

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind



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The Rights of Working Class

Labor law arose in parallel with the Industrial Revolution as the relationship between worker and employer changed from small-scale production studios to large-scale factories. Workers sought better conditions and the right to join a labor union while employers sought a more flexible and less costly workforce. The state of labor law at any one time is therefore both the product of, and a component of struggles between various social forces. Labor rights are a relatively new addition to the modern corpus of human rights. The modern concept of labor rights dates to the 19th century after the creation of labor unions following the industrialization processes. Karl Marx stands out as one of the earliest and most prominent advocates for workers rights. His philosophy and economic theory focused on labor issues and advocates his economic system of socialism, a society which would be ruled by the workers. Many of the social movements for the rights of the workers were associated with groups influenced by Marx such as the socialist. More recent workers' rights advocacy has focused on the particular role, exploitation, needs of women workers and etc.

Working conditions should be protected by well-enforced rules – rules that guarantee workers the right to organize, to have limits on their work day, to be paid a minimum wage, to enjoy social security and more. Workers have enjoyed these guarantees in the rich countries for nearly a century, but recently governments have been weakening the rules in the name of “global competition.” Meanwhile, in spite of many conventions of the International Labor Organization (ILO), workers in poor countries have few rights or protections, and some endure terrible working conditions. Financial crises in Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America have only made matters worse. The following materials look at these issues and the growing international movement to strengthen workers' rights – an essential part of the movement towards global citizenship. Historically, workers, mainly women and children, suffered severely in factories. They were busy with manual labors and back-breaking works for long hours, however, paid low wage in return. The employers and factory-owners exploited them on a large scale without anyone to voice their concerns in this regard. In a nutshell, workers were no more than a salve, sweating over physical works and being treated with disdain. Following the social movements and campaigns in favor of workers, labor rights were debated hotly which led to the establishment of labor laws at national and international levels. Labor laws are based on protecting the rights and dignity of workers and to ensure social justice around the globe. One of the focused issues in labor laws is the right to equal treatment, irrespective of sex, race, religion, color and social or political status. Discrimination against the workers on the basis of the mentioned facts is not acceptable at all and the gender gap is supposed to be bridged across the globe.

Moreover, ensuring social justice is one of the reasons behind supporting workers' rights. Justice is a universal principle, which has been a cultural and religious ambition in human society, throughout the history, to cultivate a just and human relation between worker and employer and strengthen law and order in the society. Hence, on the surface, the labor rights were established to protect the rights of the working class, but extended to save the employers' rights as well. Moreover, labor law is binding – i.e. the worker and employer cannot sign a contract against it such as working long hours without being paid extra wage. The labor law has a social and economic concept which deals with the society's law and order rather than ruling over a personal relation. Labor rights advocates have worked to improve workplace conditions which meet established standards as mentioned above. For instance, the workplace should be neither very hot nor very cold so as not to imperil the laborers' health. Labor rights advocates have also worked to combat child labor. They see child labor as exploitative, cruel, and often economically damaging. Child labor opponents often argue that working children are deprived of an education. In 1948 and then again in 1989, the United Nations declared that children have a right to social protection. In many manual labors, employing underage children is not allowed. Moreover, labor rights advocates sought to voice their concerns about forced labors – which are still rife in many poor countries, including Afghanistan. Poverty forces many families to send their underage children to work. Currently, a large number of children labor in factories from dawn to dusk under tense pressure as the bread-winners of their families. The rights of working class are also protected by Afghanistan's law based on international standards. All the aforementioned issues such as discrimination against the workers on the basis of their race, sex and color, forced labors and employing underage children in manual labors are banned in our law. And workers should have all the priorities such as enjoying public holidays, the right to free choice and not working overtime without extra payment. Afghanistan's Constitution states in article 48 as “Work is the right of every Afghan. Working hours, paid holidays, employment and employee rights and related matters shall be regulated by the law. Choice of occupation and craft shall be free within the bounds of law.” Article 49 says, “Forced labor shall be forbidden.... Forced labor on children shall not be allowed.” So, it is hoped that the rights of workers will be observed on the basis of national and international laws around the globe, mainly in poor countries including Afghanistan – where workers sweat over back-breaking labors without having their rights protected practically.



The Communicable Mental Disorders Pave the Bed for Social Violence

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Whenever we think about the challenges caused by insecurity, a lot of images come immediately in our minds: severe poverty, destruction, casualties, addiction, collapsed infrastructure, devastated cities and communities, broken families and pain. But we tend to pay less attention to other invisible wounds that last for years and cause deep scars on people and on development such as mental health. To be better understood, mental health is a term used to describe either a level of cognitive or emotional well-being or an absence of a mental disorder. Mental health is an expression of one's emotions and signifies a successful adaptation to a range of demands. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can properly cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”

For the period of the last several decades, Afghanistan has been impacted in many ways by conflict and still is much in the middle of a conflict – though some people classify it as post-conflict – in this context, one can hardly find an Afghan family which has not lost one or more members in this period due to insecurity crisis. Millions of people have been killed, addicted, windowed, orphaned, about one million are disabled and millions either migrated abroad or are internally displaced. Insecurity crisis and other factors such as unemployment, general poverty, breakdown of community support services, and inadequate access to health services have not only damaged the social infrastructure of the nation, but also caused mental health disorders mostly in vulnerable groups like women and disabled people. Regrettably, half of the Afghan population aged 15 years or older is affected by a communicable and invisible disease called mental disorders which include several types akin to: depression, anxiety, hyperactivities, aggressions and post traumatic stress disorder. These disorders contribute to community and domestic violence and to the high levels of malnutrition in the country as they adversely affect maternal care giving in diverse ways. In addition, existing superstitions and social restrictions are big challenges for women's access to mental health services in Afghanistan. Due to a combination of high prevalence, early onset, persistence and disability, mental health disorders constitute a major part of the total burden of disease globally and even more so in conflict and post-conflict settings. There is no disagreement, amongst experts, about the very high burden of mental health disorders in Afghanistan, much of which can be attributed to deep social trauma, over 30 years of armed conflict and the continuous social insecurities, unemployment, acute poverty, dissolution of social capital, and inadequate access or lack of access to mental health services. In fact, Mental health disorders is one of the major factors contributing to violence at community and household level. The violence is not only husbands against wives, but also brothers against sisters, mother-in-laws towards daughter-in-laws

and always against children. Due to socio-traditional and uneducated context, mental illness is higher among women, which is a likely contributor to the high levels of malnutrition among children in the country. It has been globally documented that mental health problems adversely affect maternal care giving, e.g., breastfeeding, responsive complementary feeding, thereby affecting child motor and cognitive development, and increased prevalence of stunting (chronic malnutrition), which could be a causative factor in the high levels of stunting in Afghanistan (more than 50 percent among children under five). In the meantime, due to social superstitions, low literacy level and lack of female health professionals delivering services to female patients remains an important challenge.

Consequently, Investments in mental health services will not only contribute to reducing individual suffering, but will also contribute to reduction of the burden of domestic violence, alleviating societal fragility and tribal conflicts, and hence help the nation to move towards sustainable peace and development. In addition, improved mental health of mothers is likely to contribute to improved child care and may well improve the nutritional status of young children, thus resulting in overall reduction of child mortality. The Disease Control Priorities in Developing Countries elaborates that the main challenge to deal with mental health problems is enhancing systems of care by developing effective local models and disseminating them throughout a country. It also points out those basic psychological therapies can be effective and can be easily put to use at the primary level. There is recent evidence on anti-depressants, which suggest that the pharmacological interventions for mild to moderate depression had no greater impact than a placebo. However, there is good evidence that anti-depressants are helpful for patients with severe depression. Therefore, in line with the intervention guide, the prescription of anti-depressant medication should be restricted to the more severe forms. In Afghanistan, as in many other Asian countries, many patients visiting health facilities expect to be prescribed some kind of medicine. In the training of health staff an important element is to assist patients in a satisfactory way, while preventing iatrogenic harm due to unnecessary prescription of psychotropic drugs. Alternatives for anti-depressant prescription can include psychosocial interventions and short-term prescription of symptomatic medication to restore sleep or reduce anxiety. In summary, there is ample global evidence which indicates that a psychosocial approach at local level through Primary Health Care (PHC) is the best choice to manage wide-spread mental health problems in Afghanistan. Also, from a programmatic perspective, it could be readily implemented through strengthening the Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS) or Essential Package Hospital Services (EPHS) in Afghanistan in terms of its capacity to provide basic psychosocial counseling coupled with provision of the right medication.

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Unburdening the Facebook Generation

By Mohamed A. El-Erian

Once again, young people have gotten the short end of the political stick. The outcome of the United Kingdom's Brexit referendum is but another reminder of a yawning generational divide that cuts across political affiliation, income levels, and race. Almost 75% of UK voters aged 18-24 voted to “Remain” in the European Union, only to have “Leave” imposed on them by older voters. And this is just one of several ways in which millennials' economic future, and that of their children, is being determined by others. I am in my late fifties, and I worry that our generation in the advanced world will be remembered – to our shame and chagrin – as the one that lost the economic plot.

In the run-up to the 2008 global financial crisis, we feasted on leverage, feeling increasingly entitled to use credit to live beyond our means and to assume too much speculative financial risk. We stopped investing in genuine engines of growth, letting our infrastructure decay, our education system lag, and our worker training and retooling programs erode.

We allowed the budget to be taken hostage by special interests, which has resulted in a fragmentation of the tax system that, no surprise, has imparted yet another unfair anti-growth bias to the economic system. And we witnessed a dramatic worsening in inequality, not just of income and wealth, but also of opportunity.

The 2008 crisis should have been our economic wake-up call. It wasn't. Rather than using the crisis to catalyze change, we essentially rolled over and went back to doing more of the same.

Specifically, we simply exchanged private factories of credit and leverage for public ones. We swapped an over-leveraged banking system for experimental liquidity injections by hyperactive monetary authorities. In the process, we overburdened central banks, risking their credibility and political autonomy, as well as future financial stability.

Emerging from the crisis, we shifted private liabilities from banks' balance sheets to taxpayers, including future ones, yet we failed to fix fully the bailed-out financial sector. We let inequality worsen, and stood by as too many young people in Europe languished in joblessness, risking a scary transition from unemployment to unemployability. In short, we didn't do nearly enough to reinvigorate the engines of sustainable inclusive growth, thereby also weakening potential output and threatening future economic performance. And we are compounding these serial miscarriages with a grand failure to act on longer-term sustainability, particularly when it comes to the planet and social cohesion.

Poor economics has naturally spilled over into messy politics, as growing segments of the population have lost trust in the political establishment, business elites, and expert opinion. The resulting political fragmentation, including the rise of fringe and anti-establishment movements, has made it even harder to devise more appropriate

economic-policy responses.

To add insult to injury, we are now permitting a regulatory backlash against technological innovations that disrupt entrenched and inefficient industries, and that provide people with greater control over their lives and wellbeing. Growing restrictions on companies such as Airbnb and Uber hit the young particularly hard, both as producers and as consumers.

If we do not change course soon, subsequent generations will confront self-reinforcing economic, financial, and political tendencies that burden them with too little growth, too much debt, artificially inflated asset prices, and alarming levels of inequality and partisan political polarization. Fortunately, we are aware of the mounting problem, worried about its consequences, and have a good sense of how to bring about the much-needed pivot.

Given the role of technological innovation, much of which is youth-led, even a small reorientation of policies could have a meaningful and rapid impact on the economy. Through a more comprehensive policy approach, we could turn a vicious cycle of economic stagnation, social immobility, and market volatility into a virtuous cycle of inclusive growth, genuine financial stability, and greater political coherence. What is needed, in particular, is simultaneous progress on pro-growth structural reforms, better demand management, addressing pockets of excessive indebtedness, and improving regional and global policy frameworks. While highly desirable, such changes will materialize only if greater constructive pressure is placed on politicians. Simply put, fewer politicians will champion changes that promise longer-term benefits but often come with short-term disruptions. And the older voters who back them will resist any meaningful erosion of their entitlements – even turning, when they perceive a threat to their interests, to populist politicians and dangerously simplistic solutions such as Brexit. Sadly, young people have been overly complacent when it comes to political participation, notably on matters that directly affect their wellbeing and that of their children. Yes, almost three-quarters of young voters backed the UK's “Remain” campaign. But only a third of them turned out. In contrast, the participation rate for those over 65 was more than 80%. Undoubtedly, the absence of young people at the polls left the decision in the hands of older people, whose preferences and motivations differ, even if innocently. Millennials have impressively gained a greater say in how they communicate, travel, source and disseminate information, pool their resources, interact with businesses, and much else. Now they must seek a greater say in electing their political representatives and in holding them accountable. If they don't, my generation will – mostly inadvertently – continue to borrow excessively from their future. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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