



SPEAKER & MODERATOR

Her Honour Mrs. Deborah Thomas-Felix
President, Industrial Court of Trinidad and Tobago

on

what Governments, social dialogue and existing tripartite
bodies can do to articulate a renewed social contract

at the

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SHAPING A BRIGHTER FUTURE OF WORK FOR THE CARIBBEAN

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Globally, we are experiencing rapid changes in technology which has been referred to in some quarters as the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This Fourth Industrial Revolution is evidenced by a combination of technologies, technologies which are changing the way we live, how we work and how we interact.

We know that the first industrial revolution which began in Britain in 1760 was powered by a major invention - the steam engine which enabled the new manufacturing process leading to the creation of factories.

The second industrial revolution came about a century later and was characterized by mass production in new industries (like steel, oil, electricity, the light bulb and telephone).

The invention of the semi-conductor, personal computer and the internet marked the third industrial revolution which started in the 1960s. This is also referred to as the digital revolution.

What is considered as the fourth industrial revolution and what we are experiencing today is different from the third revolution for two reasons.

1. The gap between the digital, physical and biological worlds are shrinking and technology is changing faster than ever.
2. Technology, specifically digital technology is so intertwined in so many businesses as well as in our social and economic lives that trying to separate tech from non-tech is becoming increasingly redundant. Companies, governments and individuals are struggling to keep up with the fast pace of technological change.

Are we heading towards a world of technological peril or are we on a road to a digital promised land? Klaus Schwab, founder and executive chairman of the World Economic Forum predicted that inequality would be the greatest societal concern associated with the fourth industrial revolution.

Schwab had this to say, "*There has never been a time of greater promise nor one of greater potential peril*". Technology, itself, will not determine the way forward. It is all about the choices that, governments, businesses, unions and societies as a whole make. The equal engagement of government, employers and workers and their unions is vital as we explore what can be considered a renewed, revitalised social contract.

As we look at the future of work, we must acknowledge that global competition, the exposure of firms and industries to greater market pressures, the growing trend in outsourcing jobs, the growth in unconventional employment modalities, which includes the emergence of the GIG platform economy and crowdwork, the care economy and the green/blue economy are part of our future.

The future of work presents countless opportunities to reverse long-term decent work deficits, but it also presents serious challenges that could increase inequalities and joblessness if not well managed. How well countries in the region adapt to such changes will be a major determinant in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Governments, employers and Trade Unions are parties to the social contract and they are responsible for its design and delivery through social dialogue. Social dialogue provides the opportunity for each social partner to engage and to consider the broader societal issues that this new revolution bring and to guide policy responses.

Rather than technology determining our future, we can shape the future of work by the use of several powerful tools to chart a course of economic success and social equity. Social dialogue is one such tool and it is key to developing and enhancing an effective platform and coherent policies to the emerging issues in each country; effective social dialogue can help shape the future of work to achieve the best possible outcome for our societies. A structured social dialogue mechanism also allows for non-conventional partnerships, such as collaborations by the traditional social partners with members of civil society such as academia, NGOs and private business enterprises to ensure coherence in policy making.

What will help to create fair share of progress for all? In the region, countries should create and encourage coherent policies that focus on skills development, social protection, social dialogue, equal opportunity, occupation safety and health, climate change and adequate labour market regulations.

Today, the world is witnessing a renewed social contract and social partners are a critical part of this social contract. It is therefore very important at this meeting for us to discuss the emerging issues and challenges centered around the future of work, particularly in the green/blue economy, digital economy and the care economy and how can social dialogue and the social contract be strengthened to face these issues and challenges. Today we also wish to explore what coordinating mechanisms are required to strengthen collaboration within and between ministries to ensure coherent policy-making. In these times of challenge and opportunity in the region, I am reminded of the call for unity across the Caribbean region in the timeless message of Trinbagonian calypsonian, Black Stalin, which he made in the Calypso, “The Caribbean Man”. Some of you may know it:

There is one race, The Caribbean Man,

From the same place, The Caribbean Man,

That make the same trip, The Caribbean Man,

On the same ship,

So we must push one common intention for a better life in the region

For we woman, and we children

That must be the ambition of the Caribbean Man, The Caribbean Man