Chapter 2: A Baptism of Fire- Wars, Revolutions, and International Labour

World War I was a deeply traumatic event which caused a major split within the international labour movement. This political disagreement was turned into a split between organisations during the inter-war period, in the midst of revolutions and upheavals around the entire world. Communists and socialists operated in different organisations and developed very different ideas about how to organise trade unions across borders. While World War II saw a degree of cooperation between the different sides of this now-separated movement, the fundamental political differences which had developed between the different groups ensured that any unity would be short-lived.

The Collapse of Solidarity - Nationalism, Militarism and Labour Politics

In August 1914, after years of growing tension between the European empires, war broke out. It was devastating- millions of workers, trade unionists, and socialists died on both sides, and the labour movements they had built over generations were nearly lost as well. Both the Second International and the IFTU were broken apart during the bloody conflict of World War I.

In the decade leading up to its outbreak, the socialist and trade union movement had taken a stance against war. The Second International had passed motions at its international conferences that called on members to use strikes and protests to prevent any war between the European powers. However, in practice, the socialist leaders in each movement generally ended up supporting their countries in this bloodbath.

In 1904, members of the Second International gathered in Amsterdam under a banner that read 'Workers of the World Unite!' Just ten years later, the delegates' parties were encouraging fellow workers to kill one another in a violent imperial war.

In Britain, the trade unions helped to recruit soldiers to send to the front, and the TUC and Labour Party agreed to an 'industrial peace' where they would not support any strikes during the war. At the start of the war, the German trade unions urged the representatives of the SPD to agree to the war credits in the Reichstag. This the SPD did on 4 August 1914, agreeing to join the 'Burgfrieden' (castle peace) declared by the German Kaiser. Only two SPD representatives dissented- Karl Liebknecht and Otto Rühle. In France, the leaders of the CGT pledged to be part of a 'sacred union' with the government until Germany and Austria were defeated. Socialists on both sides of the conflict blamed the other side for starting the war, and claimed that socialism would come faster if their own country was victorious. The labour movement was soon split three ways: the parties and unions that supported the Allies

(such as Britain, France, Belgium, Russia), those that supported the Central Powers (such as Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria) and those of the neutral countries (including the Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Italy until it joined the Allies in 1916).

The German leadership of IFTU opened a new office in Amsterdam in the Netherlands, to keep communications going through a neutral country, as did the ITF leadership. Meanwhile the British, Belgian, and French trade unions set up a rival group in Paris. The supporters of the Paris group met in Leeds, UK, in 1916 to set out what they wanted from a post-war world. They called for an 'international workers' parliament' and a body which represented both workers and national governments, that would draft labour laws which would be implemented internationally. The Germans organised a conference of the Central Powers' and neutral countries' trade unions in Stockholm, 1917, and agreed with the principles put down in Leeds. Although both sides refused to meet or coordinate, they shared similar goals.

The war did not just split the parties and unions of different countries from one another. It also caused fractures and divides within the parties and unions. There were small groupings of radical socialists and syndicalists who opposed the war in every country. These groups grew in size as the war progressed, with more and more people coming to see it as a senseless mass slaughter.

This led to very heated arguments and even violence between former comrades. In the UK, at the launch meeting of the Socialist National Defence Committee, uniformed soldiers were employed to attack socialist and pacifist hecklers with truncheons. The group soon morphed into the British Workers' League, which violently broke up anti-war meetings, in one instance even causing future Labour Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, to flee through the back entrance of a hall he was speaking at in Cardiff.

In Italy, Mussolini, then a member of the anti-war Italian Socialist Party, led a split of pro-war socialists and syndicalists away from the movement, who wanted Italian-speakers within the Austrian Empire brought into a larger Italian state. Clara Zetkin, the German socialist and feminist, organised a meeting of the Socialist Women's International in Switzerland in 1915, which produced an anti-war statement- after illegally distributing 200,000 copies of this statement back in Germany, she was expelled from the SPD.

Later that year, a group of anti-war socialists including Vladimir Lenin met in the sleepy Swiss village of Zimmerwald. To avoid the attention of the locals, they claimed to be a group of bird-watchers holding a get-together. At this meeting they also drafted an anti-war statement, and discussed the possibility of splitting the international movement to found a new, more radical, international.

The internationalism of the Second International had proved to be shallow. While its members had debated and discussed with one another, met at conferences, published newspapers with each other, sung the same socialist songs, and even organised demonstrations together, they had been unable to resist the rising tide of nationalism which helped to drag the world to war. Most of the ITS's also ceased to function during the war, except the ITF, whose German leadership had established a Dutch office before its outbreak. The organisation was able to keep going as a radical young Dutchman named Edo Fimmen took the reins and began to consider how workers could resist nationalism and war in the future.

The leaders of the IFTU who had refused to discuss the issue of war also felt responsibility for the splintering of the workers' movement. They were determined to strengthen their international links after the war, however a post-war wave of revolutions saw divides in the movement grow on political, rather than national, lines.

Revolution in Russia and Germany

As the World War continued into 1917, conditions grew worse for both soldiers and civilians, leading to mutinies, illegal strikes, and workers' protests in all the countries involved. In Russia, 1917, these protests turned into a full-blown revolution.

It began with a strike at the Putilov munitions factory in Petrograd (now St Petersburg), Russia's capital. Then, on March 8th (International Women's Day) women went on strike and took to the streets, before marching into other factories and workplaces and demanding that the men join them. Soon, the streets of Petrograd were flooded with people demanding better food, democracy, and an end to the war. Soldiers refused to break up the protests and instead joined in. Transport was halted, barricades thrown up, and riots broke out- the capital was paralysed.

The Tsar was overthrown and a centre-left government of moderate socialists, including the Mensheviks, and liberals, took power. They soon lost popularity as they continued to fight the hated war and failed to keep up with the population's demands for land and better working conditions. They were overthrown in November (October in the old Russian calendar) and replaced by a coalition government of revolutionary socialists, in which the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, were the most powerful force. This government was based on a series of workers' and peasants' councils ('Soviets'), rather than a parliament system.

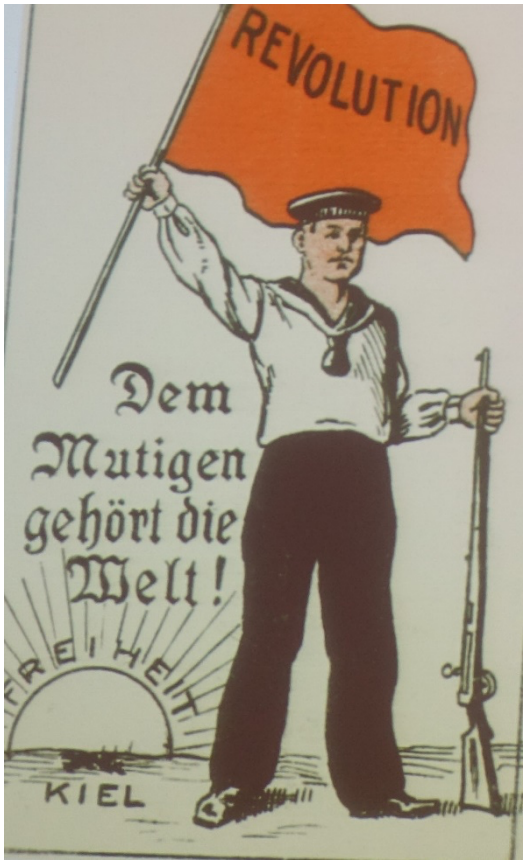
Russian Soldiers march with guns in the streets of Moscow, October, 1917. They supported the overthrow of the moderates and the creation of a new system based on radical direct democracy. Their banner says simply 'Communism'

In March, the Bolshevik-led government took Russia out of the war and in June issued a decree nationalizing the land and the main industries. A two-year civil war broke out with several 'white' armies (supporters of the Tsar and opponents of the new radical government) who were assisted by foreign powers, seeking to overthrow the new Soviet government.

The Bolsheviks in turn created a Red Army and a repressive and violent state to eliminate political opposition. What started as a coalition government of revolutionaries became controlled exclusively by the Bolsheviks, now renamed the Communists.

The Bolshevik revolution had two big impacts on the labour movement and the rest of the world: on the one hand, it greatly strengthened the calls for peace and for political, social, and economic reforms. At the same time, it caused a major division in the labour movement about how to organise and whether to support the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks throughout the civil war and early 1920s turned on many of the socialist and syndicalist groups who had supported the initial revolution and even those who supported the October revolution. In 1921 they invaded the Democratic Republic of Georgia, despite assurances to the Mensheviks and local non-communist socialists who were running the country that they would respect their independence. In 1922 they held a phony trial with members of the Socialist Revolutionaries, accusing them of sabotaging the revolution. This angered many labour groups internationally who hoped for a radical, democratic, socialist Russia.

There were also attempted revolutions in other countries inspired by the Russian experience, and born of workers' frustration with their political leaders and the impact of the war. In Germany, the SPD had split as more members rejected their official pro-war stance. They formed the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD). Along with a group known as the Revolutionary Stewards – a network of militant, anti-war, trade unionists, the radicals in Germany now had their own groups.



This postcard, distributed during the German Revolution, celebrates the mutiny of the sailors at Kiel, which triggered the German Revolution that overthrew the Kaiser. The slogan reads 'The World Belongs to the Brave!'

The split in the labour movement which began in the Russian Empire was made concrete by the German experience. Both sides felt that, given the opportunity, the other side would crush them with extreme violence. This split was to spread even further as international organisations were formed and re-formed in the aftermath of war.

In 1917, German munition workers led by a movement of revolutionary anti-war shop stewards organised mass strikes of hundreds of thousands of workers. The SPD split, with the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD) forming a new party for anti-war socialists and workers. Throughout 1918, strikes and protests against the war grew in ferocity across the country.

In October 1918, it was clear to German military and political leaders that they had lost the war. Hoping for a better peace deal, they reformed the government to turn it into a parliamentary democracy, which would allow the SPD to work with liberals to negotiate the peace terms with their military opponents.

The SPD leadership was pleased with the government reform. They felt that this gave them the space to create a gradual parliamentary transition to socialism – they feared that moving too fast, as they felt the Bolsheviks had done, would create a violent backlash from the powerful German capitalists.

However, despite the end of the war being in sight, the German admirals couldn't resist one last attempt to look like heroes. They ordered sailors to get ready for another attack on the British fleet, and the sailors responded by mutinying. This spread into a wave of strikes and protests, and workers' and soldiers' councils soon began to spring up across the country in November 1918, as they had in the Russian Empire.

The SPD leaders feared the movement, and joined the councils with the hope of quelling revolution from within its institutions. They were the biggest party in the councils, and used their position to proclaim that the parliament, not the councils, would be the basis of a new government.

But this did not stop the revolutionary workers' movement. On New Year's Day, 1919, a new German Communist Party (KPD) was formed. Just a few days later the SPD tried to take control of the police force. In response. a huge armed protest of hundreds of thousands of workers descended on Berlin, once again demanding a council state. They occupied newspaper offices, the train station, and public squares. A revolutionary leadership was formed from the Revolutionary Stewards, USPD, and KPD.

Attempts to negotiate a peaceful response stalled, and the SPD sent in the Freikorps – a far-right wing movement of ex-soldiers who eventually joined the ranks of the Nazis – to crush the movement. These Freikorps members assassinated leading KPD members Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, leading to outrage. The Freikorps officer responsible for the murders of the KPD leading figures claimed that he had approval from the SPD leadership, although the SPD leaders denied giving any such orders. The movement was crushed, and thousands more killed by the Freikorps.

The violent suppression of the revolutionaries in Germany, and of the non-Bolshevik socialists across the former Russian Empire, created a divide in the international movement. While many had hoped for a reconciliation between the pro- and anti-war sides of each country's workers' movements after the war, it had seemed to only grow stronger.

The Creation of the Communist International and the Red International of Labour Unions

In March 1919, The Bolsheviks called a conference and founded the **Third International-** known as the Comintern or Communist International. This conference, hastily called due to Bolsheviks' fears that the Second International would be refounded, wasn't very representative. Many of the delegates represented only small factions of parties. They put out a manifesto calling on the workers of Europe to revolt and establish soviet governments, and declared that the socialists were defenders of capitalism. At the next meeting of the Comintern in 1920, they created a list of 21 conditions which parties would have to accept if they wanted to join. Unlike the previous International, this new International had a strong central leadership which actively interfered in the life of the national parties. Increasingly, the new leaders of Russia would be able to exert pressure on Communist Parties and their members in the trade union movement around the world.

The Bolsheviks had originally planned for the Comintern, like the First International, to be open to trade unions, political parties, and other workers' organisations. But they soon realized that they could potentially win over revolutionary syndicalists (who had wanted an International to rival the socialists) and radical members of the socialist trade unions through establishing a revolutionary trade union international. In June 1921, they did just this, hosting the founding conference of the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU) in Moscow.

While there were independent trade unions represented at this conference (mainly syndicalists), most delegates belonged to unions which were affiliated to the IFTU (which had been reunified in 1919 but was still weak). Some of the socialist trade union federations which had opposed the war, such as the Italian General Confederation of Labour, also attended the early conferences. There were very few independent communist unions, as the communists had decided in 1920 to encourage members to join existing socialist trade unions to both gain new recruits and win control of the leadership.

The syndicalists mostly left within a year, disgusted by the communists' treatment of their former syndicalist allies in Russia, and angered by the overbearing influence of the Russian Communist Party in the organisation. They set up their own international (the International Workingmen's Association) in Berlin in 1922. Likewise, the left-wing socialist unions soon decided to leave to re-join the IFTU, after hearing about the crackdowns on non-communist labour activists within Russia.

RILU also lost independent members because the communists felt that political decisions made within Communist Parties should control what their members did in the unions. Lenin had said that trade unionists, on the whole, developed only a limited anti-capitalist politics focused on getting better wages and conditions, better labour laws, and so on. Parties represented a better type of organisation to him, with more advanced socialist politics, as they could draw on the experience of workers in many different sectors and unions. Through the 1920s, the Communist leaders in Moscow used this idea to justify directing the activities of party members in trade unions. Communist Party members who were in trade unions and did not follow orders could be expelled by either their national or international leaders. The RILU could never be truly independent.

And so the RILU was left in the hands of the communists. Its member organisations were the state-controlled Russian trade unions and the few independent communist unions that existed (such as the Czech union confederation, or the French *Confédération Générale du Travail Unitaire,* a split from the CGT which had been taken over by more-moderate socialists through the course of the war). In some cases, there were members of the RILU who were not communists- in Britain, the RILU-aligned Minority Movement was a grassroots group of militant trade unionists from many political backgrounds- but they were few and far between.

While unsuccessful in growing in Europe, the RILU did have some successes in the countries that had been colonized by European powers. Unlike the IFTU, which largely focused on European workers and seemed uninterested in the lack of democracy in the colonies, RILU demanded an immediate end to empire, and supported anti-colonial strikes and protest movements. They were very active on this issue in the late 1920s and early 1930s, gaining allies particularly in India and China. These efforts rarely created long-lasting workers' institutions, but they had a legacy in blending together communist ideas and sympathy for the USSR with anti-colonial nationalism in the colonized world.

The rivalry between Communist RILU and Socialist IFTU played a big part in inter-war labour politics, and only briefly receded during World War II. The political divisions created during World War I, and cemented by new organisations formed through revolution, still have an impact today.

The Formation of the ILO

The governments of Europe were terrified at the end of World War I. Revolutions had broken out in Russia, Germany, Turkey, and Hungary, while uprisings, mutinies, and strikes spread across Europe, with some explicitly inspired by the Russian Revolution. Within the British Empire, Egypt, India, and

Ireland were all gripped by revolutionary anti-colonial movements. The Russian communists were promising to spread revolution across the entire globe. The threats of being conquered by foreign enemies had been replaced by the threat of being overthrown by their own people.

To appease workers at home, undermine the appeal of Soviet Russia, and free up troops to keep hold of their empires, European governments realized that they needed to meet some of the demands of the labour movement and ensure that workers had some say in labour policies. In 1919, the Allied Powers met a key demand of the social-democratic labour movement by setting up the International Labour Organisation (ILO), as a part of the post-war Versailles Peace Treaty. The demand for an 'international workers' parliament' had been at least partially-realised.

The ILO's first conference was held in Washington DC, USA, in October 1919. It was huge, with representatives from governments, workers, and employers from over 40 countries. This picture shows only the secretarial staff!

The ILO is different from other international organisations like the League of Nations and its modern successor, the United Nations. These bodies are led by representatives of national governments, while the ILO is a tri-partite organisation, meaning there are three different types of delegates. Every independent country sends two delegates from the government, one from the employers, and one from the workers. The rules of the ILO mean that any proposed policy needs two-thirds of delegates' approval to pass. Often workers' reps will vote in favour of new legislation and employers' reps will vote against (although not always). Because governments have the most representatives, the majority of them need to be won over to proposals made by the workers' representatives to pass.

While many European labour leaders had wanted the ILO's decisions to automatically become law, the AFL was against this. Their leader, Samuel Gompers, was anti-socialist and did not want European socialists to be able to set the labour laws of the USA. Most governments were not keen on the idea either. A compromise was made; the ILO can pass either Conventions or Recommendations- both are meant to be automatically discussed in members' national parliaments, and Conventions are meant to be passed into law within twelve months.

It is not easy to get workers' proposals for new Conventions through the ILO. It requires a complex and time-consuming process, and the ILO is a highly bureaucratic multi-lingual institution. Governments need to be persuaded to give support, employers will do what they can to block, and sometimes workers' representatives appear to be more concerned about pleasing their respective governments than supporting workers' interests. There were multiple failed attempts to get approval for the 40-hour week to be enshrined in a Convention before World War II, for example.

Even when victorious in gaining a good new Convention, unions then have the job of getting the agreed standards ratified in national legislation, before it can come into effect.

Nevertheless, ILO Conventions and Recommendations do provide an important reference point for unions and associations when negotiating or bargaining with governments. Discussions at

International Labour Conferences also provide an important platform for workers to engage in policy debates and build alliances within the international trade union movement and with the workers' group in the ILO.

The Amsterdam International and Edo Fimmen

IFTU had divided in two rival groups based in Amsterdam and Paris when the war began. At the end of the war, both sides wanted to rebuild the International. They received support from the Allied governments, who encouraged labour involvement in the peace treaty talks that followed the war. This boosted their prestige, but also their reliance on capitalist states for legitimacy. The setting up of the ILO and the League of Nations were considered great successes for the movement, even though these organisations were not as democratic or labour-controlled as had been hoped.

Women Workers Organise Within and Beyond the ILO

At the first ILO conference in Washington, 1919, only 23 out of the 269 participants were women- and none of them had the right to vote in debates. They were even sat at the back of the room, behind the journalists, away from other delegates.

Tanaka Tana was a Japanese representative. A middle-class social work professor who saw herself as a labour ally, she had toured Japan before going to Washington as part of the government delegation. She met with women textile workers organised in the Yūaikai (a nation-wide friendly society) Women's Division, learning about how poorly they were treated.

She was denied the opportunity to speak at the conference until one of the Japanese employers' delegates, nervous about his modest English language skills, asked her to deliver his speech which argued against regulations on night work. She began by repeating his claims that Japanese employers cared so much for their workers that laws were unnecessary, but then launched into her own speech about how Japanese women workers were ruthlessly exploited and had demanded this legislation. She was fired from the delegation immediately, but protests from Japanese workers who heard of her speech, and other women delegates at the conference, soon forced the Japanese delegation to reinstate her.

The founding conference presented an opportunity for women workers from around the world to renew international organising. The day before, 200 women from 19 countries held a Women's Labour Congress- although many were from the Allied victors of WW1 and the new states carved out of the losing empires. There were no representatives from Germany and Austria, and few from the Global South. They set up the International Federation of Working Women (IFWW), which ran until 1924.

The IFWW was largely driven by the US-based National Women's Trade Union League. Like the AFL, they were anti-socialist, and so wanted to keep political parties, co-operatives, and non-trade-union labour organisations out of the IFWW, fearing that they would radicalise it. This led to arguments with the Brits who wanted these types of groups involved. The Brits lost the debate and the group remained open only to trade unions.

This had serious consequences. Several national federations who were signed up to the IFTU didn't see why they should fund another international trade union body, and reduced their payments, leaving them short on funds. What's more, with the German trade unions beginning to re-enter the international fray in the early 1920s, many German women trade unionists argued against the existence of a separate body for women. The organisation faced major barriers to growth. Its international meetings shrank, and in 1924 the group was transformed into a Women's Committee of the IFTU.

There were still tensions within IFTU. The AFL and Gompers wanted it to be a 'non-political' body which focused on wages and conditions in the workplace, while many European union federations wanted it to have socialist politics. When the IFTU re-formed in Amsterdam in July 1919, the AFL lost the argument. Gompers pulled his federation out, along with the Latin American trade union federations who worked closely with the AFL. IFTU represented 23 million workers, but they were pretty much all European.

What's more, the bloodshed, suffering, and division created by the war still haunted the members and leaders of IFTU. Many trade union members, leaders, and activists had died in the course of the war. The trade union international wanted to make sure that the labour movement could be a force for peace and international unity, and not crack under the pressure of nationalism and war like in 1914. But there were different ideas about how this could be done.

At first the IFTU had two secretaries who guided the organisation- Jan Oudegeest and Edo Fimmen. Fimmen was also the head of the ITF. He wanted the movement to become more radical and live up to its promises to use workers' power to prevent wars. He put this into practice when Poland invaded Soviet Russia in 1919 by organising shipping and rail workers to refuse to transport weapons and supplies to the aggressor.

Fimmen was a very left-wing leader who came to power as part of the post-war wave of radicalism that swept the world. As the 1920s rolled on, this workers' radicalism weakened, and IFTU leaders turned their attention away from workers' direct action, and towards lobbying and influencing the international bodies established at the end of World War I. Fimmen was now an outsider.

Fimmen left his role in IFTU in 1923, after being harshly criticized for inviting representatives of Russian transport workers to an ITF conference. He continued to worry about the threat of nationalism, and proposed that IFTU should be reorganised. He reckoned that the ITS's should each elect delegates for IFTU conferences and leadership positions, rather than the national federations. Few agreed with him.

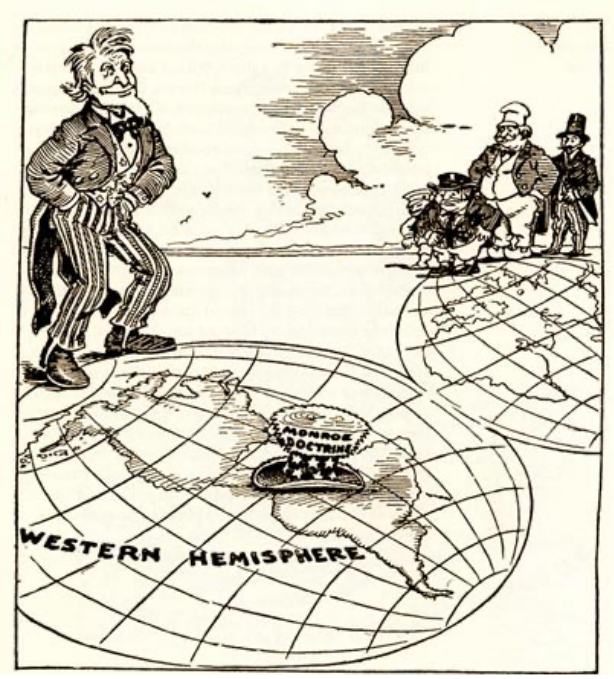
The IFTU rules said that the largest national federation in each country should send delegates- as this was generally the socialist union confederation, this helped the IFTU keep its socialist character. The

ITS's were independent and in some cases contained unions belonging to rival Internationals. If the organisation was based on ITS delegates, then the Red, Christian, and Syndicalist Unions might have been able to get access to the IFTU. IFTU leaders wanted the ITS's to be controlled by their organisation, rather than the leadership being elected by ITS delegates. The ITS's wanted to keep their autonomy, and declined proposals to become junior partners in the labour international.

In 1928, British TUC leader Walter Citrine became president of the IFTU. Citrine believed that trade unions were better off if they avoided direct conflicts with governments and business owners. He wanted more cooperation, which would get them recognition in the workplace and in the law, and allow for more-effective lobbying. He applied these ideas to the IFTU, expanding the research departments and increasing the efforts to lobby the League of Nations and the ILO on political questions. The IFTU's international work was becoming increasingly reliant on the good will of governments to cooperate with them.

The view from the Americas

The AFL pulled away from the European socialist-influenced unions after WWI, but they needed to organise internationally. As US businesses were expanding overseas, particularly in Latin America, Gompers wanted international alliances as part of a strategy to keep jobs in the US. He also wanted to prevent European political ideas (particularly communism) from gaining popularity in the Americas.



Many Latin American Trade Unionists saw the PAFL as another attempt by the USA to dominate the entire continent- this time by controlling their trade unions.

The US government supported Gompers' goals, and helped fund the AFL to set up a regional organisation called the Pan American Federation of Labor (PAFL) in 1918. Gompers proudly called PAFL a key part of the 'Monroe Doctrine' – the USA's policy of treating Latin America as its own informal empire.

The AFL and Mexican Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM) were the only two major players involved. A few small Caribbean trade union centres were also in there, but in practice these were mostly weak and had little sway either at home or in the regional group. The larger trade union centres on the continent saw PAFL as an attempt at US control of their movements, and resented it.

Despite this dislike of the PAFL, no regional rival managed to dislodge it. In 1929 the RILU-affiliated unions in the region established the Confederación Sindical Latinoamericana (CSL). Their representatives came from a much wider range of countries, with Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela all represented in the new organisation. However, the unions represented tended to be

very small Communist-led splits from the larger union centres. It took them four years before they even hosted their first continental congress

The syndicalist-leaning unions also set up a regional international organisation in 1929 called the Asociación Continental Americana de Trabajadores. They immediately denounced their competition. They called PAFL an *"agency of the US administration"* and said that the CSL's founding congress was a *"parody of a conference"* to create a group which had *"no followers other than members of the communist parties".*

But ACAT also faced difficulties. They were headquartered in Argentina, where a military dictatorship set up in September 1930 forced the organisation's leaders to flee. It took them two years to even begin publishing their newspaper again.

It would take until the late 1930s, and vastly different political circumstances, for truly international organisations to connect Europe and the Americas.

The Labour and Socialist International

In the wake of World War I, all socialists were eager to rebuild the political international as well as the trade union international, but getting there was not straightforward.

There were briefly two socialist internationals contending with each other. One, founded in Berne, Switzerland, in 1919, was led by the more right-wing elements of the socialist movement, including the parties which had supported their respective states during the war. The other, founded in Vienna and headed by the Austrian Friedrich Adler, represented parties and sections of parties which had been opposed to the war, and wanted to find unity with the communists.

In 1922, both these organisations and the Comintern sent representatives to Berlin to discuss the possibility of fusing their internationals. Debates raged over how the communists had treated non-Bolshevik socialists, their invasion of independent socialist-run Georgia, and the lack of democracy within the young Soviet state. Comintern delegates said that even raising these issues was an attempt to sabotage the meeting, and walked out.

While many anti-war socialists sympathised with the communists and had even considered affiliating to the Comintern, their anti-democratic regime and attempts to block unity within the international workers' movement lost them much of this support. The Vienna grouping realised that there was no possible unity with the Communists, and instead worked (somewhat reluctantly) with the Berne group.

They held their own unity conference in Hamburg in May 1923, with 620 delegates representing 41 parties from 30 countries attending. They merged to form the **Labour and Socialist International**. While Adler and the Austrian socialists wanted a centralised International which could make decisions that its member parties would be bound by, the British and German delegates were successful in pushing for a different model. The new International was a federation, which provided opportunities to discuss and coordinate across borders, but would not force positions on unwilling constituents.

The Road to Stalinism

The communists had defeated rival socialist parties and anarchist organisations by the early 1920s, but the unions still had the potential to give Soviet workers an independent voice. During the civil war, unions played an important role - they had a say in how factories and industries were managed, in the wages that were set, in conditions of work, and in how those who didn't turn up or underperformed should be treated.

However, many Communists wanted to take power from the unions, saying that they should be turned into an arm of the state, and that they should take orders from the Communist Party. Leon Trotsky wanted to see workers organised into military-style units, with military-style discipline.

A faction grew up which was called The Workers' Opposition. Many of their leaders had been involved in the trade union movement, such as Alexander Shliapnikov and Sergei Medvedev. They wanted trade unions to have more power and said that they should run the Soviet economy without Party control over them.

A group around Lenin sought a middle ground- of trying to gradually convince the trade unions to become a part of the state without forcing the decision, and that they should have a role in planning production so they could train workers how to manage the economy and society.

Each group organised a faction to try and get their members elected to important positions and make sure their view won out. Arguments raged throughout 1920 and became very public in 1921 at the Communists' 10th party conference. Lenin's views won out and the unions were in theory independent.

This argument got so heated that the party decided to ban members from organising factions in the future. The leadership body of the Central Committee was given the power to expel people who were accused of organising a faction. This gave the leadership a very easy way to remove rivals which Stalin would come to use very effectively.

After Lenin had died in 1924, a power struggle between different groups within the Communist Party ended with Joseph Stalin gaining power. His faction won total and unchallenged control of the party, the State, the International and all other institutions inherited from the October Revolution. They achieved this by the early 1930s by means of terror: mass murder, mass deportations to forced labour camps, assassinations of opponents in many countries, the expulsion and extermination of the historic leadership of the Bolsheviks and their supporters. Krupskaya, Lenin's widow, is said to have remarked: "(Lenin) died in time. Had he lived, Stalin would have killed him too."

In the Soviet Union, this meant a series of purges which aimed to crush any dissidents and rivals. Members of the trade unions, rival revolutionary groups, dissident communists, and ordinary workers soon found themselves arrested, tortured, imprisoned within the labour camps and, in many cases, shot. Many well-known Communist leaders and old revolutionaries were condemned to death in a series of show trials held in Moscow between 1936 and 1938. The accused gave absurd 'confessions' of fantastical crimes, after having been tortured in the prisons of the secret police. Unfortunately, gullible journalists accepted this as evidence of their guilt.

At least 700,000 died in the purges. Even those whose loyalty to the Soviet State could not be doubted weren't safe. Rose Cohen, a British-born communist ended up getting caught in the purges while working in Moscow. Harry Pollitt, a leading British Communist and an old friend of Rose's, pleaded privately with the Russians to release her but never joined the public campaigns for her repatriation.

Many leaders of the German Communists who fled Hitler's Germany to the (presumed) safety of Moscow were killed or imprisoned in labour camps between 1937 and 1941- some were even handed back to the Nazis to be killed. This included veterans of the attempted 1919 revolution and founding party members.

Stalinism also killed off any remaining independence in Russia's trade unions. They were transformed into state-controlled bodies throughout the 1920s. They were no longer meant to improve workers' conditions, but instead organise workers and boost production. People who argued against this take-over of the unions were accused of sabotaging Soviet industry to benefit the capitalists.

Through the 1920s the Communist Party took almost every leadership position within the unions, and leaders followed Communist Party orders rather than representing the workers.

In 1928, as Stalin sought to rapidly build up industry in the Soviet Union, the final elements of union independence were squeezed out. Lazar Kaganovich, who was fiercely loyal to Stalin, and would play an important role in the purges, was placed on the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions' leadership to ensure complete loyalty.

While the policy of union independence was never officially overturned by Stalin (for fear of appearing un-Leninist), in practice it ceased to exist.

Kapiton Klepikov

The story of a Russian worker, Kapiton Klepikov, shows how Stalinism worked in practice. Klepikov was a weaver at the Rodniki Mill, and had organised illegal strikes under the Tsar's regime. He was respected on the shop floor for his courage and abilities, as well as his subversive poems. He supported the Bolsheviks but never joined their party.

After the Russian Revolution, the crackdown on anarchists and non-Bolshevik socialists soured his view of Lenin's party- he felt that they had become corrupt and betrayed their own ideals. In 1924 he got elected onto his factory's management committee after making anti-communist speeches, and said he would always stick up for the mill workers of Rodniki.

In 1928, he learned that the weavers of Rodniki were paid less than in other mills, and proposed a strike. The union, controlled by Communist Party bosses, said that they should focus on increasing production rather than wages. Rodniki wrote a series of poems attacking the communist-controlled unions for not standing up for their members and read them out at the factory. The communists launched a campaign in the press to discredit him (although when they tried this in the mill, his workmates beat them up), and got him kicked off the management committee. The local trade union leaders had him expelled from the branch.

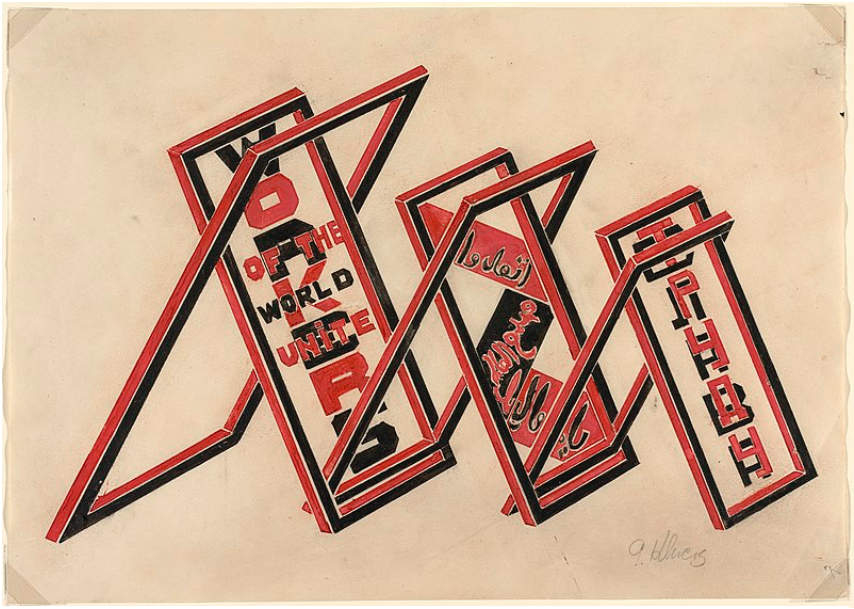
Two years later, Klepikov organised a strike to protest management's attempts to speed up production, for which he was sacked. After publicly protesting this decision he was arrested by the secret police. During his interrogation he stood by his actions and even mocked Stalin. He was sent to a labour camp, and died 3 years later. A militant worker and labour organiser, part of a group who had been the backbone of the revolution, he was eventually killed for continuing the type of activism that had brought the Bolsheviks to power.

There were thousands of men and women like Klepikov across Russia. Their attempts to organise workers through the trade unions and factory committees were prevented by violence and backroom politics. The state-controlled unions worked with the secret police to stop any independent trade unionism developing.

Mikhail Tomsky, who had been president of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions from September 1922 to May 1929, and had objected to the takeover of the unions, was attacked in the purges. He was demoted, slandered, and side-lined. He committed suicide on August 22, 1936, choosing to die at his own hands rather than Stalin's. He was put on trial after his death by suicide, and found guilty of conspiracy.

Soon, many workers came to resent these unions, and the socialist ideas that they claimed to represent. During the Soviet Union's early years there had been enthusiasm among Russian workers about the new labour organisations. But as it became clear that they would be state-controlled, enthusiasm dropped and workers were soon coerced into being a part of them.

The Stalinist takeover spread from the Russian Party to its sister organisations internationally. The Comintern and the RILU were dominated by the Russian Party, which would dictate tactics and slogans based on their needs of the Soviet state and its leaders. They would approve and arrange the manifestos that Communists published locally, and they would order the removal of leaders who had failed to follow their line. They were not always successful at this, and in practice some national Communist Parties and activists were far more independent than Stalin and his supporters wanted.



Stalin's purges led to the deaths of many loyal communists, alongside socialists, anarchists, trade unionists, and other dissidents. Gustav Klucis was a Latvian artist who designed this poster board as a way to spread revolutionary ideas in the young Soviet state. A loyal member of the Party, he was killed during a purge of Latvian workers and peasants in 1937-8.

There were many critics of Stalin's power grab internationally, who organised an **International Left Opposition** around Leon Trotsky, and accused him of betraying the revolution**.** Stalin, not wanting to seem like a traitor to the cause, decided that the Comintern and RILU needed to look more radical. To do this, he adopted a view that had first been argued by the German communists- that capitalism was near collapse, and during this time of crisis the socialists were actually the main enemies of the workers' movement. It was they who were preventing workers from building a communist society by drawing them away from the communist parties. From 1927, moderate socialists were compared to fascists in communist newspapers and speeches. Communists were encouraged by Moscow to cause splits in trade unions, to found pure 'red' unions, and to refuse to work alongside the socialists. In some countries this had little impact, as many socialists had begun to boycott communists as well. This division proved to be a disaster for the entire labour movement.

Depression and New Deals

The 1930s saw major hardship for workers around the world. In 1929, a banking crisis turned into a massive economic crisis which saw many companies try to attack workers' conditions and pay, or else lay them off, in an attempt to remain profitable. Countries which relied on agricultural exports (including many in the colonised world) saw the prices of their exports collapse, driving peasants into dire poverty.

In the US and Germany, around 1/3 of all workers were unemployed. As workers and peasants became desperate, they often became more radical. Their situation was sometimes worsened by governments cutting public spending to save money. However, to prevent the potential political threat that these workers posed, some governments decided to try and roll out more programmes to support workers and the poor, and give workers' organisations more of a say.

This kind of state intervention was not new. The leading conservative and nationalist German politician of the late 1800s, Otto Von Bismarck, introduced social insurance for sickness, injury, and disability, as well pensions in the 1880s. He wanted to prevent the rise of socialist ideas among workers by encouraging them to feel grateful to the state. The amount workers got reflected their income, it didn't cover everyone, and it was paid for mainly by contributions from workers themselves. It was an attempt to give some concessions while still controlling the overall political system. In other countries like Denmark, more progressive welfare policies had been created. In 1891 Denmark's workers got a national pension agreement, which covered all workers and was financed by taxes, not direct workers' contributions.

During the 1930s, some reforms went further- they not only provided workers some financial support, but enabled them to have more of a say. In the US, national laws were put in place which allowed for collective bargaining and created a legal system for unions to be recognised as negotiating partners through workplace elections. While there have since been attacks on this structure and unions' right to recruit and take action, it remains the basis of the American industrial relations system. In the Philippines, the American colonial governor instituted social security and legalised trade union activity, enabling the movement to emerge from the underground.

These types of reforms were not universal. In Latin America nine coups occurred between 1930 and 1932. In Japan, democratic gains were rolled back and by 1932 the country was back under dictatorial rule. Within much of the colonial world, the radicalism bred through poverty was often met with extreme violence, spurring many to join the growing anti-colonial nationalist movements.

As governments sought to keep out economic competition from other states, rivalries between major powers grew, and many sought to take control over less powerful neighbours and colonies. War and authoritarianism were on the rise at the same time that some labour movements were gaining a greater voice and more guarantees. In some places, the labour movement's growing strength convinced wealthy elites that it was time to crack down on them, rather than give way to them. It was a decade that saw conflict and violence increase dramatically, with important consequences for the world's labour movement.

Fascism

The workers' uprisings which marked the end of World War I did not just provoke reforms. In this fiery atmosphere, a new brand of conservative politics was born. It had different names in different countries, but most of us know it as 'fascism'.

Fascists were (and still are) determined to block any socialist, labour, communist, or anarchist group from gaining power. Unlike traditional conservatives, they organised violent street movements to do this, rather than relying on the state or the police. They often got money and support from big businessmen and large companies when it seemed like the workers' movement was about to make progress.

During this time of instability, fascism started to spread across Europe. Mussolini took power in Italy in 1922, and fascist and pro-fascist movements seized control of Portugal, Germany, Austria, Spain, and Latvia in the following 15 years.

Fascism had many different varieties, and in some countries different 'brands' of fascists fought one another. Even so, they all shared similar traits. They claimed that their nation was the best in the world, and said that in each nation there should be just one ethnic group and one set of values. They said this unity was being ruined by labour activists, migrants, feminists, democrats, LGBT people, and outsiders.

They built paramilitary groups to control the streets and attack their enemies' meetings and events. Once in power, they would fuse their party with the state and use their thugs, alongside the army, police, and courts to smash independent trade unions, rival political parties, and the clubs and associations of the workers' movement.

Fascists didn't rely on elections, but they still needed supporters to build their violent movements. They played on peoples' fears and prejudices to gain popularity, directing hatred towards religious and racial minorities, as well as foreigners. They hated LGBT people and the disabled, and wanted women to be housewives and mothers, nothing more.

They often used anti-Semitic ideas as a crude type of anti-capitalism- they told poor people that the problems of capitalism were in fact problems caused a conspiracy of rich Jews. Ironically, Jews were blamed both for the rise of the workers' movement and for international capitalism at the same time- this meant anti-Semitic ideas could be used to appeal to those in poverty, and the middle- and upper-classes who feared that the left might take their wealth away. This brand of politics became more appealing after the economic crisis of 1929.

As the Nazis were on the rise in Germany, both the communists and socialists failed to unite in face of the serious threat Hitler and his party posed. The socialists declared that anyone who opposed the republic- whether left-wing or right-wing- were just as bad as each other. They refused to work with the communists against the Nazis and ended up in unpopular coalition governments with capitalist parties, which lost them support among German workers. The communists did similarly, still claiming that the socialists were 'social fascists', and refusing any opportunity to work with other sections of the workers movement.

Their refusal to work together split the workers' vote, divided attempts to build anti-fascist militias, and left the workers' movement disunited at the exact moment when cooperation was needed. The communists underestimated the threat from Hitler- they suspected that a Nazi regime couldn't last

more than a few weeks without being overthrown, which would lead to a workers' revolution- *"After Hitler- us!"* became a popular catchphrase among KPD members.

After Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in January 1933, he moved against his rivals almost immediately. Communists, Jews, and SPD members would be the first to be imprisoned in concentration camps at Dachau and Oranienburg in March 1933. The leaders of the German socialist trade union federation, the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund* (ADGB) hoped he could be 'tamed' by the Conservatives who had put him in power and were still in coalition government with his Nazis (having dropped the socialists). They hoped that by keeping a low profile and potentially merging with the Christian and Liberal trade unions, that they could remain legal and avoid the fate that the Italian unions suffered under Mussolini.

They were soon proved wrong. The Nazis declared May 1st a national holiday dedicated to German labourers. Socialists and socialist trade unions took part in demonstrations in major cities, and hoped that this was a sign that they would be allowed to continue their existence. But the day after May Day, their offices were occupied, their funds seized, and their organisations declared illegal. Their leaders were arrested and were also sent to the camps. Every workers' group- whether Christian, liberal, socialist, Communist, or syndicalist, suffered the same fate in due course.

The Nazis created a state-controlled labour organisation called the *Deutsche Arbeitsfront* (German Labour Front or **DAF**), which all workers and employers were forced to join. The DAF did not permit strikes- it encouraged workers and bosses to think of themselves as a family who should be loyal to each other. Wages stagnated, but the DAF used funds stolen from the unions and workers' parties to fund cheap holidays, workplace sports halls and fields, and festivals. It was a tool to police workers and deliver Nazi propaganda, rather than a real union.

On May 2nd, 1933, Hitler's stormtroopers occupied and shut down the offices of the socialist German trade union federation, ending their hopes that his Conservative allies would prevent an Italian-style violent crackdown on the labour movement.

The IFTU and ITS's had been told by the ADGB leaders not to protest the rise of the Nazis- they hoped that keeping quiet might save their organisations. After the total destruction of their German wing, the IFTU could remain silent no longer.

When the Nazis sent a DAF representative, Robert Ley, to the 1933 ILO conference, the workers' delegates (all IFTU members) challenged his right to represent the German workers, stating that jailers could not represent prisoners. They were supported by a number of government delegates- not due to a principled anti-fascist stance, but because Ley got blind drunk on his first night in Geneva and insulted the Latin American representatives in front of the press. The Nazis were humiliated on an international stage and stormed out of the conference.

The destruction of the German movement had a huge psychological impact on labour activists across the world. It was one of the largest, best-organised, and most-powerful sections of the movement, and it had gone overnight. It caused many to rethink their politics.

Stalin grew worried that Hitler would turn his attention eastwards and invade Russia. He wanted a military defence pact with the capitalist powers of Northern and Western Europe, France and Britain in particular, to stop this. He tried to smooth things over with them, and make the international communist movement seem less threatening to capitalist interests- the Comintern reduced support for workers organising within the colonies, and the RILU was wound up in 1937.

The USSR soon joined the League of Nations and the ILO. What's more, Communists were instructed to form 'Popular Fronts' – anti-fascist alliances- with liberal capitalists and other socialists, and encouraged to merge their unions into social-democratic ones, or dissolve them altogether. The ITF began organising underground anti-fascist trade unionist groups in Germany. Their underground networks distributed anti-fascist publications, prepared to commit sabotage, and were remarkably successful in resisting detection by the Gestapo and secret police. Fimmen was so involved in the project he even smuggled himself into Germany on several occasions. Although on the ground many of the networks contained socialists and communists, the ITF had little to do with international communist and IFTU efforts to coordinate resistance. When they did attempt to work with the IFTU, they were treated as though they should just follow orders and contribute money.

The AFL decided to re-join the IFTU in 1937. The spread of fascism and growing threat of war had prompted Franklin Roosevelt, the American president, to create closer ties with the European states. He felt that the American labour movement should get involved with those in Europe to help establish better relations. The AFL was worried that its more-radical rival, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), would get there first, and win the President's approval, and so made its move.

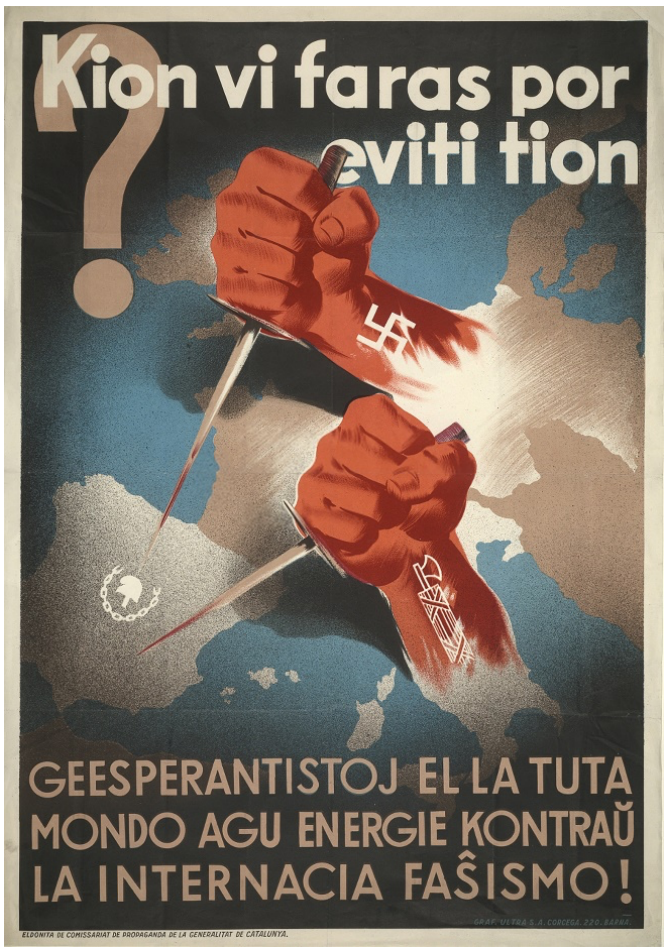
The IFTU was happy to have the AFL join- the loss of so many national labour movements to fascism had resulted in a huge loss of members and funds. Citrine was desperate to expand the organisation in the Americas, Pacific, and colonial world to regain strength, numbers, and fees.

The rise of 'Popular Fronts' helped Latin American labour organisations forge connections across the continent and even across borders. In 1936, the ILO held a meeting in Santiago, Chile- its first in the Americas. The Marxist Mexican labour leader Vicente Lombardo Toledano sent out an appeal for unity in the wake of the congress, with both communist and socialist unions responding positively.

In 1938 the Confederación de los Trabajadores de América Latina (CTAL) was established at a conference in Mexico, organised by Toledano's Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM). Unions from Brazil were not invited, as the dictatorial regime of Getúlio Vargas had turned them into state-run fake bodies. In those countries with no singular national centre, such as Cuba, organisers encouraged smaller organisations to send shared delegates with the aim of encouraging unity. At its founding congress, constituent members who had not yet joined IFTU were encouraged to do so.

Although this represented a big step in the integration of European and Latin American labour movements, the links ultimately remained weak, giving US-based groups more sway on the continent.

Labour and the Spanish Civil War



Labour activists from around the world came to Spain to support the revolution and fight fascism. This poster calls for support from people who speak Esperanto- an invented language that many labour activists hoped would one day be spoken by everyone in the world, promoting unity and peace.

In 1936, the Popular Front was elected in Spain- a coalition of socialists, communists, and other leftists, with support from both anarchist and socialist trade union movements. This victory at the polls was built on the back of a revolutionary movement of workers and peasants, who wanted to end Spain's extreme inequality and poverty.

The Spanish elites were terrified, and launched a coup under the leadership of General Francisco Franco with the support of Spain's fascist movement. It soon developed into a bloody civil war between the workers' movement and the far-right. The British government got other European countries, including the left-wing French Popular Front government, to sign up to a 'non-interference' policy, but Hitler and Mussolini flooded the country with troops, arms, and airplanes to crush the workers' government.

The labour movement was determined not to let another country fall to fascism. The Labour and Socialist International and IFTU worked together to get food, clothes, and medicines to the Spanish people, and even ran field hospitals. But it became clear that the Spanish people needed military support as well, and British trade unionists were soon pressuring the British government to end its non-interference policy.

With no government support for the Popular Front forthcoming, workers took matters into their own hands. At least 40,000 international volunteers joined the forces to defend the Spanish Republic from a fascist takeover. They were mainly organised by the Comintern, but volunteers came from all parts of the movement- trade unionists, members of socialist and communist parties, anarchists and syndicalists, co-operative members, and left-wing intellectuals. Despite the non-intervention policy of the French government, over 9000 French workers and left-wing activists, around half of them Communists, went to fight against fascism in Spain. There were contingents of 3000 workers from Italy, between 2 and 3000 from the USA, and over 1000 from Cuba. It was a truly heroic display of workers' internationalism.

Disagreements developed amongst the anti-fascists. Anarchists and radical socialists both wanted to immediately transform society and did so where they were strong, for example in Catalonia. Workers took over their businesses and turned them into cooperatives, and peasants occupied farms and got rid of their landlords. The communists opposed this. They said that a revolution in Republican Spain would prevent France and Britain joining an international anti-Nazi alliance with the USSR, but their

overriding consideration was to prevent revolutionary developments led by their rivals on the left which they would be unable to control.

When France, Britain and other democratic countries declared they wouldn't get involved in the Spanish Civil War, the USSR remained the only government (with the exception of Mexico which sent over $2 million in aid and a number of rifles) providing military support to the Republic and used this support to blackmail the Spanish government into repressing the revolutionary Left. The repression was conducted under the supervision and control of officials of the Russian political police. It hit the anarchists, syndicalists, and the independent Marxist party called the *Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista* (Workers' Party of Marxist Unification, or **POUM**). The POUM were accused of being spies for the fascists, and their leader Andrés Nin was arrested, tortured, and 'disappeared' on communist orders. The organisation was violently attacked by the Spanish communists and their allies, forcing their members into hiding and exile. Stalin's intervention in the Spanish Civil War demonstrated that the only unity the Communist Parties would accept was one where they called the shots.

Despite the support received from the international labour movement, the Spanish Republic fell to the fascists in 1939. The political divisions amongst the anti-fascists, as well as the huge amounts of arms being sent in by Hitler and Mussolini, allowed Franco to establish a new fascist regime in Europe.

Stalin (aware that Hitler and Mussolini were now looking for a new region to expand into and hoping to delay an attack on the USSR) signed a peace treaty with the Nazi regime in August 1939. This peace treaty divided Eastern Europe into areas that the Nazis would control and those that the Soviets would control. Hitler invaded western Poland just one week later, and the Soviets occupied the east of the country shortly after.

Unions at War

World War II had a devastating impact on the international labour movement. As Nazi Germany's armies spread over and occupied huge parts of the European continent, leading trade unionists and socialists fled to London, while many communist leaders went to Moscow. The unions of occupied countries were either broken apart or absorbed into Nazi-controlled Labour Fronts. The IFTU almost collapsed while the ITS's were severely weakened.

Remembering the strikes, mutinies, and revolutions that had accompanied the previous war, the British government decided it was important to bring the labour movement into the war effort. Churchill's five-man war cabinet contained two Labour MP's. The government agreed to a series of policies proposed by the labour movement in exchange for wartime cooperation. Both the Tories and Labour agreed and announced that after the war there would be a huge expansion of public healthcare, housing, and welfare, and national insurance. The government agreed to only do business with companies hiring unionised labour, helping the number of TUC-affiliated members grow from 4.5 to 7.5 million. In return they agreed to a law which made strikes, and even calling for them, illegal during the war.

At first, the communists took no part in these deals and campaigned against the war, saying it was a fight between two sets of imperialist states. The Stalin-Hitler Pact had allowed the USSR to invade Eastern Poland and Finland, and occupy Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia, and while many communists were unhappy about not joining the fight against fascism, few publicly criticized Stalin's leadership. When the Nazis invaded the USSR in 1941, the parties quickly pronounced that it was now a 'People's

War' for democracy. Their members joined and launched partisan movements in Nazi-occupied Europe, while party members in Britain agreed to no-strike agreements and helped manage factories to boost production.

Trade unions loomed large in Allied governments' plans to win the war and undermine Nazi rule in Europe. Both MI6 and the OSS (the forerunner of the modern CIA) established connections with the refugee trade unionists based in London, and worked together to establish activist networks in those areas occupied by the Nazis. The OSS set up a special labour department which created front organisations that looked independent but relied on money and directions from the intelligence services. At first the underground networks of trade unionists gathered information about infrastructure, transport, workers' morale, and so on, which helped the Allies work out what their military targets and strategies should be. But from 1943 they took an even larger role, and were encouraged to engage in active sabotage and military resistance to undermine the Nazis.

Trade unionists played big roles not only in government intelligence and wartime production, but also diplomacy. As the USSR and USA joined the UK in the Allied coalition, each government tried to encourage connections between their labour movements.

With the IFTU now barely existing, and Soviet prestige running high due to the Red Army's victories against the Germans, the TUC reached out to the Russians to start a trade union coordinating body. They also asked both major American national centres, the AFL and the CIO. The AFL refused to work with the Russians, and instead proposed a separate Anglo-American body, with the TUC acting as a go-between between the Russians and Americans. The TUC agreed, and the AFL managed to squeeze the CIO out of the body (to the annoyance of Roosevelt, Churchill, and the TUC).

In 1943, The TUC decided that there would have to be a post-war replacement for IFTU which could draw in the Communist unions as well. They sent out invitations to every national centre they could contact, and where more than one existed, they broke with IFTU traditions and invited all to join. The AFL were irate- this meant that they were being asked to work with red unions, Communist state-controlled unions, and their rivals in the CIO. They immediately refused, and instead established a group called the Free Trade Union Committee to direct their own overseas work. It worked very closely with the OSS and was headed by Jay Lovestone, a former founder and leader of the Communist Party.

When World War II ended, the trade unions in the Allied countries had a closer relationship with the state than ever before. They had played a huge role in wartime intelligence, managing the economy, and international diplomacy. While this made them seem strong, it also meant that they had become more dependent. The relationship between unions' international departments and their respective foreign ministries would continue for decades.

The Lost Generations

Fascism had wiped out the labour movement in most of Europe: first in Italy and Portugal, then in Germany and Austria, then in Spain then, as the German armies occupied nearly all of the continent, everywhere except in Britain and the few remaining neutral or unoccupied countries. The Jewish Labour Bund, strongest in Poland, was destroyed along with the population that supported it. Stalinism had, for its part, exterminated hundreds of thousands of socialists, anarchists, and communists in Russia itself, later in the occupied countries of Eastern and Central Europe.

Nobody has established the exact numbers, but in the years between the end of the First and Second World War, it can be safely said that two generations of political activists and leaders disappeared.

It is easy to look at unions and workers' parties as things that have always been there and will always be there. But they are the products of the ideas, efforts, and cooperation of millions of working-people. The loss of such huge numbers of fighters in this period, along with their experience, their knowledge, their networks, and their ability to make change, had a huge impact on the march towards equality and social justice. It also ensured that British, American, and Soviet figures would be some of the most powerful influences in the post-war labour movements around the world.

The Cold War

After the end of the war, there was hope amongst many that the war-time alliance could be the basis for a new trade union international, drawing together the Communists, socialists, Christians, and the elusive Americans. A preparatory conference was held in London in February 1945, which grew from the TUC's invitations two years before.. The Christian unions did not take part, choosing to re-establish their own international instead, which came to be known as the **World Confederation of Labour** (WCL). The AFL felt betrayed by the British for choosing to work with the Communist unions, and also turned down the invitation.

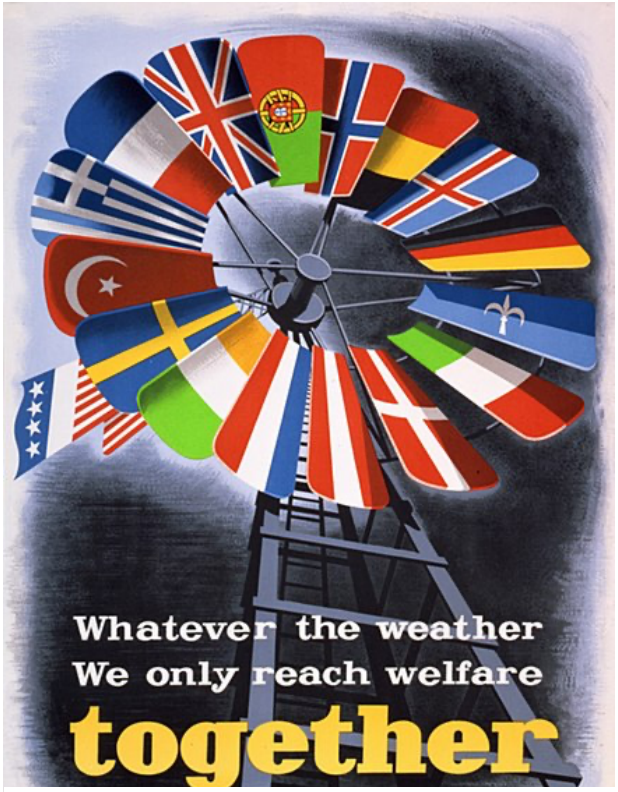
In October 1945, a founding congress established the **World Federation of Trade Unions** (WFTU), which brought the communists and socialists back into an international organisation for the first time since their 1919 split. However, this was not a smooth journey. The founding conference saw big arguments over whether the WFTU should take a stance against colonialism. The British and Dutch unions, determined not to embarrass their governments or create tensions within their empires, argued against it. The communists saw it as an opportunity to increase their influence in the colonized world and managed to get opposition to empire included in the founding documents.

Despite the disagreements, everyone involved tried to push ahead with building their new international. They tried to build a strong leadership, and make sure they were well represented in the United Nations. They also sent delegates to countries where trade unionism was either under attack (such as Iran and Spain) or being rebuilt (such as Germany and Japan, where they had little impact). These visits created more tension- the Soviet members of the delegations tried to give WFTU backing only to explicitly pro-Soviet unions, causing further arguments. After visiting Japan, the delegates couldn't even agree on the content of a joint report.

Tensions were never far away. Communist union leaders took responsibility for the WFTU publications, and used them to criticize the capitalist nations, while showering the USSR and the new 'People's Democracies' of Eastern Europe with nothing but praise.

There was also a growing divide with the ITS's. The communist unions wanted them to be under WFTU control, while the ITS leaders were determined to remain independent. Encouraged by the AFL, the leaders of the ITS's decided not to affiliate to the new labour international.

The goodwill established in the war between non-communist and communist wings of the labour movement was falling apart not just because of events within the WFTU. Between 1945 and 1947 the Soviet-occupied countries of Eastern Europe saw crackdowns on the non-Communist trade unions and political parties. They had originally been set up as 'People's Democracies' with power shared between different parties. But the Russians placed loyal communists in control of the police bodies and trade unions. Using these positions, they claimed that they had discovered plots being organised by their political rivals, and then used mass strikes to bring down the governments and put the communists in charge. Other political parties were criminalized and their leaders arrested. It was clear that the communists were determined to be in charge, not work alongside others.



The Marshall Plan was aimed at creating American-dominated markets in Europe, and winning European workers away from communist ideas. US unions were involved in selling the scheme, but soon found they had little influence in how funds would be administered and grew disillusioned with telling European unions to be compliant with business interests.

The Marshall Plan proved to be the breaking point. It was a huge aid program through which the US would give money to European governments. It was designed to rebuild European infrastructure that had been destroyed in the war, gain sympathy for the US, and encourage purchases of American goods. American planners hoped that greater coordination and integration amongst the European states would provide a stable market for American exports, and help to economically bind them to the US. Stalin was worried that the plan would be used to break the Eastern European countries away from his control, and establish American dominance instead.

The leaders of the USSR told Communist Parties and their unions that they should do all they could to try and disrupt the scheme. The non-communist unions generally thought it was a good idea, and wanted to organise an international conference to make plans for how European trade unions could influence how the money was spent. However, Louis Saillant, the pro-communist General Secretary of the WFTU, wrote a manifesto which committed the WFTU to an anti-Marshall Plan position, and blocked the WFTU from discussing the issue.

The underlying fundamental tensions between the Soviet-dominated unions and the democratic socialist and conservative unions came to a head in 1949, when the TUC and others broke away from the WFTU, joined with the AFL, and created the **International Confederation of Free Trade Unions** (ICFTU).

The ICFTU was founded as an anti-communist coalition. The power of the AFL and TUC meant that it was not aligned with socialist traditions as the IFTU had been. This anti-communism limited its human and workers' rights agenda as state-controlled anti-communist unions from right-wing regimes were allowed to join, such as the Taiwan-based, state-controlled, Chinese Federation of Labour or the

Federation of Korean Trade Unions, which was controlled by the state and the employers. The main achievement of the ICFTU was to become a truly worldwide organisation, when the previous international labour organisations had been essentially European.

While the split into two internationals might seem like the result of the Cold War, it sprang from a much deeper divide. The communists had shown in Eastern Europe that they weren't willing to work with other socialists unless they were in control. The behaviour of red unions and Communist Parties within the WFTU showed that they were still more concerned with propping up the Soviet regime than anything else. The only thing which held the WFTU together was the memory of the common fight against fascism. With this gone, a split was just a matter of time.