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AN IDEAL WORLD LIKE OUR WORLD, BUT COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

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Law cannot be better than the high values of the society of which it is the law. *The values of international society in its present form* reflect the interests of states. The *high values* of actual *human beings* may be reflected in the representational role of governments, but only if and when those governments are behaving well.

The international world-as-it-is is not the only human world-that-might-have-been. We know that there could be many worlds better than our actual world.

The International Labour Organization seems like something that has come to us from a *better world*, a better world that must have seemed to be a *possible world* in the eyes of certain visionary people in 1919. The ILO was to be a bright light shining in a time of darkness, a darkness that would soon extinguish human hope for another generation.

The idea of ‘better worlds’ was at the heart of *Voltaire’s dialectical relationship* with those he saw as *congenital optimists*, such as Rousseau and Leibniz and Alexander Pope. They all knew that they were taking part in *the permanent confrontation between the ideal and the actual* that determines the permanent re-making of the human world.

Our own role in history is still the task of re-making the human world, a task more formidable and more urgent now than ever before.

Human history is not only the history of the use and abuse of power by powerful people. It is also the history of those *who have worked to make a better world*. It so happens, as a fact of history, that it was European thinkers who, over the course of centuries, dominated *the dialectical resolution of the ideal and the actual* that has shaped the present form of the human world, for better and for worse.

The battle of ideas *to make the future* of our chaotic and dangerous world is no longer a debate among public intellectuals from Europe. It is a debate among thinking people everywhere, reflecting all cultural traditions and all human experience. An exciting prospect!

In the meantime, I can only speak as a very old public intellectual from Europe. We European public intellectuals will continue to contribute what we can to *the great debate of the human future*. It remains a heavy burden of responsibility on us also.

Above all, it must be a battle of ideas that engages and excites *young people* everywhere. The world that we older people have made is passing into the hands of younger people. We older people have done our best and our worst in the human past.

Young people should see themselves as the poets and the builders of a new kind of human world, like our own but completely different. '*Every child begins the world again.*' (Henry David Thoreau). We need that.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Citizen of Geneva as he was proud to call himself, to whom I owe the title of these remarks, felt passionately the world-changing responsibility, and it caused him great suffering. His Enlightenment friends were looking at the world with a new excitement, certainly, but with a congenital scepticism, materialism, cynicism, pessimism.

Rousseau's new kind of world would be a world in which *the fundamental social dialectic of individualism and collectivism* would be resolved in a way that treated each and every human being as something of ultimate value. It sees *human society* as an almost miraculous thing, based on the binding force of law, but offering ever greater possibilities of *personal self-fulfilment*.

In the frenzy of social change of recent centuries, we have, in fact, been doing Rousseau's work, mostly unaware even of the name of Rousseau. We fail to recognise that peaceful social revolutions in many countries *have* transformed the lives of people who, for centuries, for millennia, were the *victims* of their own society, not its *primary beneficiaries*.

They were *beautiful revolutions* – to borrow a phrase from Karl Marx, speaking in a passing moment of optimism after the revolutionary events in France in February 1848.

The enemy of progress is fatalism. Fatalism is a pandemic which is now infecting people who think. Faced with a chaotic world and a frightening future, many thinking people have *lost the will to think creatively*, to think hopefully. Defeatism in the minds of the privileged classes soon infects all classes in society.

Indifference, resignation, passivity become an acceptable form of social and personal consciousness. *Si tout n'est pas bien, tout est passable.* 'If not everything is good, everything is good enough', as Isuriel says, in Voltaire's ambiguous story called *Le monde comme il va*.

The enemy of progress is fatalism. *The enemy of fatalism is education.* Education develops the thinking systems of the *brain*. Education develops the thinking capacity of the *mind*. *Knowledge is power*, as Francis Bacon said in 1597, foreseeing the modern world.

The decline in education at all levels, in so many of our societies, is a decline in a unique characteristic of the human species, its amazing capacity to think about its own thinking, and thereby to think better, and thereby to live better.

The idea that knowledge contained in the *World Wide Web* is equivalent to knowledge contained in the human mind is a devastating error. *My mind is my own search engine, and much much more.*

The depersonalising of knowledge is part of a broader phenomenon of *the increasing insecurity of the human mind*. The tragic ethos of the social media is *polluting public debate*. Machines are reproducing the activity of the human brain, and *may surpass the human brain* in some respects. The algorithms of AI offer *irresistible truth* without values or feelings.

The triumphalism of science and engineering and mathematics is relegating *the humanities* to the margin, in the making of the human future. The humanities are the human mind's essential and arduous task of studying itself and its works.

We must remember and reassert vigorously two priceless products of the human mind which must serve as the foundation on which a better human future will be built.

Politics is the pursuit of the possible. The social practice that we call *politics* is the everyday struggle of values and interests through which a society chooses its better future. Politics takes place in the *public mind* of a society. But it allows the *private minds* of the citizens to affect their society's choice of its better future.

Law is the possible made actual. Law is *a bridge between the ideal and the real*. Reflecting the high values of a society, law is the vehicle that a society uses to carry it into the better future that it chooses and its citizens desire.

Problems of law and politics are at the heart of *the imperfection of the existing form of international society*. It is an *international unsociety* whose most grotesque weakness is the absence of any true *politics beyond frontiers*. You cannot have good law without a good system of politics. You cannot have good government without a good system of politics.

For most of human history, *customary law* has been the law of human societies. Customary law depends on a powerful sense of *social cohesion*. It naturally reflects a society's *highest values*. It serves the *common good* of a society.

Customary international law, in its present form, cannot reflect the social cohesion of a human world that *still does not have* any true sense of social cohesion. It cannot reflect the high values of an international society that has *not yet discovered* what those high values are, a humanity that still *lacks any good idea* of its common destiny, let alone its common good.

What will it be like – *the ideal world that is like our world, but completely different?*

It will be a world in which there is *a fundamental change of human self-consciousness*. It will be a consciousness that gives us a new idea and a new ideal of what it is to be human, what it is to be the creator of possible human worlds, possible worlds in which the values and interests of *all human beings* are respected in the service of *the common good of humanity*.

Our job as thinking human-beings is to help to find new ways to overcome gross social injustice and inequality everywhere, to give all human beings everywhere the possibility of ever greater levels of personal self-fulfilment. A better life for all human beings everywhere. *That is the most beautiful of all possible revolutions*.

The ILO was and is a pioneer in *the new human self-consciousness*. Our working life is a primary aspect of what we should still take pleasure in calling 'the good life', *the good life* that everybody everywhere *hopes for*, the good life that everybody everywhere *deserves*.

In celebrating the centenary of the ILO, we may be inspired to express our joy as we remember that we are *the self-evolving and self-perfecting species*, a species programmed to make and remake a *human world*, a human world that *wholly depends on a natural world* that makes us what we are, that makes us what we can be in the future.

And we have a particular species-characteristic which no one, and nothing, can take away from us. *Our capacity to hope for a better human future*.