



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
TO DELEGATES FROM THE ITALIAN CONFEDERATION  
OF WORKERS' UNIONS (CISL)**

*Paul VI Audience Hall  
Wednesday, 28 June 2017*

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**[Multimedia]**

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I welcome you on the occasion of your Congress, and I thank the Secretary General for her presentation.

You have chosen a very nice motto for this Congress: “*For the person, for work*”. Person and work are two words that can and must stand *together*. Because if we think and talk about ‘work’ *without* the ‘person’, work ends up becoming something inhuman which, in forgetting people, also forgets and loses itself. But if we think of a person *without* work, we are talking about something partial, incomplete, because a person is fully realized when he or she becomes a worker; because the individual becomes a person when he or she opens up to others, to social life, when he or she flourishes in work. A person flourishes in work. Work is the most common form of cooperation that humanity has generated in its history. Every day, millions of people cooperate simply by working: educating our children, operating mechanical devices, sorting out paperwork in an office.... Work is a form of civil love: it is not romantic love nor always an intentional love, but it is a true, authentic love that enables us to live and moves the world forward.

Certainly, a person *is not only* about work.... We must also consider the healthy culture of idleness, of knowing how to rest. This is not laziness; it is a human need. When I ask a man, a woman who has two, three children: “Tell me, do you play with your children? Do you have this ‘idleness’?” — “Well, you know, when I go to work, they are still asleep, and when I get back, they’re already in bed”. This is inhuman. That is why, along with work, the other culture must also

be present. Because a person is not just about work, because we do *not always* work, and we do not always have to work. As children we do not work, and should not have to work. We do not work when we are sick nor when we are elderly. There are many people who are not yet working or who no longer work. All this is true and well known, but it must be remembered today too, when there are still too many children and young people who work and do not study, whereas study is the only good “work” for children and for the young. And when the right to a fair pension is not recognized always and for everyone — “fair” as in neither too meager nor too lavish: “*golden pensions*” are no less an offence to labour than pensions that are too meager, as they ensure that inequalities during the working life become permanent. Or when a worker becomes ill and is also rejected from employment in the name of efficiency. Instead, if a sick person can manage to continue to work within his or her limitations, work can also have a therapeutic function: sometimes one recovers by working with others, together with others, for others.

A society that compels the elderly to *work too long* and forces an entire generation of young people *not to work* when they should do so for themselves and for all, is foolish and shortsighted. When the young are outside the work force, businesses lack energy, enthusiasm, innovation, and ‘*joie de vivre*’, which are valuable *common assets* that improve economic life and public happiness. It is therefore urgent to form *a new human social pact, a new social pact for labour*, that reduces working hours for those who are in the last phase of their working life, to create jobs for the young who have the right and duty to work. The gift of work is the first gift fathers and mothers give to their sons and daughters; it is a society’s prime patrimony. It is the first endowment with which we help them to take off on their first free flight of adult life.

I would like to emphasize two epochal challenges that the trade union movement must face and defeat today if it wants to continue to perform its essential role for the common good.

The first is *prophecy*, and it relates to the very nature of unions, their truest vocation. Unions are an expression of the *prophetic profile* of society. Unions are born and reborn each time that, like the biblical prophets, they give a voice to those who have none, denounce those who would “sell the needy for a pair of sandals” (cf. Amos 2:6), unmask the powerful who trample the rights of the most vulnerable workers, defend the cause of foreigners, the least, the rejected. As shown by the great tradition of the *cisl*, the unions movement has its great seasons when it is prophecy. But in our advanced capitalist societies, unions risk losing their prophetic nature and becoming too similar to the institutions and powers that they should be criticizing instead. With the passage of time, unions have ended up bearing too much resemblance to politics, or rather, to political *parties*, their language, their style. However, if this typical and diverse dimension is lacking, their action within businesses will also lose strength and effectiveness. This is prophecy.

The second challenge: *innovation*. Prophets are sentinels, who keep watch from their lookout post. Unions too must keep vigil *over the walls of the city of work*, like a watchman who guards and protects those who are inside the city of work, but who *also guards and protects those who are*

*outside the walls*. Unions do not carry out their essential function of social innovation if they watch over only those who are inside, if they protect the rights of only those who already work or who are retired. This must be done, but it is half of your work. Your vocation is also to protect *those who do not yet have rights*, those who are excluded from work and who are also excluded from rights and from democracy.

The capitalism of our time does not understand the value of trade unions, because it has forgotten the *social nature of economy*, of business. This is one of the greatest errors. Market economy: no. Let us say '*social market economy*', as Saint John Paul ii taught: social market economy. The economy has forgotten the social nature that it has as its vocation, the social nature of business, of life, of bonds and pacts. But perhaps our society does not understand unions also because *it does not see them fight hard enough for the "rights of the 'not yet'"*: in the existential peripheries, among those rejected from work. Let us consider the 40% of young people under 25 who have no work. Here, in Italy. And you must fight there! These are existential peripheries. Society does not see them fight for immigrants, for the poor who are below the city walls; or perhaps it simply does not understand because at times — and it happens in every family — corruption has entered the heart of some unionists. Do not let yourselves be obstructed by this. I know that you have been committed for some time, working in the right directions, especially with migrants, the young and with women. And what I am about to say may seem outdated, but in the world of work, women are still second class. You might say, "No, but there is that businesswoman, that other one..."; yes, but women earn less; they are more easily exploited.... Do something. I encourage you to continue and, if possible, to do more. Inhabiting the peripheries can become an action strategy, a *priority* for the unions of today and those of tomorrow. There is no good society without a good union, and there is no good union that is not reborn every day in the peripheries, that does not transform the economy's *rejected stones* into its cornerstones. "*Sindacato*", (the Italian for "union"), is a beautiful word: it comes from the Greek '*dike*', or 'justice', and '*syn*', together: *syn-dike*, 'justice together'. There is no 'justice together' if 'together' does not include today's excluded people.

Thank you for this meeting. I bless you; I bless your work, and I wish you every success in your Congress and in your daily work. And when we in the Church carry out a mission in a parish, for example, the bishop says: "Let us carry out a mission to convert all the parish, that is, to take a step for the better". You too, "convert": take a step for the better in your work, so that it may be better. Thank you!