

*International Unity in Diversity Conference:
People, the Workforce & the Future of Australia
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A Baha’i Perspective on Global Industrial Justice

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The opportunity is most appreciated to present this address. While I am attending this conference as a representative of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Australia, this paper is a personal contribution and should not be read as an official statement of the Australian Baha'i Community². This is the full, printed version of the paper to which I will briefly speak at the Conference, given the limitations of time arising from the many excellent speakers at this Conference.

I justify the adoption of a global perspective in this paper, in a Conference directed at “*People, the Workforce and the Future of Australia*”, in several ways. In the first place, my argument is that in this rapidly integrating planet, under the compelling forces of globalization and other factors, it is not possible to separate the future of Australia in the field of industrial relations, or for that matter in almost any other field, from that of the future of the whole world. The future of Australia is inextricably linked with the wider international realm. And in the second place, as will be seen below, the Baha’i perspective is universally global in nature, advocating as it does the unity and oneness of all humanity. The Faith asks us to adopt a global vision when considering any of the

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manifold issues confronting the planet or any countries within it. In this modern age, the Baha'i Faith links the future of Australia and its people with the future of the planet and all humanity. And of course the first words in the title to this Conference. "*International Unity in Diversity*", bring in the international dimension as a necessary aspect of the topic.

As the title to this paper indicates, this subject is addressed from the perspective of the teachings of the Baha'i Faith. The paper can only be a broad review of the Baha'i perspective on this most important subject. Even in this printed format it is impossible to give this subject the detailed consideration it deserves. Global industrial justice is just too vast and complex for one essay and has too many facets. But further reading is encouraged into the Baha'i teachings if you are interested.

In the course of this paper an effort will be made to show how the achievement of global industrial justice is necessary for a meaningful form of global unity in diversity and for the worthwhile future of humanity on this planet.

Baha'i Background

First a short introduction to the Baha'i Faith for your background assistance and to set the scene for this topic. For convenience I am including here an extract from another Baha'i publication³.

"The word "Baha'i" comes from the name of the Founder of the Faith – Baha'u'llah ("the Glory of God")⁴. Baha'i simply means "a follower of Baha'u'llah".

³From "Basic Facts of the Baha'i Faith", (Baha'i Publications of Australia).

⁴ 1817-1892. The Baha'i Faith is an independent world religion founded by Baha'u'llah, a Persian nobleman who was persecuted, tortured, dispossessed and exiled from His home country for His beliefs, ending up in prison in Palestine, then part of the Ottoman Empire, in the second half of the nineteenth century. He taught there was only one supreme God of all the great religions and also the oneness of humanity under that one God. He also taught that the purpose of religion in this age was to unite humanity under that one God.

Baha'is live in all countries of the world and are people who formerly had different and conflicting religious backgrounds. They had been Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, Zoroastrians, Hindus, members of the various sects of Christianity, Pagan and some had had no religion at all. They have found in the Baha'i Faith a basis of unity that makes the competition of sects and denominations seem unimportant to them.

Baha'is come from different economic and social classes. Through a common devotion, rich and poor mingle as equals and work together to establish a world order for all men and women. They are people of different national and racial backgrounds, but the Baha'i teachings have given them a higher loyalty – the loyalty to humanity. Baha'is have no colour prejudice or racial segregation. In this Faith, people of all races find equality with each other because they are equal before God.

The Baha'i Faith develops world-mindedness. Read these well-known Baha'i quotations: . . . “Let your vision be world-embracing rather than confined to your own selves.” . . . “That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race.”

The Baha'i Faith offers a clear pattern for world order. It does not have any secret mystic doctrines; it does not have any priesthood or professional clergy. People find this a practical, spiritual religion with the mission of uniting the world in one common faith and one order. Baha'u'llah declared that in our time religion must unite people or else it has no value. He declared that religion must show how to build a just world. He emphasized that justice is the “best beloved of all things” in the sight of God. To show men how to achieve this, He outlined a pattern of World Order.

Baha'u'llah's vision of a united world begins with each man and woman. Individuals must have high moral standards and a common basis of belief if they are to become citizens of one world."

Frequently cited in the Baha'i community is the principle of "*unity in diversity*", meaning in that context that all humanity is really one family and one race under one God, and that the diversity that exists among humanity in terms of colour, background, ethnicity, nationality, language, culture, etc., is a matter of beauty and is the heritage of all. Thus the Baha'i writings state:

*"In reality all are members of one human family -- children of one Heavenly Father. Humanity may be likened unto the vari-colored flowers of one garden. There is unity in diversity. Each sets off and enhances the other's beauty."*⁵

This principle is just as relevant in the field of industrial or labour relations as it is in any other field of human social and economic activity. In an interdependent world, where labour and capital move rapidly around the globe and where markets are to an ever increasing degree internationally orientated, there is a great need for the establishment of certain universal standards and principles as to labour and management generally that are respected and observed worldwide. But in doing so, it may well still be appropriate to take into account particular differential factors of a national and local nature that do not detract from the wider global unity of purpose and the interests of justice and equality applicable to all⁶. There is no doubt that because of historical factors, the

⁵ Abdu'l-Baha, *Divine Philosophy*, p. 25.

⁶ See Dharam Ghai, "*Decent Work: Universality and Diversity*", Discussion Paper , DP/159/2005, International Institute for Labour Studies, Geneva. Examples of legitimate national and/or local circumstances could include the makeup of the labour force, whether predominantly urban or rural, old or young, literate or illiterate, whether industries are predominantly of a subsistence or of a corporate/commercial nature, special customs and practices, particular areas of disability or disadvantage, etc.

industrial circumstances within any one country continue to be influenced by various national and local factors beyond these global influences. There must be a reconciliation between these global factors on the one hand, and particular national or local factors on the other hand, in order to reach a just resolution. This is a theme that is returned to below.

The present industrial systems of the world

There is of course no single industrial system in force throughout the world at present. Terms and conditions vary greatly from country to country and from region to region. Some countries have great wealth and also have relatively sophisticated industrial systems for regulating labour and management issues, in which workers have considerable rights. In the main these are countries with government by some form of democracy. At the other end of the scale, some countries have great poverty on a per capita basis and also very little in the way of industrial systems. There are still countries that countenance industrial slavery or servitude, child labour and very poor working conditions, in which many workers have few rights. These are not necessarily poor countries but may be subject to various forms of discrimination - the privileged may enjoy a very high standard of living⁷.

This situation is a direct product of the varied evolution of human history. Humanity is a single race, but it is also a race that has historically dispersed itself around the planet, forming new, separate and more limited allegiances based on nationality, geography, tribe, language, religion, customs and practices, etc. Eventually this dispersion has coalesced into a global system of nation-states, each asserting sovereignty over a specific area of the earth's surface and the peoples within it. The subject of labour relations, except in so far as it might affect the citizens of one country who were either investing in or working in some other

⁷ Other people in those countries, the disadvantaged, may have very poor working conditions, such as migrant workers or members of minorities.

country, was seen as, and to a considerable extent still is seen as, a matter entirely for the sovereign state within which the industry and work occurred.

These states still are obviously at different stages of their economic, social and political development. Different countries have developed into versions of the modern industrialized state at different times. Some countries have been largely integrated into contemporary industrial realities and the global market for some considerable time. Other countries have barely begun in this respect, although all countries have now been influenced by the forces of globalization to a greater or lesser extent.

It is therefore not surprising that the varieties of industrial systems that have evolved differ greatly from country to country. This situation was and still is ripe for exploitation and injustice, depending on the circumstances of each country. The more educated leaders of the working public in the West soon came to realize this on and after the Industrial Revolution in Europe. Their views and actions contributed significantly to industrial turmoil, the growth of unions and in some cases violent revolution. The most notable example of the latter was the Communist Revolution in Russia of 1917. There were also movements, some humanitarian, some purely self-interested, that arose domestically and internationally and seeking the adoption of basic industrial standards and regulations. Thus there were international conferences on labour legislation in Berlin in 1890 and in Berne in 1905, 1906 and 1913. The International Association for Labour Legislation was formed by private initiative in 1900 at the Paris Exhibition, and the International Labour Office was set up at Basel to collect and distribute information. But these were very limited international steps to bridge the national divide.

Speaking in 1970 of the situation just after World War I, C Wilfred Jenks said:

“Half a century ago there was no international labour code; there were two sparsely ratified general conventions prohibiting the use of white phosphorus in the making of matches and night work by women and some forty bilateral agreements, negotiated over a period of some sixty years, dealing almost exclusively with migrant and recruited labour and industrial- accident compensation for such labour. In this respect also we started, therefore, half a century ago, with little better than nothing.”⁸

This reflected the traditional view that international law and relations were only concerned with matters arising between nation-states, not with that which was confined to internal matters within the domestic jurisdiction and boundaries of a particular nation-state. This view is still asserted today and is largely reflected in the wording of the United Nations Charter⁹. But in practice, international law and relations have moved on from there. It is now established that international law and relations can be concerned with internal events occurring only within a nation-state, capable of reaching down to the level of the individual, at least where established international norms of conduct are adversely affected or where there is a wider threat to international peace and security.

The question that follows is as to the extent to which the international position in industrial relations as at the end of World War 1 has changed up to the present day.

International Labour Organization

In this regard, the founding of the International Labour Organization (ILO) at the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919, based on the American option, was a landmark. Robertson calls it

⁸ Social Justice in the Law of Nations: The ILO Impact After Fifty Years, (OUP, 1970), 10.

⁹ Eg: the domestic jurisdiction clause in Article 2.7.

the “*first rights-related global agency*”¹⁰. It was also the first international organization of real significance in labour matters. Of the 10 American proposals, three were adopted unchanged. Firstly, that labour should not be treated as a mere commodity. Secondly, that all workers had a right to a wage sufficient to live on. And thirdly that women should receive equal pay for equal work. As will be seen, all three are totally consistent with the Baha’i teachings. A number of other significant proposals were adopted in a modified form.

The Preamble to the ILO Constitution recites:

*“Whereas universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based on social justice;
And whereas conditions of labour exist involving such injustice hardship and privation to large numbers of people as to produce unrest so great that the peace and harmony of the world are imperiled; and an improvement of those conditions is urgently required....
Whereas also the failure of any nation to adopt humane conditions of labour is an obstacle in the way of other nations which desire to improve the conditions in their own countries..”*

The Declaration annexed to the Constitution in 1944¹¹ recites the aims and purposes of ILO which are to “*inspire*” the policies of its members, stating inter alia, that:

“(a) 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;”

¹⁰ G Robertson, Crimes Against Humanity, (Allen Lane, 1999) 15.

¹¹ Declaration concerning the aims and purposes of the International Labour Organization, adopted by the General Conference of ILO on 10 May 1944.

“(b) the attainment of the conditions in which this shall be possible must constitute the central aim of national and international policy;”¹²

Article V of this Declaration recites:

“The conference affirms that the principles set forth in this Declaration are fully applicable to all peoples everywhere and that, while the manner of their application must be determined with due regard to the stage of social and economic development reached by each people, their progressive application to peoples who are still dependent, as well as to those who have already achieved self-government, is a matter of concern to the whole civilized world.”

However the founders of ILO had to give up the revolutionary idea of giving ILO legislative powers directly binding on nation-states in order to ensure that legislative progress did not become hostage to a reactionary minority. But there clearly was seen to be a moral obligation on nation-states both to ratify any ILO conventions adopted and to implement them domestically¹³. This was a necessary part of a wider understanding that universal and lasting peace could only be established in the world if it was based on social justice.

The ILO became the first specialized agency of the United Nations system after the demise of the League of Nations as a result of World War II, and its work has continued ever since.

In 1998 the ILO adopted the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work¹⁴, seeking to ensure that social progress went hand in hand with economic progress and

¹² Article II of the Declaration.

¹³ Report on Standard Setting and Globalization, Director-General of ILO, 85th session. 1997, 50.

¹⁴ Adopted at the 86th Session of the General Conference of ILO in June 1988.

development. Member states are committed to respect and promote the specified fundamental rights and principles in the Declaration in four categories¹⁵, whether or not they had ratified the relevant ILO conventions.

The Constitution and its annexed Declaration recognize the universality of these international labour rights, of concern to the whole world, although also recognizing that their application depends upon the stage of social and economic development reached by each people. Thus the rights apply to all humanity as an equal standard to be observed by and in every nation, although full implementation is said to depend upon the particular circumstances.

The 1998 Declaration has led to considerable debate over whether, by adopting that Declaration, nation-states and the ILO have given undue prominence to the specific core values in that Declaration to the detriment of the wider standards adopted by ILO in other ILO documents, thereby diminishing the protection of worker's rights generally and in particular from exploitation in many countries¹⁶.

Another recent debate has centered on the connections, if any, that should exist between ILO standards and other international trade organizations, in particular the World Trade Organization. There is clearly considerable opposition to any such linkage from the international liberal, capitalist sector and its supporters¹⁷. There may be expressed support for ILO standards, but at the same time they may not be seen as being pertinent to the restraint of global economic trade liberalization or on freedom to contract. Inherent

¹⁵ Freedom of association, elimination of forced or compulsory labour, abolition of child labour and elimination of employment discrimination.

¹⁶ See various articles by Philip Alston, James Heenan, Francis Maupain and Brian Langille on this theme in the *New York Journal of International Law and Politics* and the *European Journal of International Law* by searching the web

¹⁷ Discussed in Luke Arnold, "*Labour and the World Trade Organization: Towards a Reconstruction of the Linkage Discourse*", (2005) *Deakin Law Review* 6.

in this approach may be a degree of hypocrisy – by the combination of the expressed view that certain fundamental universal values are necessary for a just and peaceful global social system, while at the same time seeking to preserve the many discriminatory privileges that exist in the global system, which in many ways are due to the lack of effective international standards¹⁸.

Recent discussion have been held within the ILO framework on the matter of corporate social responsibility and ILO standards, the aim being to establish direct ILO-corporate links and to encourage the voluntary assumption of corporate responsibility in applying ILO labour standards. This follows the Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy¹⁹. One writer recently stated:

*“It can no longer be conceivable or acceptable – and this is the root of all the controversy about whether CSR should be based on voluntary measures or non-negotiable rules of law – for a business to resort to social dumping, sacrificing workers’ rights and the world around us in a sort of global, no-holds barred race for maximizing profits.”*²⁰

There is also discussion as to whether the ILO is really directed at the Third World and its deficient standards in labour matters, and not at the industrialized modern states with their organized industrial systems, workers rights’ and the welfare state²¹. As will be seen below, from the Baha’i point of view the situation in the more advanced nation-states in this respect is still considered to be deficient, although not necessarily for the same reasons as those in the Third World. Where there is excessive inequality in any form

¹⁸ It is now widely recognized that for a stable planetary social system, certain fundamental values, such as social justice, cannot be attained by unrestrained global competition – see eg: George Soros, Soros on Soros – Staying Ahead of the Curve (J Wiley, New York, 1995) 196.

¹⁹ ILO document OB Vol LXXXIII, 2000, Series A, No 3.

²⁰ Remi Clavet, International Governance, International Law and Corporate Social Responsibility, (International Institute of Labour Studies, 2008, ILO Research Series 116), 2.

²¹ Discussed in Craig Murphy, International Organization and Industrial Change, (OUP, 1994), 199-202.

in labour relations, the Baha'i Faith would consider this to be the responsibility of both sides of the equation to take co-operative remedial action.

The positive side of this debate is that it has been possible for ILO to hold regular International Labour Conferences that have drafted and adopted a wide variety of labour conventions and resolutions that form the basis of the International Labour Code. Each such convention must be separately adopted and implemented by state parties to ILO, and there have been campaigns to extend state ratifications. A system of reporting follows up on implementation once ratified, together with a system of state or delegate complaints, reports and final appeal to the ICJ²².

Australia has been a member of ILO since 1919 and is an active contributor. It has only ratified some 58 or so of the 185 ILO Conventions, but some of the latter are no longer in force. There are said to be 8 fundamental ILO conventions, of which Australia has apparently ratified 7 of them²³. One is outstanding in this respect²⁴. The question of ratification of particular conventions has sometimes been controversial in Australia²⁵. There was also controversy over whether the previous Commonwealth Government's Work Choices amendments to the Workplace Relations Act 1996 complied with certain ILO conventions to which Australia was a party²⁶. The not-unusual argument that the Commonwealth lacks constitutional power to implement some ILO conventions because the subject-matter falls into residual

²² International Court of Justice – see ILO Constitution.

²³ Numbers 87 and 98 on freedom of association and collective bargaining, numbers 29 and 105 on forced labour, numbers 100 and 111 on discrimination in employment and number 182 on child labour.

²⁴ Number 138 on adopting the objective of the Abolition of Child Labour. See also number 182 requiring countries to commit to the immediate prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour. Ratification was apparently held up because certain State and Territory laws did not conform.

²⁵ Eg: Number 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries.

²⁶ There was a complaint lodged to the ILO Standards Committee against the Australian Government concerning the Work Choices amendments to the Workplace Relations Act, resulting in the issue of a statement on 8 June 2007 calling for more information. It appears to have not proceeded further.

component-state powers does not stand up to constitutional scrutiny²⁷.

A question at this point is whether the existence of the ILO, with its wide-ranging international labour standards, can be said to amount to a comprehensive and effective international industrial system. The answer to this must be in the negative, for a variety of reasons. The ILO only operates against the background of state laws and industrial systems and only seeks to overlay them with certain basic standards and principles²⁸. We have already seen that these standards and principles are only expected to be implemented and to operate according to the exigencies of the particular situation²⁹. But more than that, these standards and principles do not normally operate directly within states by their own force. First of all, the conventions have to be adopted and ratified by each state, and after that they have to be implemented by each state, both in terms of legislation and by governmental administration³⁰. The sanctions for not doing so are relatively weak in international law³¹. And the domestic legal sanctions available in any state for failure to comply depend upon the domestic law of that state and the will of the incumbent domestic government to apply and enforce them³².

The result is a fairly widespread non-observance of many ILO standards, varying in degree from country to country. The world is

²⁷ Particularly in the light of the widely interpreted external affairs power of the Commonwealth in section 51(29) of the Australian Constitution. As to the international obligations on federal states under ILO, see Hendry, Treaties and Federal Constitutions, (Greenwood Press, 1975 reprint), 172.

²⁸ Much in the manner of the international human rights system.

²⁹ Whilst this would allow legitimate regional and national factors between and within particular countries to be taken into account when seeking to implement ILO standards, it may also presently be used to justify actions, policies and attitudes that accept the great disparities between and within different countries without requiring any corresponding effort in terms of economic redistribution.

³⁰ In many countries, including Australia, there is no automatic implementation of a convention in domestic law just because it has been adopted and ratified by the nation-state concerned.

³¹ There is not scope to go into this subject in detail in this paper.

³² Even though there may be an international law obligation on states to do so under the ILO Constitution. Australian courts have recognized the legality of Australian domestic law operating in conflict with international law.

replete with human rights violations of the worst kind, including in industrial and labour matters. And industrial unrest is not uncommon in a world dominated by an aggressive, competitive and largely unrestricted capitalist system³³, with competitors seeking all possible means to minimize costs, including labour costs. Investment capital moves around the globe with great speed, seeking the best economic return, and taking advantage of the weaknesses and deficiencies in the international global order as well as the increasing irrelevance of national systems³⁴, and the competition between nation-states in granting concessions to encourage that investment. While there have been considerable achievements in terms of adopting and promoting basic ILO labour standards³⁵, it is quite evident that the ILO system as presently constituted cannot be expected to achieve its goal of successful, effective and universal global implementation. The forces pulling in the opposite direction have usually been far too strong, at least up until the present time. The different world industrial systems tend to be more marked by the factors either of a subdued and exploited labour force with few rights, particularly in third world countries, or by considerable antagonism and disputations between labour and capital, each seeking to maximize their own rights and interests as opposing forces, particularly in western or developed countries, and with national governments seeking to protect their

³³ The lack of restrictions and controls are mainly at the international level, due to weaknesses in the prevailing international order. There is also a problem with weak, unsophisticated or corrupt governments in some countries. Keynes is said to have exposed the baselessness of laissez-faire theories in capitalist economics in his lectures in 1924 and 1925 “*The End of Laissez-Faire*” – D Dunstan, “*Understanding the Dynamics of the National and Global Economies*”, 21 April 1998, Whitlam Lecture.

³⁴ Kenichi Ohmae has said that most financial markets now inhabit a “borderless world” or an “invisible continent”, with which the traditional mechanisms of national regulation and control are often out of kilter – *Borderless World – Power & Strategy in the Interlinked Economy* (1989, Harper & Collins). See also Thomas McCarthy, “*On Reconciling Cosmopolitan Unity and National Diversity*”, Chapter 8 in De Greiff and Cronin (Eds.), *Global Justice and Transnational Politics* (MIT Press, 2002), 235 at 239; John D R Craig and S Michael Lynk (Eds.), *Globalization and the Future of Labour Law* (Cambridge UP, 2006); Gregory C Dahl, *One World One People: How Globalization is Shaping our Future*, (Baha’i Publishing, Wilmette Illinois, 2007), Chapter 7.

³⁵ Eg: The adoption of the first Forced Labour Convention Number 29 in 1930 contributed to the conviction of Nazi war criminals at Nuremberg for deportation of civilians to and forced labour at concentration camps.

own interests.³⁶ In either case there is less concern with the public interest in the industrial system and the effect on the global society as a whole and the gross inequities in that system³⁷. In neither case, viewed from the perspective of a neutral observer, can it be said to constitute a particularly satisfactory or just industrial system on a planetary basis. In so far as the ILO standards and principles can be said to mark a movement towards global social justice in industrial relations, there is clearly a long way yet to go.

Speaking of this issue generally, Robertson has said:

*“The movement for global justice has been a struggle against sovereignty – the doctrine of non-intervention in the internal affairs of nation states asserted by all governments which have refused to subject the treatment they mete out to their citizens to any independent external scrutiny.”*³⁸

From another angle, it is said that there needs to be a movement away from a hubristic interpretation of world affairs based on the imperialism of economics and the market, to a more participatory conversation on human liberation and a people-centered dialogue, one in which human life is seen to have been created to serve a purpose greater than the market, the state or the global economy³⁹.

Connecting Unity in Diversity to Global Justice

The Baha’i goal of giving effect to the principle of global unity in diversity among the human race has already been referred to. According to the Baha’i view, that principle already exists, it is the necessary foundation for a worldwide beneficial human state, but various sections of humanity have yet to fully and freely embrace

³⁶ This in itself reflects the great economic and other discrepancies between different nation-states, and the pressures arising from national sovereignty to perpetuate and even extend the privileges thereby accruing.

³⁷ The Baha’i writings specifically point to the importance of the public interest in matters of industrial relations. It is not seen as just a matter between capital and labour.

³⁸ *Crimes Against Humanity*, op. cit., xviii.

³⁹ Wilfred L David, *The Humanitarian Development Paradigm*, (University Press of America, 2004) Preface ix.

it. There continues to be a common thought-pattern that suggests that humanity can continue indefinitely with this present, deeply divided world. But any considered and rational reference to contemporary international issues and problems must result in the confirmation of the truth of the principle of unity in diversity as a contemporary human imperative. The hope of a future permanent peace on earth must be based on widespread acceptance of this principle, as the human race cannot hope to survive in the longer term if it continues to cling to more narrow allegiances and prejudices of race, class, religion, colour, ethnicity, nationality, language, etc., to the exclusion of this wider universal unity. The earth is now simply too small and its peoples too interdependent – it is a “*global village*”.

But, it may be asked, what has this got to do with the interests of justice? It is here argued that these two concepts – that of unity in diversity and that of justice - are inextricably connected. If the goal is to establish a peaceful, unified world community notwithstanding the great diversity within that community, then the only authentic form of unity in this world is one that accepts and values a unity in diversity. This unity must extend to the implementation of certain basic human standards and values, including in industrial relations, as the ILO Constitution clearly recognizes. This diversity reflects the special circumstances of each country and region, being a legitimate diversity that does not detract from the wider unity of purpose and the interests of global social justice. And as we have already seen, that Constitution recites that universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice⁴⁰.

It is this form of unity which respects and encourages all creative and legitimate differences, not a uniformity that seeks to suppress individual difference. It is not the individual differences

⁴⁰ See also the second Preamble to the 1998 Declaration.

themselves that lead to conflict and competition, but rather the lack of tolerance towards and respect for such legitimate differences. Otherwise there will be an underlying tension and insecurity and consequent will of one to dominate the other⁴¹. An authentic global unity in diversity will be one characterized by co-operation rather than competition, by consensus building rather than confrontation, by the pursuit and implementation of fundamental or basic human standards rather than a tolerance of unfair differences based on prejudice and sectional interests that impede the wider unity. What we are talking about here is the pursuit of global social justice rather than that of inequity, unjustifiable discrimination and exploitation. The true measure of any justifiable differentiation must lie in its ability not to detract from overall global unity and justice whilst also recognizing and respecting inherited differences and allowing for any disadvantage.

There is, I would submit, no doubt that the widespread recognition of the primacy in this age of the common interests of all people on the planet – the Baha’i idea of the “*oneness of humanity*” - is a necessary foundation for the creation of a new planetary paradigm in global industrial relations and in other matters. But by itself the adoption of this perspective among individuals may not be sufficient. There also has to be a just social order and structure as part of that common collective that incorporates this perspective. This is because human beings have the capacity for good or bad, and any individual expression of a global perspective that upholds unity in diversity and justice can be taken advantage of by those so inclined in the pursuit of personal gain, self-interest and dominance. Unless priority is also given to the pursuit of authentic social and structural justice on a global scale, then the opposite of unity will be the collective result. In the worst case example, this could result in anarchy or tyranny. It follows that in acting to increase the authentic unity of the collectivity, we should

⁴¹ William S Hatcher, Love, Power & Justice (Baha’i Publishing Trust, Illinois, 1998), 94.

not only seek to increase this global perspective among individuals but also to increase the justness and effectiveness of the collective global structure⁴². Both are necessary to establish unity in diversity.

Applied to the global industrial scene, as a general rule while there is a growing sense of human commonality among individuals in the world, there is a marked absence of unity both among and within the various national industrial systems and the industrial objectives of different nation-states. This occurs at a time when the world is coming together at an exponential rate and national boundaries are losing much of their significance in industrial terms and otherwise. And in the content and structure of the international industrial scene as a whole, we have seen that there is little unity of purpose and direction notwithstanding the advances over the last century with the ILO, etc. The sharp divisions and conflicts that exist between capital and labour in the liberal, capitalist system, and the persistent efforts of each one to seek dominance over the other, are clear evidence of this. And the great differences in the industrial relations arrangements of different nation states, and the lack of effective global implementation of basic universal industrial standards, are another. Workers in one part of the world may enjoy considerable rights and privileges, including the right to organize and to demand better conditions and to strike if not satisfied, even though in other parts of the world there is industrial slavery, worker exploitation, child labour and discrimination against particular segments of the workforce. The degree of disparity in economic terms between the haves and the have-nots in the world is increasing, not decreasing, under the effects of globalization⁴³. This is not at present a world system conducive to the construction of permanent peace and unity.

⁴² As to the meaning of the Baha'i concept of justice in the context of industrial relations, see Bryan Graham, "*The Baha'i Faith and Economics: a Review and Synthesis*", (1997) 7 Baha'i Studies Review, 15.

⁴³ See, eg, Malte Lubker, "*Globalization and Perceptions of Social Inequality*" (2004) 143.1-2 Int Labour Rev.

The Baha’i Perspective

Any religion must accept that we live in a material world and humans have certain basic material/physical needs. These needs have to be provided by advanced economic and industrial systems and forms of organization, largely nationally based but increasingly taking on an international aspect. The world of humanity now has too many members and is too interdependent and technologically sophisticated to support itself by some form of primitive hunting and gathering, relying simply on the bare resources of the planet in their natural state. There is no going back to some primitive state such as existed at human origins.

The Baha’i Faith recognizes these human material requirements; it also acknowledges the importance of scientific and technological advancement; but it also teaches that the production and acquisition of material things and personal economic gain do not constitute the purpose of human existence. The human being is not simply a material creation with material needs. He or she is not a mere economic factor in the production of material things⁴⁴. A distinction has to be drawn between means and ends in this regard. Humans possess a conscious intellect and the power of reflection, conceptualization, rationalization, imagination, memory and volition. They have a degree of free will and choice, particularly in matters of morality and spirituality, and hence are accountable for the choices they make. They are, according to the Baha’i Faith, essentially spiritual beings, and purpose in human life is to be found in terms of moral and spiritual advancement. As they are also social beings, moral and spiritual advancement must be sought not only in the individual sense, but also in the communal sense. In this interdependent modern age, this extends to the planet and to all humanity as a single entity.

⁴⁴ See the Declaration annexed to the Constitution of the ILO, Article 1(a) “*labour is not a commodity*”.

As already noted, this global perspective is encapsulated in many of the writings of the Founder of the Baha'i Faith, Baha'u'llah. For example:

*“All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. The Almighty beareth Me witness. To act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man. Those virtues that befit his dignity are forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the peoples and kindreds of the earth.”*⁴⁵

The goal of humanity is said by the Baha'i Faith to be the establishment on earth of “...a single, organically united, unshatterable World Commonwealth”⁴⁶. This is a world that is organically united in all its essential aspects, material, social, economic, moral and spiritual, but which still respects and treasures the diversity that exists in the human race and the rights, freedoms and entitlements of its individual members consonant with that wider unity. As part of that new unity, there must be respect for the human rights of all its individual members. These are seen as divinely bestowed rights, necessary for the moral and spiritual development of the individual, and they carry with them corresponding obligations and responsibilities towards others and towards society as a whole. The whole system should operate in accordance with the rule of law and with respect for legitimate authority.

Applied to the field of economics, it is envisaged that there would be a global re-adjustment and equalization of the economic conditions of mankind, so that the world would no longer be marked by an inordinate disparity between rich and poor, between the privileged and the greatly disadvantaged or those discriminated

⁴⁵ Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, (Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1976), 215.

⁴⁶ Shoghi Effendi, *The Decisive Hour, Messages from Shoghi Effendi to the North American Baha'is*, (Baha'i Publishing Trust, 2002), 105. It is envisaged that preceding this will be the establishment of a global federation of nations.

against⁴⁷. Various teachings of the Faith point to the manner in which this can be achieved, such as by putting emphasis on principles of moderation, charity, the equality of men and women and the abandonment of prejudice in all its forms. Special laws should be made, dealing with the extremes of riches and of want, so that the general rights of mankind are guarded and preserved⁴⁸. But fundamentally it is said that this readjustment will stem from the spiritualization and unification of humanity and the consequent abandonment of the prevailing philosophy of sectional self-interest, gross materialism and consumerism. This philosophy, the teachings state, should be replaced in favour of an approach based on altruistic love, the pursuit of excellence and of service to others. These are, of course, principles that can be applied now without waiting for some new world order to emerge. The process is seen as an evolutionary one.

One area in which the Baha'i writings are particularly strong is that of the elimination of discrimination and prejudice, both in the field of industrial relations and otherwise. Discrimination in the workforce, whether on the grounds of race, colour, ethnicity, religion, nationality, gender, etc., is condemned. It is impossible to conceive of the effective global implementation of the principle of unity in diversity without firm adherence to this principle. This would have particular implications in such areas as migrant workers, refugees, minorities, etc. The ILO as an organization shares similar principles and has already been prominent in its criticism of Iran for its persecution of Baha'i workers in that country and the withdrawal of their industrial rights and entitlements⁴⁹.

⁴⁷ The Baha'i Faith does not, however, teach the need for absolute equality, as it states that this is an impossibility.

⁴⁸ Abdu'l-Baha, Paris Talks (Baha'i Publishing Trust, 11th Ed, 1979), 153.

⁴⁹ Many web sites attest to this fact.

Put together, these may be seen by some as idealistic goals, but a dispassionate and unbiased consideration of world history does disclose an overall pattern of ever-widening circles of unity. Humanity began as small groups – tribes or the like, and underwent transformations as it emerged into wider unities through the process of human settlement and geographical groupings, city-state building, nation building and now region building. And the early foundations of a philosophy and structure of a global unity have already been laid and are gradually unfolding and becoming more obvious at many levels. True, there is considerable opposition to this movement, but that is only to be expected in such a major change. But the forces for increased unity in diversity, under the pressure of serious contemporary global challenges and difficulties that themselves are forging ever greater international links out of necessity, point the way forward. It is now easy to perceive the earth as one planetary home for one human race. Indeed many now see the imperative of establishing a closer planetary union for reasons of human survival⁵⁰.

The suggested re-adjustment and equalization of economic relations must have a concomitant aspect in the re-adjustment and equalization of global industrial relations – both are intimately connected. The Baha’i teachings provide considerable guidance in this respect. They promote the work ethic – all people in the world of working age and capacity should engage in useful work⁵¹. Thus a primary aim of the industrial system is said to be to promote fair employment and equal opportunity of employment⁵².

⁵⁰ Added to this, the Baha’i Faith is founded by and is based on the teachings of Baha’u’llah, whom Baha’is believe to be the Manifestation of God for this age and the spiritual “return” of the founders of all the earlier great religions. Baha’u’llah has laid down in His writings the prerequisites in this age for world unity and peace in all fields of human endeavour.

⁵¹ Idleness and begging are condemned. For those who cannot find work, the practice of charity is advocated in addition to governmental support for equal opportunity and other measures.

⁵² This involves the prohibition of discrimination in employment on such grounds as race, ethnicity, colour, class, nationality, religion, etc. In some countries such a prohibition already exists, but only on a national basis. This suggested new prohibition would have global effect and be enforceable.

for all capable of working⁵³. And the dignity of labour is upheld in the Faith, with reasonable working conditions, such as sufficient rest and leisure and the equality of those conditions between men and women, advocated on a global scale. The station of work performed in a spirit of service and excellence is elevated to being a form of worship. All workers are said to be entitled to a living wage sufficient, with moderation, for their needs and for that of their families, together with a provision for retirement, although wages can vary in a manner corresponding to each worker's capacities and abilities. Industrial slavery or servitude and child labour should be prohibited worldwide and the prohibition enforced. The industrial system should ensure this result.

With respect to labour-management relations and difficulties, a new approach is advocated, even for advanced economies. Thus the Baha'i Faith indicates:

“With regard to your question concerning the Bahá'í attitude towards labour problems; these cannot assuredly be solved, 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us, through the sheer force of physical violence. Non-cooperation too, even though not accompanied by acts of violence, is ineffective. The conflict between labour and capital can best be solved through the peaceful and constructive methods of cooperation and of consultation.

The Bahá'ís, therefore, are advised to avoid, as much as they can, getting mixed in labour strikes and trouble, and particularly to desist from all acts of physical violence which indeed run counter to the very spirit of the Cause. The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh stands for peace, harmony, and cooperation between the individuals and nations of the world.”⁵⁴

⁵³ Note that at present in the world, a certain level of unemployment is often tolerated for economic and other reasons. In third world countries in particular, unemployment is at present often widespread, contributing to the possibility of exploitation of those workers who can find work. ILO annual jobs reports have indicated in recent years that unemployment has continued to grow worldwide notwithstanding buoyant world economic conditions.

⁵⁴ Letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Luxembourg, April 4, 1973, quoted in Lights of Guidance (Baha'i Publishing Trust, 4th Revised Ed., India, 1996), 427.

Commenting on this, one Baha'i writer has stated:

“It is by friendly consultation and co-operation, by just co-partnership and profit-sharing⁵⁵, that the interests of both capital and labour will be best served. The harsh weapons of the strike and lockout are injurious, not only to the trades immediately affected, but to the community as a whole. It is, therefore, the business of the governments to devise means for preventing recourse to such barbarous methods.”⁵⁶

Some countries already have legislation for the conciliation and arbitration of industrial disputes. But these systems are usually established against the background of a predominantly adversarial approach between labour and management/capitalist. And they are limited nationally in scope. This Baha'i approach advocates a move away from the adversarial principle to a more direct, co-operative, consultative approach, operating worldwide, one in which both management/capitalist and labour actively seek out their common interests and work in partnership together on an ongoing basis in a spirit of unity. The interests of both capital and labour are recognized, but so is their interdependence⁵⁷. Where there are differences between them that cannot be resolved notwithstanding this approach, an impartial court of justice should have jurisdiction to resolve the dispute and make a binding determination. The Baha'i writings do not spell out the detail of exactly how this approach is to be achieved, leaving this largely to the parties concerned acting in a conciliatory spirit in their common interests, to governments and to laws that facilitate this

⁵⁵ Profit sharing in its various industrial forms has a long history in Europe going back some 170 years. It was advocated by such prominent commentators such as J S Mill.

⁵⁶ J Esslemont, Baha'u'llah and the New Era, (Baha'i Publishing Trust, Revised 4th Ed., 1974), 137-138. For a fuller discussion, see Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions (Baha'i Publishing Trust, India, 1973), Chapter 78 (LXXVIII).

⁵⁷ There has been considerable interest in such an approach for some time. Putting to one side various socialist theories, ideas of participatory enterprise management within a free society go back to the writings of Douglas McGregor – The Human Side of Enterprise (McGraw-Hill, 1960) - and probably even before him. They have more recently been vigorously advocated and applied liberally in practice by the Brazilian author and business executive Ricardo Semler.

approach and to over-arching international prescription. But the broad industrial framework, and the spiritual principles upon which it is to be based, are delineated in those writings.

Future Role for ILO and its relationship with the Baha'i Faith.

The Baha'i writings do not specifically deal with the role and future of the ILO. But the Faith has been a strong supporter of the United Nations Organization since its inception. Thus it was stated:

“Bahá'ís have had an interest in the United Nations since its inception in 1945. When the allied nations met in San Francisco, at the close of World War II, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada sent two official observers to witness the drafting of the Charter for the United Nations. Two years later, that same national assembly was listed with the United Nations Office of Public Information (later the United Nations Department of Public Information) as a national non-governmental organization (NGO), qualified to be represented through an observer.

Shoghi Effendi⁵⁸ urged Bahá'ís to support all United Nations activities that were in accordance with Bahá'í principles.”⁵⁹

The Faith has recognized, in the creation of numerous international institutions over the last 100 years or so, definite steps towards global world order. Commenting on this, the Universal House of Justice⁶⁰ has stated:

“...world leaders are often taking collective actions that, to a Bahá'í observer, signify a tendency towards a common

⁵⁸ Guardian of the Baha'i Faith 1921 – 1957.

⁵⁹ Statement by the Baha'i International Community, Feb 29, 1995.

⁶⁰ The present ruling body of the Baha'i Faith, with its seat on Mt Carmel, Israel, elected worldwide every 5 years.

*approach by nations to solving world problems.... Such trends coincide with the increasing cries from enlightened circles for attention to be given to the feasibility of achieving some form of global governance. Might we not see in these swiftly developing occurrences the workings of the Hand of Providence, indeed the very harbinger of the monumental occasion forecast in our Writings?"*⁶¹

While in 1998 it commented that:

*"...amid the din of a society in turmoil can be discerned an unmistakable trend towards the Lesser Peace. An intriguing inkling is provided by the greater involvement of the United Nations, with the backing of powerful governments, in attending to long-standing and urgent world problems; another derives from the dramatic recognition by world leaders in only recent months of what the interconnectedness of all nations in the matter of trade and finance really implies -- a condition which Shoghi Effendi anticipated as an essential aspect of an organically unified world."*⁶²

There are already close relations between ILO and the Baha'i Faith. Reporting on one initiative in Italy, it is stated:

"The ILO has chosen to collaborate with the European Bahá'í Business Forum (EBBF), a private voluntary association that promotes, among other things, the application of spiritual principles to economic problems.

Since 2000, the EBBF and the ILO have produced a joint paper and sponsored a series of workshops, all on the topic of "socially responsible enterprise restructuring." Many of the workshops have been held at the ILO Centre in Turin, and many have featured the participation of the EBBF's Secretary-General, George Starcher.

⁶¹ Universal House of Justice, Ridvan message 1996.

⁶² Ridvan message 1998.

According to Mr. Starcher, who is one of the principal authors of the joint paper, companies need not resort first to layoffs in hard times. "There are ways to restructure without reducing personnel, and, even if you eventually have to lay off people, there are ways to do it that minimize the effect on people and the communities in which they work and live," said Mr. Starcher."⁶³

It seems inevitable that these links will increase in the future, as the world community becomes increasingly aware of the need to apply ethical and spiritual principles in many fields, including in industrial relations, and as the United Nations Organization and other international and regional institutions seek ever closer collaboration with NGOs such as the Baha'i International Community.

The ILO has survived the League of Nations and has become an integral part of the United Nations Organization. There is no reason to surmise that this basic connection will not continue long into the future, either in its present form or as modified, and whether as part of the United Nations or of any new global umbrella institution that might emerge. It seems essential that there be some global institution which has as its priority the achievement of global industrial justice. That goal is still a long way from fruition.

Let me close this paper with an extract from the Baha'i holy writings on the theme of this Conference:

⁶³ For the full report, see One Country, Vol. 14 Issue 4, January-March 2003, at <http://www.onecountry.org/e144/e14408as_EBBF_story.htm>



Unity in Diversity

"The diversity of the human family should be the cause of love and harmony, as it is in music, where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord. If you meet those of a different race and colour from yourself, do not mistrust them and withdraw yourself into your shell of conventionality, but rather be glad and show them kindness. Think of them as different coloured roses growing in the beautiful garden of humanity, and rejoice to be among them.

Likewise, when you meet those whose opinions differ from your own, do not turn away your face from them. All are seeking truth, and there are many roads leading thereto. Truth has many aspects, but it remains always and forever one.

Do not allow differences of opinion, of diversity of thought to separate you from your fellow-men, or to be the cause of dispute, hatred and strife in your hearts. Rather, search diligently for the truth and make all men your friends."

(Abdu'l-Baha, Paris Talks)