100 years ago today, the dream of decent work for all became a reality on a global scale. Forty countries, including Canada, adopted the first conventions defining the rights of workers everywhere: a limit to hours of work, security during unemployment, maternity protection, a minimum age for work, and restrictions on overtime by women and young people.

This act of solidarity marked the beginning of the International Labour Organization. It proved that the worker walkouts, lockouts and organizing of the previous fifty years had the power to shape the future. It set in motion a century of creative collaboration among employees, employers and government for the common good. It is this unique experience of sharing power fairly that has best prepared the world for what lies ahead.

The ILO was created in a time of chaos and renewal not unlike our own. Today, a growing number of Canadians are fighting for decent work, in the streets, boardrooms and legislatures. We’re saying “enough already” to the dangerous excesses of unrestrained capitalism. We’re reckoning with the injustices of the past to restore relationships in the present.

This is a moment to make choices about how we’re going to live together on a digital, deeply divided, and rapidly warming planet. We’re rising to the opportunities and challenges of a new decade with the same energy that created the ILO just one year after the end of a devastating world war.

Going forward, the purpose of people and their governments must be to maximize the common good – not corporate profits and shareholder value – through bold public policies and programs.

Canada’s priorities must be informed by people-centred principles and the best evidence available, and enacted through robust democratic and cooperative processes. The Atkinson Foundation believes it’s time to:

maximize potential. Especially as Canada’s population ages, we should invest in our collective capacity to continuously learn, welcome newcomers into the workforce, and manage the increased demands of care work and new technology.

maximize advantage. Especially as incomes become less predictable, we should provide basic services like child care and transportation to create a collaborative advantage for workers.

maximize public resources. Especially as the economy grows more slowly, we should leverage every public dollar spent on goods and services in the marketplace to build up workers and the wealth of their communities.

It’s time to free ourselves from the traps of austerity and competitiveness that create too few winners and minimize chronic disparities.

It’s time to build the kind of solidarity that makes our everyday lives less precarious and more manageable, and makes our common life richer.

It’s time to act decisively on the climate crisis and to take all workers through a just transition to a green and reparative economy.

It’s time to organize and form the kinds of friendships, networks, alliances and institutions that propel large ideas forward.

Join us in celebrating #ILO100. What’s your #LargeVision for the future of workers?