



**WITNESS
FOR JUSTICE**

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In Defense of the Rights to Work, to a Living Wage, and to Rest

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Throughout human history, societies could only be built and sustained through human labor, and the willingness and ability to work have generally been regarded as necessary conditions for earning a living and sustaining one's life. Consequently, the right to rest, having adequate time for family and community life, and receiving fair compensation sufficient to sustain a dignified existence have been enduring concerns in both religious and secular reflections on human labor. This has remained true even as societies have experienced varying degrees of involuntary unemployment since the Industrial Revolution.

However, the emerging regime of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies could upend the millennia-old conception of human labor as the fundamental element in building and sustaining societies, rendering redundant the traditional claim to the rights to work, to fair wages, and to rest. If certain predictions about the coming AI regime prove even nearly accurate, a vast majority of humans could be consigned to an unwished-for and never-ending rest without them ever having an opportunity to work and earn a living. Thus, they would never ever be able to have a peaceful and secure rest, which can only proceed from their participation in productive work.

The Hebrew and Christian traditions, along with other religious paths, emphasize the sacred and inviolable nature of rest. Rest is understood as something that human beings both deserve and rightfully earn through meaningful labor to sustain the life of the community. Moreover, these traditions



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extend this right to rest not only to humans, but also to the cattle and other animals whose labor supports human endeavors.

In the Hebrew and Christian traditions, this right to rest is grounded in the example of God, who rested on the seventh day after the work of creation. By resting, God established and sanctified rest itself as an inalienable right and need of both human and animal life. Given the emerging reality of an AI dispensation and its potential for causing mass unemployment, from now on, our utmost emphasis ought to be on the fact that God labored productively for a set of days before entering rest. Hence, this act of God's productive work could be considered as the ground for an eternal human claim to the right to work.

The Hebrew prophets are relentless in their call for fair wages and fairness in all financial transactions, and the Christian scriptures underscore this message. And since its advent in the eighteenth century, the labor movement has devoted its advocacy and activism to securing fair wages, fair working hours and conditions, and guaranteed daily and weekly periods of rest. Yet, history has taught us that notwithstanding the ideals of rest and just compensation affirmed by both religious and secular traditions, much of human history has been marked by pervasive systems of involuntary bondage, enslavement, and indentured servitude, accompanied by a systematic denial of rest.

Our ability as humans to imagine new possibilities and work toward their actualization could be the primary sign of us being alive. The scripture testifies to how the living God—whom we strive to follow and adhere to—demonstrates that working to set in motion new possibilities is intrinsic to life itself, and work as the very basis for having a chance to rest. It is thus for us to discern that God has made productive work and the rest that follows from it as the essential signs of life, both for the living God and for the human, the ones who are created in the image of God. Thus, God has enshrined productive work as an inalienable right that humans are endowed with, and consequently are always already endowed

with the rights to a living wage and to unfettered and undisturbed rest. Therefore what God has enshrined, let no one be permitted to efface.

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