

Chapter II – The two towers.

Like all ILO staff, I was confronted with the institution's worrying current situation and noted with growing anxiety the gathering clouds over our activities, the ongoing negotiations (the aim of which, as announced by management in December 2023, is to harmonise working conditions) and the future of our 'community'.

With regard to our work, I was disconcerted by the questioning of the rule of law, of cohesion through social negotiation, in short, of everything for which the ILO was established, due to the return of bullies to the highest echelons of some of our member states, including the most prestigious and the most exemplary. Similarly, it must be said that the apparent lack of solidity of the edifice in which I thought I had built my life, my energy and my faith: the disappointment induced by the attitude of leaders and guides whose motivation can sometimes be questioned, whom we discover would almost ally themselves with the enemy to save the furniture that the enemy ostensibly wants to burn... All this upset me.

In our Community, *'the fish rots from the head'* (Erasmus^[1]), and the shock of such news was not without consequence on the atmosphere among us: who was in danger? Who would come out of it? How would our working conditions and the physical organisation of our offices be affected? Who should show solidarity with whom? Colleagues on technical cooperation contracts funded by American funds, whose activities in favour of *'inclusion'*, *'diversity'* or women's rights, hitherto funded by USAID as associated with social justice, saw their work thrown out. They were promised help and protection, and colleagues on the regular budget were called upon to show solidarity, but this did not prevent the termination of the former's contracts. Then it was the colleagues on the regular budget based in Geneva who were threatened by the announcements of the US presidency and then the management's plans to relocate... and the calls for solidarity were reversed: colleagues in the field, or on technical cooperation budgets, who were less threatened this time, were asked to consider which elements of their remuneration they would be willing to sacrifice for the sake of savings presented as imperative, but with no guarantee as to how the funds saved would be used...

It was with all this weighing on my mind, shaken by the obvious application of the 'shock doctrine' (Naomie Klein^[2]) to our old company, that after the traditional evening reading of the second volume of *The Lord of the Rings* to my son, I fell asleep with a heavy heart...

- *'Saruman the White has turned against his work,'* Ilwenn announces, *'he is making a pact with Mordor to keep his power, and the men are divided. Rohan is weakened by a king under control: his new advisor works for Sauron...'*

- *'How should we react? Everything seems to be falling apart around us!'*

- *'Not everything is falling apart, Mr Fraudon, and in the end, this shadow will pass. Even darkness must pass. A new day will come, and when the sun shines, it will be all the brighter. [...] There is good in this world, and we must fight for it.'*^[3]

Emerging from this bad dream, I had to confront the present and tell myself that, indeed, the worst is never certain: the fight is possible if the servants of 'Rohan', our kingdom, remain united. They have the tools to awaken their weakened king: social dialogue, even taking into

account everyone's calculations, is constitutional at the ILO. We have tools specific to our organisation for this: the union, of course, and the other pillar of our governance: the social partners. Through the current round of negotiations – which began before the reversal of a 'Saruman' member state whose destiny had until then been clear – they can influence the future. Through the JNC (Joint Negotiation Committee), our representatives can engage staff in a process of co-constructing a nuanced and intelligent response to the attacks of a white (and red) wizard who has become mad with power. By appealing to the Review Panel, we can challenge the failure of our king and his representatives to keep their word in the planning of the current negotiations. Finally, through the ILO tribunal, the Union can support colleagues in invoking the law to unite staff behind a value system in which it believes so strongly that it intends to apply it to itself. 'Let those who are ignorant know, let the enemies of God and mankind know, whatever name they take, **that between the strong and the weak, between the rich and the poor, between the master and the servant, it is freedom that oppresses and the law that liberates.**' These words were not spoken by Gandalf the Grey, but by Father Henri Lacordaire, from the pulpit of Notre Dame de Paris in 1848, in a speech that laid the foundations for social Catholicism^[4], one of the intellectual sources of the solidarist movement, whose disciple, Albert Thomas, was our first Director General.

https://www.jean-jaures.org/wp-content/uploads/drupal_fjj/publication-print/note-297.pdf

[1] Erasmus, adage No. 3197, in the online catalogue published by Leiden University

[2] Naomie Klein, The Shock Doctrine, 2007. <https://resumedelivres.com/resume-de-la-strategie-du-choc-la-montee-du-capitalisme-des-catastrophes-par-naomi-klein/>

[3] Sam Carnegie to Frodo Baggins, The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers.

[4] <https://fondamentaux.org/2011/henri-dominique-lacordaire-du-double-travail-de-lhomme/>