



Inter-Parliamentary Union  
For democracy. For everyone.

# 149th IPU Assembly

Geneva  
13–17 October 2024



## Speech by Mr. Dan Carden, President of the Board of the IPU Forum of Young Parliamentarians

Opening of the 149th IPU Assembly, Geneva

Geneva, 13 October 2024

Madam President of the IPU,  
Mr. Secretary General,  
Madam President of the Bureau of Women Parliamentarians,  
Dear colleagues,

I am delighted that 25% of delegates here at the Assembly are under the age of 45. That is real progress for youth representation from our Parliaments at Assemblies. Now on the topic of this Assembly.

When faced with the advent of something new, there is often a tendency to think that the uncertainty before us is without precedent in history. And this impulse is not necessarily wrong. The technological changes we are living through may well be in a different category to anything that we have seen before, but this is not the first time that we have found ourselves on the precipice of a technological revolution with the potential to untangle every weave in our social fabric.

Let me offer a historical precedent for what we are now facing from my country. The industrial revolution in the north of England, a region of pastoral landscapes and small-scale craftsmanship, rapidly transformed into a hub of industrial activity. Towns like Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds became epicentres of a new economic order, drawing people from rural communities to work in new manufacturing engineering and on the docks. This industrial boom unleashed productive capabilities that had previously been unimaginable, creating the wealth and prosperity that would eventually define industrial societies.

But in the immediate term, it was profoundly disruptive. It shattered a social equilibrium that had endured for centuries, pulling workers away from the land and the relative autonomy of rural life into crowded, often squalid urban centres. There, they became cogs in a vast industrial machine, alienated from the product of their labour and subject to the gruelling demands of factory work.

This new economic order did not limit its influence. To the north of England, the hunger for raw materials and new markets led to the extensive pillaging of resources from colonized territories feeding an industrial juggernaut that, while prosperous for some, was built on exploitation. It was only through collective action from the formation of the early labour and trade union movements to political reforms initiated by the leaders who recognized the need for change that society began to tame the forces of industrialization. Workers demanded fair wages, reasonable hours and safer conditions, while governments gradually intervened with regulations designed to humanize the labour system. Over time, these efforts demonstrated that industrialization could be moulded into something more socially beneficial, but only when its power was deliberately harnessed to serve the interests of the many.

This history underscores a fundamental truth – technological advancements have no intrinsic moral character of their own. Their impact depends in whose interests they are made to serve. Today, we face a similar test with the rise of artificial intelligence and social media. AI has the undoubted potential to revolutionize every sector of society, and social media has endowed us with a level of global connectivity that would have been unthinkable even a few decades ago. But these technologies could well have, and indeed may well already be having, a catastrophic impact on society, social media algorithms, with their built-in bias towards sensationalism and discord, have poisoned the public debate, and detached people from the real-life communities that surround them. AI threatens jobs and a new deeper reliance on technology.

The challenge now is to avoid the mistakes of the past, and just as workers and political leaders once reigned in the forces of industrialization, we must act decisively to manage the development of AI and social media, because technology must remain a tool for human progress, serving society's needs rather than dictating society's direction. History shows that without such efforts, technological progress can disrupt rather than empower and it is up to us to ensure that the power of innovation is harnessed for the benefit of all.

Colleagues,

I wish you a fruitful and successful Assembly from the Board and the Forum of Young Parliamentarians. Thank you for listening to me today.