

Summary of the Discussion

Almost twenty years ago, when Pope John Paul II wrote that labour was the key to tomorrow's social problems, many treated this as exaggerated at a time of full employment and economic growth. Now this pronouncement would be greeted with less incredulity because the problems of work and employment are a challenge, not only for the unemployed, but for the whole of society.

However, society is now a global society which creates a world-wide labour market. In many developed countries, the legal entitlements of employees have rendered labour prohibitively expensive. Nevertheless, as there is quite enough world-wide demand for labour, the problem of unemployment can only be solved at the global level. As far as social security benefits are concerned, it is questionable whether the Church's social teaching has not endorsed an excessive level of payments as the rightful norm. Equally, the Church seems to be thinking in national rather than global terms, when condemning job losses in developed countries. The reduction of jobs in one part of the world leads to job-creation in other parts of the globe. Every new economic order (including hypothetical ones which might be advocated), has to confront the question of capital regulation. Social teaching has not confronted this issue, having been more concerned with issues of distributive justice than with the conditions of production. Here, the Church's moral universalism needs to be complemented by a global institutional commitment, that is a greater involvement with the developing international regulatory agencies.