

report

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“IT’S NOT A TRANSFORMATION, IT’S A MASSACRE” WHAT WE DO TODAY DETERMINES THE FUTURE OF WORK

The dramatic heading quotes a French trade unionist trying to describe the current process of deep restructuring in the auto industry. Others compare current developments with when horse-drawn carriages were replaced by automobiles at the beginning of the last century. Irrespective of how we characterize this time of change – as an inhuman act or as just another technological evolution – it is highly unlikely that we can stop it. Instead, we need to focus our resources on managing the change and making sure it unfolds according to our rules: based on a human-centred approach and in a spirit of solidarity, and therefore collectively.

When trade unions demand that human beings should be the focus, it is to avoid this massacre. **In practice, this means that the first step taken together with employers, politicians, scientists and others should be to analyse how any changes based on digitalization impacts people.**

As trade unionists, we have a responsibility for our current members as well as future generations, and in particular, for the unorganized. Our core target is that we want the employees of today to be the employees of tomorrow. We also need to be relevant for new generations and for those who either cannot or do not want to join a union.

Our vision of trade unions that are able to move the masses must remain intact.

Two major convictions guide us:

- ▶ **the best solutions are found in collective bargaining and social dialogue**
- ▶ **lifelong learning needs to become a reality for all employees, no matter where they work or what position they hold**

Both aspects are central to a global agreement recently signed by IndustriALL Global Union and French car manufacturer Renault, named Building the World of Work Together.

On the topic of reskilling and upskilling, the agreement gives all employees the right to an annual review with their supervisor to identify skill deficits and develop a suitable training plan.

As unions, we need to pay particular care to those who find it difficult to adapt to the changes that digitalization entails, whose abilities to learn and upskill are less developed. These colleagues cannot simply be left behind, even if paid decent compensation. No society can afford more citizens who are not fully integrated.

Special attention also has to be given to managers and supervisors. In many cases, they have the necessary technical skills to manage the transformation but their skills to deal with change from a human resource perspective are often lacking. Ensuring that staff in leading positions are adequately trained is crucial, or the whole process may fail.

The end of blue- and white-collar definitions?

When looking into the details of future work schemes, we must be careful to not just condemn the future. There is both good and bad, challenges and opportunities.

Digitalization may lead to a better work-life balance, less hazardous work places, fewer hierarchies (and maybe a more democratic workplace), and possibly shorter working hours for everyone. **At the same time, unions need to protect workers and the bargaining agenda should among other things reflect:**

- ▶ **New working time arrangements that seem better adapted to the needs of employees and companies can easily develop into uncontrolled overtime, leading to stress and so on. In the future, collectively agreed and/or legal requirements on working hours need to be respected and protected.**
- ▶ **A digital work environment allows online access to work at any time. A right to disconnect is therefore indispensable.**
- ▶ **Data protection is crucial, as the creation and use of immense data pools is a key principle of every future business model and production system and must not be used against workers.**
- ▶ **Rethink schemes of premium payments. Today premiums are paid for overtime, night work, noisy work places and so on. New premiums should allow space for all those workers who cannot benefit from reformed work schedules, remote working and so on, because they have to work in a traditional shift model at an assembly line for example.**

When IndustriALL initiated negotiations with Renault on the new agreement, the company had less focus on the aspects mentioned above. Their main concern was to maintain their attractiveness as an employer for younger generations, which is why the introduction of more participative management and leadership structures is a top priority for them. As maintaining large scale industrial manufacturing is also in the unions' interest, unions also need to take into account how young people think and how they set their priorities.

The lines between traditional blue- and white-collar jobs have already started to blur and this will continue to a point where it will be impossible to make that distinction. Trade unions who still function along these lines will face severe challenges in the future.

Digitalization, new mobility concepts, green technologies and so on will also create a lot of new jobs, many of them in the IT and service sectors. How can unions make sure that these new jobs will provide decent pay, decent working conditions, health care and the like? How do we stop the trend towards more and more precarious jobs? How do we organize crowd workers?

These questions require a bargaining agenda, but more importantly they require new trade union strategies ensuring that these employees choose unions as their representatives because we speak their language and because we know what their issues are, and because we know how to effectively defend them.

We are seeing a profound transformation in the world of work, one which needs pro-active support from governments. States which have not started to develop relevant industrial policies act irresponsibly, increase future unemployment levels and risk being left by the wayside with all the negative consequences associated with this.

BUILDING THE WORLD OF WORK TOGETHER WITH GROUPE RENAULT

In July 2019, Groupe Renault, its Group Works Council and IndustriALL Global Union signed a global agreement on quality of working life. The agreement, signed by the ten trade union federations or unions represented in the Group Works Council, provides a basis for structuring social dialogue, both at Group and local level. It offers the possibility and encourages the launching of new initiatives, as well as finding relevant pragmatic solutions to improve employees' lives at work, through the negotiation of local agreements.

Through a sustainable approach, the new agreement addresses many aspects of life at work, and particularly those that enable employees to combine performance and well-being.

This approach, which involves all the Group's employees, is based on five fundamental principles:

- ▶ **A dialogue on the evolution of the world of work**
- ▶ **A collaborative management system**
- ▶ **A sustainable commitment to inclusion**
- ▶ **Work-life balance**
- ▶ **Adaptation of the working environment**



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1 Royal IHC shipbuilding plant, Rotterdam, the Netherlands. *IndustriALL*
 2 IndustriALL signing the agreement with Renault, witnessed by the ILO. *IndustriALL*.

THE AGREEMENT

