take into account the need for a global development agenda that could lead to the realisation of these standards. The breakthrough on that front came in the 1995 United Nations Social Summit in Copenhagen, which placed respect for core labour standards – freedom of association, and freedom from forced labour, discrimination and child labour – within a broad development agenda. Subsequently, India supported the process in the ILO that led to the adoption of the 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, which, while declaring the universality of these rights, states that

labour standards should not be used for protectionist trade purposes, and that nothing in this Declaration and its follow-up shall be invoked or otherwise used for such purposes; in addition, the comparative advantage of any country should in no way be called into question by this Declaration and its follow-up (ILO 1998).

This phrase is now regularly invoked whenever social issues are discussed alongside trade.33

Today the ILO’s agenda is built around the overall goal of decent work. This is the accepted framework for the organisation’s activities in India as elsewhere, with an agreed programme of collaboration between the ILO and Indian workers, employers and the government. Nevertheless, a common reaction in India to the idea of decent work is, “First let there be work, then we can aim for decent work”.14 But the decent work approach has been designed as an integrated approach to economic and social policy, ensuring that employment quality and quantity go hand in hand. This connection does not get much political priority in India. The recently concluded National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector attempted to address conditions of work in the informal sector (Government of India 2007), but its efforts on that front generated little political echo. Employment policy in India today is rather dominated by the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, a programme which aims to establish and guarantee the right to work, but with little attempt to improve the intrinsic quality of the work concerned. The quality of work in the bulk of the Indian economy leaves a great deal to be desired, and while there have been significant improvements in working conditions in the modern sector, it accounts for only 8% of employment in the economy as a whole (Government of India 2009). This may prove to be an important area for future collaboration between India and the ILO.

4 Concluding Comments

The strength of the relationship between India and the ILO has varied over time, but has often been productive on both sides. The ILO benefited when India pressed for a greater focus on development, and has drawn extensively on Indian expertise; India has benefited from both practical and analytical cooperation with the ILO, and has taken advantage of the ILO as a platform to promote its international agenda.

The ILO and India continue to face common challenges. The social dimension of globalisation is one, as global market forces weaken job creation, put pressure on labour standards and
drive increasing inequality. Another is the implementation of a universal social and labour policy in economies where the bulk of workers are outside the formal sector. A third is a better integration of social and economic policy across different arms of government – the ministries of labour that mainly represent governments in the ILO often lack the resources or authority to implement comprehensive policies to promote decent work, just as the ILO lacks instruments to ensure that global economic policy serves social ends. These problems call for improved patterns of organisation, influence and dialogue at the national level, but they also define an international agenda for the ILO. And as this discussion suggests, progress is likely to be faster if national and international agendas are pursued together.

### Table 1: ILO and India, 1919-2009 – Some Highlights

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<td>1931: Congress Karachi platform and 1936 election manifesto stress fundamental rights</td>
<td>Expansion of work on social insurance</td>
<td>ILO GB chaired by Sir Atul Chatterjee (1932-13): N M Joshi prominent as worker representative</td>
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<td>1940s</td>
<td>ILO in Canada during second world war 1944: Declaration of Philadelphia embeds universal rights</td>
<td>1947: First ILO Asian Regional Conference held in Delhi Prime Minister Nehru endorses Declaration of Philadelphia</td>
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<td>1942: Quit India Movement</td>
<td>1946: ILO becomes specialised agency of UN 1948-9: Conventions on freedom of association and collective bargaining adopted</td>
<td>1948: First Indian Assistant Director General of ILO (Raghunath Rao) 1948-9: Dharee Lal chairs GB</td>
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<td>1942: Tripartite Indian Labour Conference established on ILO model</td>
<td>Adoption of further Conventions on rights at work Development of ILO technical assistance programme Tensions due to Cold War</td>
<td>1950: Jagjivan Ram chairs ILC Growth of technical cooperation on productivity, management development, wage policy</td>
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<td>1947: Industrial Disputes Act</td>
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<td>ILO uses ILO forums to promote decolonisation</td>
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<td>1947: Independence and Partition</td>
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<td>1957: Fourth Asian Regional conference in Delhi India active in ILO governance (Naval Tata employer representative until the 1980s)</td>
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<td>Indian Constitution incorporates key labour and social rights</td>
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<td>1950s</td>
<td>First Five-Year Plan built around public sector-driven industrialisation Community development and zamindari abolition Reservations for Scheduled Castes (1953-55: First Backward Castes Commission chaired by Kaka Kalelkar)</td>
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<td>1953: Birth of Socialism</td>
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<td>1954: ILO supports Indian institutions for occupational safety and health, manpower development Lower priority given to ratification of conventions</td>
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<td>1961-2: S T Merani chairs GB</td>
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<td>1956: National Commission on Labour</td>
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<td>1975-77: Emergency</td>
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<td>Indian economists involved in World Employment Programme</td>
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<td>Analytical/policy reports on labour markets, poverty, migration, industrialisation, rural employment</td>
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<td>Labour and population programme starts</td>
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<td>1984-85: B G Deshmukh chairs GB 1985: Rajiv Gandhi addresses ILC, calls for more attention to informal sector</td>
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<td>1990s</td>
<td>1991: National Commission on Rural Labour Political volatility Urbanisation accelerates</td>
<td>Start of International Programme for Elimination of Child Labour UN Social Summit endorses ILO goals of employment and core labour standards 1998: Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work 1999: Launch of Decent Work Agenda</td>
<td>India helps prevent a social clause at WTO and keep international action on rights at work within ILO Indian representatives participate actively in process leading to adoption of 1998 Declaration</td>
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<td>2000s</td>
<td>Indian economy globalises High economic growth, slow formal sector employment growth, increase in inequality Growth of migration for work 2004-09: National Commission on Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector</td>
<td>Global Programmes launched on employment and social security 2002-04: World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation 2008: Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalisation</td>
<td>Development of action on child labour and HIV/AIDS ILO support to policies in India for entrepreneurship development, employment policies, reconstruction after disaster, hazard control, gender equality</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Economic & Political Weekly 51 March 5, 2011 Vol XLVI No 10
FELLOW PROGRAMME IN MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATIONS

MICA invites applications for admission to its doctoral-level ‘Fellow Programme in Management – Communications’ (FPM-C). The FPM-C is an AICTE APPROVED, three-year, full-time, residential programme.

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- MICA’s FPM will produce ‘Fellows of Communication’ who will be able to meet international norms of research and education in communication; the FPM focus would be on theory and, hence, critical thinking, argument development, knowledge gaps identification, problem formulation and report writing.

- The FPM offers four areas of specialisation: Integrated Marketing Communication, Communication and Social Change, Communication and Cultural Studies, and New Media and Communication. Candidates should choose any one area at the time of application.

- Students will spend one term at an overseas university department assigned to an eminent communication academician/researcher.

- FPM students will be paid a stipend.

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Applicants must have a two-year UGC/ACU/AICTE approved Master’s degree/equivalent qualification with at least 55% marks or equivalent grade in any discipline of the Humanities/Social Sciences/ Business Management having Communication/Journalism/Advertising/PR/Marketing as a core subject. The candidate also should have completed a three-year Bachelor’s degree/equivalent qualification after completing higher secondary (10+2) or equivalent education. Candidates with M.Phil. or NET/JRF (UGC) qualification in ‘Mass Communication and Journalism’ or ‘Management’ and/or relevant work/research experience in a recognised communication/media institution will be given preference.

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All eligible applicants will be scrutinised through telephonic interviews. Shortlisted candidates will then be required to appear for the MICA Admission Test (MICAT-FPM). MICAT-FPM is a two-tier process: Written Test (WT) and Oral Presentation + Personal Interview (OP+PI).