



Conclusions of the 2013 session of the Semaines Sociales de France, "Reinventing work"

The resource of social Christianity to re-invent work Jérôme Vignon

1 I don't know if we were able to re-invent work. We have at least been able to partially re-invent "Les Semaines Sociales" in this three-way polyphony between Strasbourg, Villeurbanne and Paris.

I extend congratulations on your behalf to the teams who were the architects of this unprecedented performance: to Marc Feix with Pastor Reutenauer, to Luc Champagne with Bernadette Angleraud, to Hugues d'Hautefeuille and Jean-Pierre Rosa for taking the risk, without a safety net, of a "live" broadcast.

Out of this came a liveliness and rigorous expression, which you noticed. We had image and sound. You will have noticed too listening to the Alsations and the Lyonnais, that there definitely is a Parisian accent! I extend my regrets to the Alsations that I could not join them.

2 We wanted to focus on work. It struck us after the first day that work should be reinvented, rediscovered in terms of its human dimension. A rediscovery rendered inevitable, not only by the crisis of working life riddled with dissatisfaction and unfulfilled expectations, but also that of employment, which has become inaccessible to so many left behind by our inadequate development mode with what the world has become. This is what we have been told on totally different levels, by Jean Paul Betbèze and Dominique Meda. They each invite us to become aware, to make an effort of lucidity. For us there is also the "Emmaus Challenge". There is a "Rerum Novarum challenge" to an extent comparable to the groundswell that captured our predecessors 100 years ago.

If on one side we are driven by crises to re-invent work, would we not on the other be drawn by the advance of society, even by technological advance itself. Technological progress requires, as noted by Peter Giorgini at a workshop yesterday, a generalization of the process of co-construction, of co-realization. How can work marked by "boxes", silos and solitude be able to respond to new relational opportunities?

3 Nevertheless, despite blinding evidence, change is not always forthcoming. The philosopher Hans Jonas devoted his life to account for these persistent collective irresponsible situations, despite the evidence of the damage they could cause in the future. Somehow the young people who with talent held the trial of the generations on Friday remarkably illustrated this principle of irresponsibility. Mistrust and refusal to cooperate, are the founding principles of inertia and social indifference to the ills of the workplace and employment.

Indifference you said! This reminds me of a certain Pope Francis who has made it the target of his criticism of world disorder. I dare, citing his figure which encourages us to overcome our fears and misgivings, to stress that which social Christianity can bring, because it must be called by its name, to the rediscovery of work at the heart of our humanity.

4 Social Christianity first helps to name the goal we seek to achieve by reinventing work. This was emphatically presented by Bruno Marie Duffé whom I quote: "the challenge today is to restore the

affirmation of each person in his work and to reestablish the link of this individual work with the future of the human community. Christian Social thinking about labor offers to rebuild social ties. "

5 Social Christianity gives a *prophetic breath* to the search for practical solutions to the reconstruction of work and employment. It does not require choosing between an emergency response to unemployment and the fight against its causes, it does not require choosing between repairing and prevention. It puts us on the path of social innovations that clearly fulfill these two tasks, with feet in the realities of the present and head turned towards the future. Social Christianity is recognized in particular in the proposals I'm going to touch upon:

- *New forms of cooperation based on territorial and cultural ties*, between businesses, local authorities, universities and public services, creating new potential for innovation and training, much like that which we have heard described by the CCI of Strasbourg, but also by politicians committed to employment whose testimonies have impressed us: Christian Sautter, Michel Braouzec, Gérard Collomb.
- The progressive creation of a *field of new intermediary activities* (other than common law employment), from the area of integration through economic activity, based on enhancing the capability of people excluded from common law employment.
- The extension of a *civic service 60+* to senior citizens that would make them available to accompany young people in the transfer of know-how and life skills. It is about learning to feel useful without being servile, loving, welcoming, and accompanying by serving.
- Multiplying the number of partnerships between companies in the social economy and so-called ordinary companies, whatever their size, so that the original principles of the one echo that which carries promise and future of the other, according to Elena Lasida's beautiful formula. In this regard, I would like to talk about businesses: let us not be obsessed with salaried employment. We need more entrepreneurs and businesses of every shape, kind and status. We need them to invest in youth, in training, if they are to take more steps they must first exist. And it would be a great shame for our country to continue, in what we feel the past few years, the last few months, in a form of distrust of businesses and entrepreneurs; it would be a serious risk. The SSF will join any form of reconciliation between companies and society, between entrepreneurs and the French people.
- The introduction of a mechanism facilitating, during the course of a life, a *voluntary and reversible use of part-time*, for those who realize that indeed, if work is essential to one's existence, it is not the be all and the end all.
- And taking into account the patience and courage needed by the social partners to gradually implement a framework of rights attached to the worker throughout his life, social Christianity should aim for our country, the prospect of a joint decision between the employee representatives and ultimately the Board of Directors on all matters affecting the organization of work, lifelong training and skills planning. This morning I do not know if you were aware, but there were two important dimensions to this exchange between the social partners: first the interprofessional agreement of January 11th., which opens the way for a change in the nature of social relations on the highest level in our country, and secondly, the bulwark that the social partners represent in respect of an explosion of "every man for himself." Let us not give any credit whatsoever to the voice of mistrust, of withdrawal or of corporatism. Nothing is more foreign to Christianity, whether social or not, than these voices of derision, skepticism and corporatism. We are the opposite of that, and we will stand with the social partners when they are first in line to ask the French to show solidarity and to excel even when their interests must accept a compromise.
- Social Christianity acknowledges the importance of *genuine cooperation between the countries of the European Union*, so that not only employment, but also access to quality

work and the fight against exclusion and the refusal of social dumping between states becomes an issue of common interest, an issue open to social dialogue. I intend for my part to make this subject an issue at the upcoming European Social Weeks to be held next January in Ostend. I invite all those who are concerned with these vital issues for our future, to support the initiatives of the Semaines Sociales network in Paris. I make a wish for dialogue between Eurosceptics and Europhiles.

- Social Christianity is also the desire to move forward together, coming from different viewpoints and experiences. I pledge as President of the Semaines Sociales to continue to work with all our partners sharing our input in order to contribute to the mission France 2020 entrusted to the High Commissioner for prospective and strategic thinking, based on Nathalie Sarthou-Lajus' summary of the proposals of the workgroups.

6 But social Christianity is perhaps above all a spiritual resource. Sources of mistrust and indifference that paralyze us more than others, according to Philippe d'Iribarne, which bind us to the representations and stereotypes rooted in history, are also within ourselves. The fear of a face-to-face, taking refuge in authoritarian or passive working relationships also reflects our own lack of confidence. It expresses in substance, the fear of having to recognize our limits and failure in dealing with new questions that continually arise. Management, which is also a matter of handling people gently, falls, as revealed in the latest issue of *Christus*, within a horizon of spiritual life that makes us not only servants, but fulfilled servants.

No, dear friends, it is not true that all has been tried for work and employment. Because this "all" lacks a "je ne sais quoi" of human and personal, of trust and generosity that can still overturn everything. To create a virtuous circle of trust, someone must take the initial risk. Social Christianity is about taking the risk for the first time; it is about taking the risk of being disappointed yet never becoming discouraged. I ask you, dear friends, never become discouraged, be the first to provide the setting of this ultimate point of generosity, which allows the exchange to effectively take place and to be creative in the workplace, within and outside the economy.

Finally, I suggest that next year we push further this reflection by continuing to understand what the new technologies can offer to help us reinvent work and continue working tirelessly at putting the person at the center of social relations. Bio, info and nano technologies are already transforming the way we live, work and think: How do we take the true measure of these changes, look them in the face to orient them with humanity? Lille is this time in partnership with the Catholic University where things will be happening. It will be exciting. Remember to register in advance.