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Audience with Delegates from the Confederation of Trade Unions in Italy (Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori, CISL)

At 9.00 this morning, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience delegates from the Confederation of Trade Unions in Italy (Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori, CISL), on the occasion of its 18 th National Congress, on the theme “*For the person, for labour*” (28 June to 1 July 2017).

The following is the Pope’s address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

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

You have chosen a beautiful motto for this Congress: “*For the person, for labour*”. Person and labour are two works that can and must stay together. Because if we think and talk about labour without the person, labour ends up becoming something inhumane, which by forgetting the person forgets and loses itself. But if we think of the person *without* work, we are saying something partial, incomplete, because the 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 *thrives in work*. The person *thrives in work*. Labour 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 equipment, dealing with paperwork in an office ... Work is a form of civil love: it is not a romantic, nor always an intention love, but it is a true, genuine love, that makes the world live and carry on.

Certainly, the person is *not only* formed by labour ... We must also think of a healthy culture of idleness, of knowing how to rest. This is not laziness, it is a human need. When I ask a man or a women with two or three

children: “Tell me, do you play with your children? Do you allow yourself this ‘idleness’?” – “Well, you know, when I go to work they are still asleep, and when I return they are already in bed”. This is inhuman. Therefore, along with work there must also be the other culture. Because a person is not only formed by labour, because we do not *always* work, and we must not work always. Children do not work, and should not work. We do not work when we are ill, nor when we are elderly. There are many people who still do not work, 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 only “good” job for children and the young. And when the right to a fair pension is not always recognized, and not to all – “fair” as one should be neither too poor nor too rich: golden pensions are no less an offence to labour than pensions that are too low, as they ensure that that inequalities during the time of work become permanent. Or when a worker becomes ill and is rejected also from the world of work in the name of efficiency – instead, if a sick person manages, within his or her limits, to continue to work, the work may also have a therapeutic function: at times one heals by working with others, along with others, for others.

It is a distorted and short-sighted society that compels the elderly to *work too long* and obliges an entire generation *not to work* when they should do so for themselves and for all. When the young are outside the world of work, businesses lack energy, enthusiasm, innovation, the joy of living, that are valuable *common goods* 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 working phase of life, to create work for the young who have the right and duty to work. The gift of labour is the first gift fathers and mothers give to their sons and daughters, it is a society’s primary patrimony. It is the first gift with which we help them to lift off on their first free flight of adult life.

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

The first is *prophecy*, and regards the very nature itself of the union, its truest vocation. The union is an expression of the *prophetic profile* of society. The union is born and reborn every time that, like the biblical prophets, it gives a voice to those who have none, denounces those who would “sell the needy for a pair of sandals” (cf. *Amos 2: 6*), unmasks the powerful who trample the rights of the most vulnerable workers, defends the cause of the foreigner, the least, the discarded. 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, the union risks losing its prophetic nature, and becoming too similar to the institutions and powers that it should instead criticize. The union, with the passing of time, has ended up resembling politics, or rather, political parties, their language, their style. And instead, if this typical and diverse dimension is lacking, its action within businesses will lose strength and effectiveness. This is prophecy.

The second challenge is *innovation*. Prophets are sentinels, who watch from their lookout. The union 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 labour, *but also guarding and protecting those who are outside the walls*. The union does not carry out its essential function of social innovation if it watches over only those who are *inside*, if it protects the rights only of *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 excluded from work who are also excluded from rights and democracy.

The capitalism of our time does not understand the value of the trade union, because it has forgotten the *social nature of the economy*, of the business. This is one of the greatest sins. Market economy: no. Let us say, *social market economy*, as St. John Paul II taught: social market economy. The economy has forgotten the social nature that it has as a vocation, the social nature of business, of life, of bonds and pacts. But perhaps our society does not understand the union also because it *does not fight enough in terms of the “not yet rights”*: of the existential peripheries, among those rejected from work. Let us think of the 40 % of young people under 25, who do not have work. Here, in Italy. And you must fight there! These are existential peripheries. It does not fight for the immigrants, for the poor, who are below the city walls; or rather it does not understand simply 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 women. And what I am about to say may seem obvious, but in the world of work women are still in second class. You might say, “No, but there is that businesswoman, that other one...”; yes, but if women earn less, 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 union of today and 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 *discarded stones* of the economy into its cornerstones. The Italian for “union”, “sindacato”, 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 it “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 ahead”. You too, “convert”: take a step ahead in your work, so that it may be better. Thank you!

And now, I ask you to pray for me, because I too must convert, in my work: every day I must do better to help and carry out my vocation. Pray for me, and I would like to give you the Lord’s blessing.

[*Blessing*]
