

Jobs in the 21st century: brave new work

While workers began fighting for their rights very early on, the notion of labour rights emerged only in the 19th century when **industrialisation** paved the way for the creation of **trade-unions**. The fight for workers' rights was spearheaded by **Karl Marx**, whose focus on labour issues influences the economic model of socialism described in several publications, the most famous being *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, which he wrote with Engels as early as 1848, and *Capital* (published in 1867, the last two volumes having been published posthumously by Engels in 1885 and 1894).

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) was created in 1919, as part of the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I, to reflect the belief that universal and lasting peace could be accomplished only if it was based on **social justice**. It was later integrated into the United Nations. Its Constitution was drafted in 1919. It emphasised the regulation of labour supply, the prevention of unemployment and the protection of workers against sickness, disease and injury and guaranteed provisions for old age and injury.

While in the 1960s the status of workers was still precarious, full-time jobs and hard won **social benefits** for workers and their families ushered in a relatively stable era that the economic crisis gradually jeopardised.

The model of the economy that Henry Ford had introduced, backed by big firms and powerful trade-unions, is waning. In rich countries, an increasing number of people are being excluded from society as manufacturing jobs have been **automated or outsourced**. The **on-demand economy**, backed by **cheap computing power**, is reshuffling the working world, best epitomised by **Uber**, founded in San Francisco in 2009 and which has since grown exponentially, blazing a new trail and reinventing both the organisation of work and the nature of the **social contract**. Lifetime employment is now a thing of the past, all the more so as the on-demand economy seems to better meet the needs of demanding consumers at a lower cost.

The main losers are workers who value security over flexibility, and, in the long run, those who will have to pay for contract workers never able to build up **pensions schemes** or whose **health care** is no longer provided by employers.

Civil liberties in the 21st century

"The fall of the twin towers in New York was the true beginning of the 21st century" (Timothy Garton Ash, *The Guardian*).

9/11 (2001) in New York City and **7/7** (2005) in London marked a turning point for the western world, sparking a **war on terror** that translated into the **USA Patriot Act** (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act) in the United States (October 2001) and in a raft of **Terrorism Acts** in the United Kingdom at the dawn of the twenty first century.

They brought about radical changes in the **powers of investigators by extending surveillance**. In the United States, Civil rights groups as the **ACLU** voiced their concerns about the anti-terrorist legislation passed right after 9/11, which includes physical surveillance usually targeting Arabs or Muslims and financial controls to stop money-laundering. Edward Snowden's revelations of the **PRISM scandal** in 2013 showing that the US authorities had been spying on other countries, friends or foes, unveiled that we live in a surveillance society and are denied the right to know the full facts.

In the United Kingdom, the two principles at the heart of criminal law (everyone is presumed innocent until proven guilty and nobody can be jailed without evidence) were flouted in 2005 when the government drafted a Terrorism Act that contained **indefinite house arrest and increased stop and search powers**, which the House of Commons rejected. The number of **Close Circuit Television** cameras reaches a mind-boggling 5 million (one for every ten inhabitants), hoisting the human rights issue to the top ranks.

Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon, or **GAFAs** as they are called (primarily in Europe), are collectively known as "**the big four**" internet tech companies whose invasion of personal privacy is increasingly being questioned.

Never before in the history of mankind had it been possible to collect, keep, cross-reference and mine that much individual data. In the name of **security**, in the name of the protection of our health, in the name of a greater efficiency for corporations, what is gleaned thanks to electronic data gathering and processing is staggering.

It all comes down to the **tradeoff between liberty and security**, between the greater good and individual liberties, which lie at the core of democracies.