

Chapter 3: Partner or Predator? Unions and the State (1945-1989)

State Incorporation and the Rise of the Welfare State

At the end of World War II, the once-powerful states of Europe were in crisis. Major cities and industries had been devastated by artillery and aerial bombings. Both former Allied and Axis powers had no money, and had to turn to the United States for funds to rebuild and recover.

What's more, in many countries the political systems had been destroyed by fascist takeover and/or Nazi occupations. Not only did new governments need to be created, but new systems for electing them had to be set up, along with both old and new political parties. In countries where the Nazis and their friends had taken power, trade unions had been crushed or combined into a 'labour front' like in Germany, and would have to be rebuilt or transformed.

There was a wave of unrest that was spreading across the globe. In the USA, over 5 million workers went on strike in the year after the war ended. The communists were also on the rise once again. The Red Army was well-respected by many workers for beating Hitler's armies, and was now occupying Eastern Europe. Communist partisan groups had gained prestige for their anti-fascist efforts, and major communist movements in Greece, Italy, and France seemed to be on the verge of gaining power.

In the colonies- from French Indo-China and the Dutch East Indies to British India and Palestine, nationalist movements were demanding an end to empire. The British and American governments feared that the workers' revolts, Soviet advances, and anti-colonial uprisings could join forces to overthrow them.

At the end of World War I, when governments across Europe feared the spread of revolution, they set up the ILO and extended democracy to try and pacify workers. After World War II, the Allied victors made even more reforms to prevent a new revolutionary wave from spreading further. It was decided to roll out public welfare on a scale not seen before, and bring workers' representatives from trade unions into political and welfare systems.

During the war, American President Roosevelt and Winston Churchill had made statements promising an end to unemployment and poverty after the war. The British government had explicitly promised to fund education, healthcare, and sick pay through taxes. Though both were gone by 1945 (Roosevelt died and Churchill was voted out immediately), their successors knew they knew they



The CIO, the more-radical of the American union federations, grew in strength during WW2 as the government encouraged employers to recognise unions in return for unions' refusal to strike during wartime. After the war they were considered a threat and faced state repression after leading a major strike wave.

needed workers' support to make progress on fulfilling these promises. To build welfare states and rebuild popular political systems, the unions would have to be involved in the process.

Initially, the American government wanted to destroy German industry so it could never rise to be a threat again. However, given the strength of the Soviets and the spirit of revolt, they decided to reindustrialise and rebuild their former foe. Both the Brits and Americans promoted the redevelopment of independent trade unionism in Germany after World War II to accompany this process of rebuilding. The TUC and AFL worked with their governments, and gave funds, support, and advice to the re-founded German unions, aiming to prevent the communists from taking control of the German labour movement. The ITS's, annoyed by the attempts of the WFTU to take them over, also provided financial support for the free German unions with donations from their Western European and, in particular, Nordic members.

Within the new West German state, workers regained rights won during the pre-Nazi era, including the right to elect a 'works council', which would be funded by the company, have an office, and would be consulted on any potential changes in how the company was run. In almost every industry the *Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund* (**DGB**- the new German equivalent of the TUC) took part in sectoral collective bargaining arrangements with new employers' associations. Between 1960 and 1990, some 85% of German workers were covered by collective bargaining agreements.

These kinds of institutionalised negotiations did not just occur in Germany. All across Europe, governments set up tripartite bodies (similar in structure to the ILO) which gave trade unions and employers an official role in policy-making.

In Belgium, unemployment benefits were jointly paid for by the unions, employers, and the state, and handed out to people mainly through the unions. In France, during the late 1940s and 1950s laws were introduced which created works councils, a minimum wage, and formal collective bargaining procedures.

In Britain, the war had seen major changes in the way the economy had been run, with the state taking the lead in planning what should be produced, how, where, and by whom. British trade unions had grown massively thanks to government support and were more powerful than ever before. After the war, key industries like coal-mining, steel, railways, and electricity, were taken over by the state, a public healthcare system was set up, state schooling was expanded, and a huge project of house-building begun.

Industry-wide agreements set minimum wages and conditions, while governments regularly met with trade union leaders to discuss policy. The formal democratic machinery of the unions stagnated, but grass-roots organisation was gaining strength. Hundreds of thousands of shop stewards would regularly lead short, sharp strikes to improve on the national agreements within their workplace.

This cooperation between unions and governments was a double-edged sword. On the one hand it gave the labour movement more opportunities to shape laws and policies, access to state funding, and guarantees that they could recruit and negotiate in the workplace. On the other hand, it made them less accountable to their members as they had new sources of income and new people to please. What's more, because of closed shops and industry-wide agreements, members no longer had to be as engaged in their unions for them to keep functioning.

This impacted international labour as well as national unions. The ICFTU was led by unions who wanted to keep up a good relationship with their national states, while the WFTU was led by unions controlled by their states. Often the free unions worked alongside their governments, and took on board their wants and needs. As national governments came into conflict, their national union centres often followed them into the fight.

As the British and American unions had emerged from the war (relatively) unscathed, they took the lead in the international labour movement due to their size and financial strength. While they found it easy to work together immediately after the war, the different approaches to two major issues- communism and empire- would create strained relationships within ICFTU.

The Purge of the Radicals

The American labour movement was experiencing some dramatic changes after World War II. American president Franklin D Roosevelt approved laws in the 1930s which brought in some social security measures, and created means for trade unions to get workplace recognition. Union membership grew massively during the war (in 1941 around 28% of workers were in unions, but in 1945 it was around 35%), particularly in transport and manufacturing.

After the war, during which strikes were banned, many workers were ready to go on the offensive to get better wages. The union leaders also wanted a European-style system where labour representatives had a say in state policy. The massive strike wave of 1945-6 was successful in improving wages, but also saw right-wing politicians go on the attack to try and limit union power.

In 1947 members of both the Democrats and Republicans passed the Taft-Hartley Act. This law banned sympathy strikes, walk-outs, and closed shops, got rid of the right to unionise for some workers, made it harder for unions to get recognition by companies, and forced union leaders to sign pledges saying that they were not communists.

The CIO (mostly industrial unionists) and the AFL (mostly craft unionists) had competed since the mid-1930s to win members and gain political clout. The CIO was the more radical of the two centres, and even had several unions which were established and led by communists and Trotskyists. They were purged after Taft-Hartley had been passed, but even this didn't stop reactionary politicians from accusing the trade unions of being run by secret communists determined to wreck the country. This was the age of McCarthyism- if you were accused of being a communist you could lose your job and end up on a blacklist, and being vocally pro-labour or anti-racist was treated as suspicious.

While the US Government justified attacking the Communists by claiming that they were working for the enemy during the Cold War, this state harassment was part of a wider clampdown on the entire radical left. In 1940 the US Government passed the Smith Act, which made it easy for them to arrest, imprison, and deport left-wing radicals. The Act was almost immediately used to prosecute a group of Trotskyists who were influential in the local Teamsters union and had led a general strike in Minneapolis in 1934, and were not honouring the 'No Strike' commitment of WWII. The Communist Party had supported this witch hunt as a way of beating their rivals on the left, not realising the same repressive laws would be used against them as well.

A whole series of left-wing and labour groups- Trotskyist, Anarchist, Communist, and Syndicalist- were eventually placed on the 'list of subversive organisations' which allowed the US government to harass

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them and their members. These attacks weakened the left in the US unions, and gave right-wing politicians a stick to clobber the labour movement with whenever it seemed too powerful.

In 1955, with both the AFL and CIO struggling in this hostile environment, it was decided to merge the two organisations to both increase their political power and reduce costs. The AFL was nearly twice the size of the CIO, and most of its unions were wealthier than their CIO rivals. The AFL were able to use this to take control of most leadership positions within the merged organisation.

The two union centres had had very different approaches in the international movement. Both were anti-communist, but this for the CIO meant working within international bodies to help build strong, fighting unions which could out-perform their Communist rivals. The AFL tended to direct its own international programmes (such as setting up and funding partner unions in Latin America) and felt that the European unions were too soft on communism.

After the merger, the AFL's Jay Lovestone and his associate Irving Brown remained very important in the international department. They had close links to the CIA, and were able to get government funding and resources for the AFL-CIO's programmes. Their hatred of communism was so great that they would work with other enemies of independent, democratic, unionism, so long as they weren't communists.

In both 1947 and 1950 they worked with drug-smugglers and gangsters to violently break up communist-led strikes against the Marshall Plan in Marseille, France. In Greece in 1947, they funded a right-wing coalition to take control of the national centre, driving out a socialist and communist alliance. These new Greek union leaders were happy to run the unions for the benefit of the country's industrialists and right-wing politicians rather than the members.

Lovestone and Brown would work alongside the American government to pursue an 'anti-communist' agenda across the globe. They claimed that they were opposing totalitarian movements, but in reality, they often ended up targeting democratic left-wing movements, splitting independent unions, and even supporting right-wing dictators. This created a great degree of tension within the international movement, as the AFL-CIO claimed that European unions were not tough enough on communism, while their rivals claimed the AFL-CIO was acting as a stooge for American businesses and the CIA.



Jay Lovestone was once a radical trade unionist. He drifted further to the right and worked closely with the CIA after WW2. Their 'anti-communist' campaigns in fact targetted any labour movement which wasn't compliant with US business interests. They worked with gangsters, Nazis, spies, and thugs to shut down real labour movements.

Unions and Empires

While members of the ICFTU agreed on fighting communism, but disagreed on just how to do it, the issue of colonialism was even more divisive. The AFL-CIO, like the American government, took a strong stance against the existence of European empires, and wanted to encourage trade unions in the colonies to do the same. They worried that people in the colonies hated being part of empires so much that they would turn to communism if the system continued. The American government also hoped the end of European empires would allow US businesses to expand into Africa and Asia.

The national centres of the colonial powers (such as the TUC) generally wanted African and Asian unions to avoid 'politics', and instead focus on 'bread and butter' issues. TUC leaders felt that the colonised countries (particularly in Africa) were not ready for independence, and that if it happened then local elites would exploit the local populations. They wanted to build industry and strong unions before independence happened, using funding and support from the British state.

There had been waves of strikes and labour protests across the British Empire in the 1930s, causing the government to legalise trade unions so long as they stuck to collective bargaining rather than political organising. They appointed labour advisors to the colonies, often from TUC ranks, whose job was to train local union leaders and activists in 'apolitical' unionism. The TUC and British government, while saying that they wanted an end to empire, were not clear about when that would come.

This conflict would play out in the ICFTU. The TUC was happy to allow ICFTU to fund education and training programmes within British colonies, so long as they controlled what was taught and who could attend. The AFL-CIO wanted to challenge the TUC's control of the colonial unions, and so organised its own 'bilateral' (union-to-union) programmes independently of the ICFTU, causing many arguments. The ICFTU set up an International Solidarity Fund, but when either the Americans or British felt that their views were being ignored, they withheld cash from it.

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union and the WFTU were very vocal about opposing empire. They encouraged trade unions in the colonial world to take a stance against both colonialism and American influence. Even so, some of their largest affiliates, such as the CGT (which the Communists had come to control having re-joined the organisation in the 1930s), did not see challenging colonialism as a major priority.

Within the colonies, trade unions played a major role in ending the empires. As political parties faced severe restrictions, it was in trade unions that nationalist leaders could hone their skills and build movements. In some cases the 'respectable' unions that had been set up and supported by the colonial state and the British TUC, turned to nationalist and anti-colonial politics. In others, unions' actions forced political crises which caused the occupiers to leave, hoping to salvage a positive post-colonial relationship.

In Sudan, trade unions grew more radical in response to anti-democratic laws. In July 1946, the Workers Affairs Association was founded in Atbara to provide welfare and charity to the working poor. After a year's struggle for legal recognition, it launched a six-day general strike, winning all its demands. This victory convinced many trade unionists that striking got results, and the union took a much more confrontational stance. In 1948, the Trade Union Ordinance was passed, legalising all trade unions in the country. Membership blossomed, with some 70 - 120,000 workers joining unions. In 1950 the Association transformed into the Sudan Workers Trade Union Federation. The SWTUF was anti-colonialist and took inspiration from other nationalist and communist militants in the region. Over three years it launched waves of strikes, both over 'bread and butter' issues, but also to protest anti-democratic laws and to free arrested labour leaders. With the overthrow of the pro-British Egyptian

monarchy in 1952, it became clear to the British that they could no longer hold on to power in the Sudan. They spent their last years in power attempting to cooperate with the unions they had once repressed, and Sudan gained its independence in 1956.

In some cases, trade unions' militancy created political crises which forced an end to colonial rule. In Malaya, the communists controlled the Pan Malayan Federation of Trade Unions and launched an armed uprising in 1948. In 1949 its former president, SA Ganapathy, was arrested and shot by the Malayan government, drawing angry complaints from the TUC as well as the WFTU. The WFTU promised to found a new union movement in Malaya, but the TUC was able to move faster, setting up the 'apolitical' Malayan Trade Union Congress (MTUC) with government support. The MTUC proved to be militant and very capable at winning better pay and conditions, causing the British government to rethink their support for the group. Rather than continuing to support these radical workers, they partnered up with middle-class anti-colonialists, hoping that an independent Malaya could protect British businesses better than a colonial puppet state could.



HANGING IN MALAYA

Revolver Carried On Rubber Estate

SINGAPORE, May 4: An Indian named Ganapathy, former president of the Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions, was hanged at the Pudu Gaol, Kuala Lumpur, this morning. He was sentenced to death on a charge of having been in unlawful possession of a revolver and ammunition on a rubber estate in Selangor. The sentence was confirmed by the Selangor Executive State Council after his appeal had been dismissed by the High Court. He is the first Indian to be hanged under the emergency regulations.

One Malay and one Chinese were killed when terrorists ambushed several vehicles in Kanching Pass, within 13 miles

At first the British tried to violently repress the Malayan independence movement and the trade unions involved in it. S.A. Ganapathy was murdered by the state and became a martyr, provoking protests around the world.

In Kenya, Tom Mboya began his career working for the government-approved 'apolitical' Kenya Federation of Registered Trade Unions. He was brought to Ruskin College by the TUC, with government funding, to study trade union organisation. He soon got annoyed by the TUC's lack of support for anti-colonialism, and instead sought American sponsorship. He set up the Nairobi People's Convention Party in 1957, which was transformed into the Kenya African National Union. He used union offices and staff to run the party's election campaigns, and became a leading figure in the Pan-African movement and amongst African socialists. He would eventually be one of the African leaders who negotiated an independence deal from the UK in 1960.

In the Gold Coast (now Ghana), a decade of strikes and union organisation created the movement that won independence in 1957. There had been a long history of labour organisation in the area- as far back as 1677 local canoe-men downed their oars until the European traders provided better pay. In late 1947, after years of inflation and wartime deprivation, a strike wave for improved pay and conditions paralysed the mines and railways. African World War II veterans also launched a series of boycotts of European-owned businesses, which turned into riots in 1948 when the colonial police shot at protestors. The government first arrested, and then attempted to co-opt the existing nationalist leadership. Despite this, Kwame Nkrumah was able to build the Convention People's Party with the support of the workers who had been active during this wave of protest. His party soon became the major force which led the country to independence.

International funds and training were used by trade unionists on the ground to improve their skills and build the independence movements. Despite attempts by the Western unions to direct the poorer

unions, often they found that the workers on the ground could not be easily controlled. Despite American funding, many did not become anti-communists, and despite British funding, many demanded an immediate end to empire. Although the TUC had worked with colonial states throughout the 1950s and 60s, a growing number of black and Asian members alongside their radical socialist and communist allies increasingly pushed the organisation to take a stronger stance in favour of liberation in the 1970s and 80s.

South Africa and International Solidarity

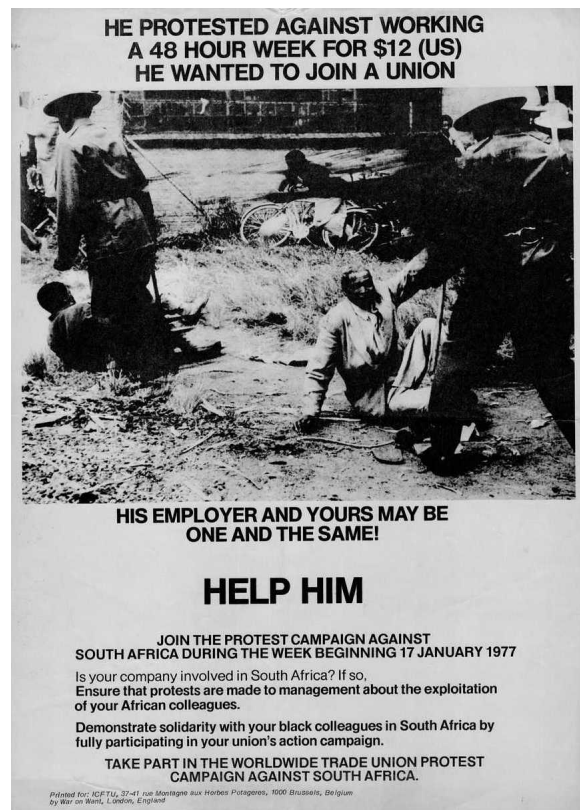
The case of apartheid shows the potential strength of the international labour movement. While South Africa had left the British Empire after World War II, it was still a state controlled by a minority of white colonists. Black people weren't allowed to vote or be involved in politics, worked worse jobs for less pay, and were segregated into small, overpopulated, deprived areas. This system, which was turned into a strict law after World War II, was known as Apartheid.

The first trade unions in South Africa had been organised by and for white workers. They were very militant, but also did not organise everyone. In 1922 a huge strike by armed workers was launched to prevent black people getting the same mining jobs as whites – white workers complained that they would be paid less and so bring white workers' wages down. Rather than trying to organise with black workers, they thought it was better to exclude them. Some of the strikers' banners read 'Workers of the World Unite for a White South Africa.'

Black trade unions were set up after World War I but were repressed by the South African state, with white trade unionists helping to break up their strikes and protests. During World War II, however, black and mixed unions started to grow at a massive rate, with around 200,000 non-Europeans signing up. Many were cracked down on by the Apartheid regime, as the South African government claimed that they were all run by communists.

In 1973 a huge strike wave swept the city of Durban despite the repression – over 100,000 mainly black workers were involved in a series of strikes for better pay and conditions, winning in many cases. There had been few unions involved- these were spontaneous uprisings. The South African government, worried about how movements like this could erupt, decided to legalise non-white unions, hoping to contain the workers' anger.

In April 1979, these new independent unions formed the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), which after merger with the previously-exiled South African Congress of Trade Unions



An ICFTU poster from 1977 urges workers in the US to take part in solidarity actions to support Black South African workers.

(SACTU) that had been operating from Zambia, led to the creation of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in 1985. Labour activists around the world had been horrified by what was happening in South Africa since the creation of Apartheid. ICFTU members launched a consumer boycott of South Africa in 1959, and repeatedly protested at South Africans' presence in the ILO. It was not until the 1970s that the campaign drew in large number of Western trade unionists. In 1973 a conference of trade unionists against Apartheid was held, bringing together the ILO, ICFTU, WFTU and the Christian unions of the WCL. While the trade union internationals campaigned separately, many of their members on the ground worked together.

COSATU after it was formed avoided affiliating to either the WFTU or the ICFTU as they contained supporters of both, and wanted to avoid any splits. Many members felt uncomfortable with the ICFTU due to the presence of the AFL-CIO, and they refused to take money directly from the international because of the US and UK unions' presence. The ICFTU leadership took this as an insult, and at first refused to work with COSATU.

The Nordic unions and the Dutch national centre Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging, (FNV) formed a funders' group to ensure that the young COSATU was receiving funds from ICFTU affiliates, and in several cases, there was direct union-to-union support as well. The National Union of Mineworkers in South Africa, for example, worked closely with the Swedish Metalworkers Union. The trade union movements in the Nordic countries were hugely important in making sure their governments sent humanitarian aid to the black communities of South Africa, as well as providing support for the labour movement.

Relations with the ICFTU improved in time, and they came to provide legal aid and funding to the South African black labour movement. This was particularly important as the Apartheid regime arrested, tortured, and killed the movement's leaders. The ICFTU also drew up lists of multinational companies operating in South Africa and pressured them to both recognise black workers' unions, and to not open up any new operations in the country. These campaigns helped to give the South African labour movement space to grow in size and strength.

WFTU supporters helped to organise workers' boycotts of shipping due to go to South Africa. Members in the Australian transport unions helped to uncover ships which were secretly breaking international embargoes of the regime, and made sure that they went unstaffed. Through their connections to the ITF, they were able to share information and plans between ICFTU and WFTU members. The WFTU's sponsors in the Soviet Union provided funding and arms for the African National Congress' militia.

The international labour movement did not end Apartheid- it was the South African people who led the struggle and brought it to victory. Between 1990 and 1994 the regime was dismantled, and multi-racial elections took place. The global movement played an important role though- it helped to weaken and isolate the South African regime, and provided resources to the unions and resistance parties within the country. The end of Apartheid shows how important the international labour movement can be in the fight for liberation, democracy, and human rights.

'Solidarity Funding' from the State

There is a rich history of trade unions raising funds from their own members in support of workers in other countries fighting oppression, challenging colonialism, facing hardship during disputes or generally in need of resources to build or sustain strong trade unions. This still continues today.

But there is also a history, particularly in the post-Second World War period up to the end of the century, of state financial support for trade union development.

Several countries, particularly those with social-democratic governments, understood that strong democratic trade unions were important means of improving and protecting workers' livelihoods, and significant actors in movements for democracy and human rights.

National trade union centres in several European countries, notably Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway and the Netherlands, all established foundations designed to provide support for development programmes for unions in other countries, almost entirely in the Global South (and later, in Eastern Europe), funded by their respective governments.

These are generally independent of the unions themselves but governed by a board of trade union nominees. Within broad guidelines negotiated with government, they were able to determine their own priorities, policies, and programmes. The group of Nordic and Dutch organisations (including the Danish Trade Union Council for International Development Co-operation, the Trade Union Solidarity Centre based in Finland, The Dutch FNV, The Secretariat of International Trade Union Development Co-operation established by the Swedish unions, and the Norwegian national centre, *Landsorganisasjonen i Norge*) coordinate their work and establish common guidelines.

The Norwegian LO (the national centre) has been particularly important in providing core support to national trade union centres in many Asian and African countries. Some foundations in the Dutch-Nordic group also supported development projects of the ITS's that benefitted their affiliates in the Global South.

There is no comparable organisation from the UK. Historically, the TUC International Department has cooperated with the Foreign Office, but with relatively modest amounts of money involved. Individual unions have been able to apply for grants to assist international trade union development, along with NGO's (such as the charity War on Want), but there is no national organisation established by the trade unions with responsibility for the disbursement of state funding.

The exception was the Commonwealth Trade Union Council (CTUC), financed by commonwealth governments which was in operation from 1979 to 2004, when it was rebranded as the Commonwealth Trade Union Group. Initially, it supported trade union programmes in the newly-independent Zimbabwe, at a time when the American unions were also trying to develop links in the country. It then expanded to establish regional offices in Africa, South Asia, and the Caribbean. The CTUC's primary role was to support the development of trade union education systems for national union centres, based on British workers' education principles and methods.

In the post-war reconstruction In Germany, the importance of preventing fascism from reappearing led to the establishment of political foundations for education and discussion, each linked to a political party, and each receiving substantial government funds in proportion to their electoral support. The idea was to encourage democratic debate and ensure that no one party had a monopoly on ideas. This led to the government funding the *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES)*, the foundation named after one of the SPD's leaders from 1913, who served as Germany's elected president between 1919 and 1925.

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The FES has substantial resources (although now beginning to reduce, in line with the decline in the SDP vote) and runs programmes in Germany, but also since the 1960s has set up offices all over the world, for national programmes with social-democratic parties, some employers' organisations, and the trade union movement. Unlike the Dutch-Nordic organisations, unions, other than the international federations, are generally discouraged from submitting proposals but are invited to participate in projects initiated by the respective national FES offices.

All the other major German parties have similar foundations. Die Linke (the Left Party), a party founded out of a series of mergers of left-wing groups with the remnants of the former ruling party of the German Democratic Republic in the mid-2000s, established the *Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung*. They have recently begun to support trade union development, but to a more limited extent than the FES.

In the 1970s and 1980s, these kinds of organisations were significant sources of finance for union development and solidarity projects, particularly when the ICFTU was paralysed by arguments over communism and colonialism. But with the rise of nationalist and right-wing parties across Europe, and the general crisis in social-democratic politics, governments have reduced or completely cut their budgets.

But governments have also recognised that financial support channelled through trade unions could be useful for less admirable political purposes. Most notoriously, during the cold war years, the AFL-CIO established the American Institute for Free Labour Development (AIFLD) in 1962, with around 85% of its income from the US Government, and a governing board which included anti-union businessmen. The group worked in Latin America, providing training programmes, office spaces and supplies, funding, and even social projects to labour leaders and activists. They promoted an American model of trade unionism which focused on 'bread and butter' issues and encouraged local labour movements to support American foreign policy in the area.

AIFLD graduates were involved in several coups and uprisings against left-wing governments. In 1964 Brazilian President João Goulart was brought down by a military coup, bringing in a twenty-year right-wing dictatorship. AIFLD-backed trade unionists helped to undermine the strikes against the military takeover. Any hopes that this new regime might lead to better conditions for unions and workers were dashed as the military dictatorship used torture and arrests to keep leaders under their control. Similar US-backed right-wing takeovers in Chile, the Dominican Republic, and Guyana were supported by AIFLD-trained unionists.



Chilean troops burn left-wing literature, 1973. The coup against socialist President Allende was supported by the AIFLD and brought in a brutal right-wing regime.

In the 1970s, it was revealed that the AFL-CIO was running ICFTU's regional organisation for the Americas (Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores - ORIT) in much the same way, causing huge controversy internationally. ORIT had worked in tandem with the CIA to, for example, overthrow the leftist government of Guatemala in 1954, ushering in a regime which used concentration camps, mass torture, and executions against opponents and labour activists.

Similarly, the AFL-CIO set up the Asian-American Free Labour Institute in 1968. It funnelled funds to groups who supported the American war in Vietnam, and helped run training courses for the state-controlled Federation of Korean Trade Unions, among others.

Perhaps most insultingly, many of the Latin American regimes brought to power by the CIA, with ORIT and AIFLD's assistance took advice from and collaborated with former Nazis and Italian Fascists who had come to the continent after WW2, as well as neofascist organisations based in Europe and Asia. 'Free trade unionism' was being used as a cover to empower some of the worst enemies of the working class movement.

State Control and the Struggle for Independent Unions

As the Cold War continued, the international labour movement became a battleground, as the big powers tried to control it and use it to promote their own interests.

Within the Eastern European nations occupied by the Red Army, trade unions had been integrated into the state, as they had been in the Soviet Union in the 1920s. Between 1967 and 1975 the Russian union federation, the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions, was even led by Alexander Shelepin, who had previously been one of the leaders of the KGB (the secret police).

The People's Republic of China, founded in 1949 when the Communists won the civil war against the Nationalists, followed in the Soviets' footsteps and soon the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (or ACFTU) became part of the party-state. In Cuba, a similar process took place, as the Central de Trabajadores de Cuba (or CTC) was purged. Although some CTC leaders had been supporters of the right-wing Batista regime, instead of just ousting them, the Castro government removed any rival political groups from within the union, and brought it under their control. Many of these state-controlled so-called 'unions' were part of the WFTU, which became a mouthpiece for the Stalinist regimes.

Ordinary workers did not just accept these attempts to control them. Many had been involved in the labour movement and understood just how important independent unions and democracy were.

In Hungary, as in many of the Eastern European nations, the Red Army had been welcomed as liberators in 1945. At first the Soviet-controlled system had been democratic and pluralistic, but within a few years the Russian-backed communists took total control- opponents, including socialists, were exiled, imprisoned, and killed.

By 1956, Hungarians had had enough. In Poland there had been protests which reduced the number of Red Army troops stationed there and led to some reforms. Many hoped they could do the same in Hungary.

At first students and writers started protesting. They demanded democratic reforms, the right to strike, and an end of Russian control. Then hundreds of thousands took to the streets, tearing down a 30-foot high statue of Stalin, and placing Hungarian flags into his remaining boots. Fighting broke out between the police and protestors, but it became clear that many of them did not want to crush the movement, nor did the soldiers. The government resigned, and a coalition



Hungarian workers destroy a statue of Stalin, 1956. The movement was denounced as pro-fascist by Soviet supporters, but in fact many were socialists, communists, and trade unionists who wanted a real workers' state.

government headed by Communist reformer Imre Nagy came to power- they promised to create a socialist democracy. Reforming communists felt that they should win people's support rather than impose their system by force. Workers' councils were formed in the workplaces, and towns, villages, and cities set up revolutionary democratic councils. These councils helped to organise day-to-day life while the government was in chaos, and tried to make a socialist democracy a reality.

However, the Soviet leaders sent in the army, terrified that an independent Hungary would lead to the break-down of their control of Eastern Europe. The socialist councils and trade unions organised strikes and militias to try and stop them, but were unsuccessful.

Soon a Soviet-backed government was set up, with workers controlled by the state-directed unions once more. Over 2,500 Hungarians were killed in the invasion, and some 200,000 fled the country as refugees. The violent crackdown on an independent socialist movement disgusted members of Communist Parties across the West, causing many to leave the organisations.

It wasn't just the communists who attempted to control the unions. As we have already seen, the American state was attempting to control the trade unions of Latin America and had a willing partner in the AFL-CIO's international department as well as control over parts of the ICFTU Latin American apparatus. Similarly, in the Philippines, 'anti-communist' unions were founded with US money and AFL-CIO training which often worked hand-in-hand with the repressive right-wing regime. Within the formerly-colonised states as well, new rulers attempted to crack down on the labour movements that had often helped them gain power.

In Iran, there was a history of organised trade unionism dating back to the 1910s, and Marxist guerrillas played an important role in the 1979 Iranian Revolution which overthrew the US-supported king (known as the Shah). During the revolution Iranian labourers set up the 'Workers' House' to coordinate strikes and the fight for democracy. This organisation was taken over by the Iranian state in the 1980s, and labour, socialist, and Communist groups faced violent repression as the Iranian clerical regime turned on the allies who had helped overthrow the Shah. In the place of independent unions, Islamic Workers' Councils were set up, which were tripartite (they contain bosses',

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governmental, and workers' reps), and the delegates were hand-picked by the government for their political loyalty. The destruction of the unions in Iran has meant that protests against poor conditions or bad treatment come from outside the 'official' labour movement.

In Tunisia, the *Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail* (Tunisian General Labour Union or UGTT) had been a strong national centre which played an important role in ending France's colonial occupation in 1956. It was founded by Farhat Hached, who had been a member of the French CGT's Tunisian section. He resigned when he found that they wouldn't support an independence struggle.

When Tunisia became independent, Habib Bourguiba, a nationalist lawyer, took power. He turned the country into a one-party state. One of the leading members of the union sat on his party's leadership, and Bourguiba tried to use the union to control the workers. Despite this, throughout the 1970s wildcat strikes



The UGTT plays an important role in fighting for democracy and workers' rights to today. This picture is from a May Day demonstration in 2012, the year after they toppled the dictator Ben Ali with a general strike and uprising.

broke out, often protesting poor wages and the unfair dismissal of workers for their political beliefs. The union leadership was won round to supporting these strikes- the union had democratic structures so grassroots members could get their voices heard.

In 1978, the government decided to try to get rid of the union leadership and replace them with loyalists who would stop the strikers. In response, the UGTT called a general strike- over 500,000 workers stopped work to protest this attack on their independence. The government called in their armed supporters and attacked the movement, killing over 200, arresting over 1600, and wounding many more. Eventually they were able to replace the movement's leaders with their hand-picked loyalists. But in time the UGTT's members reasserted control over the union, and played a key role in ousting the Tunisian dictator Ben Ali in 2011.

In Western Europe and North America, unions in the post-war era enjoyed higher status than ever before, but many started to align with their governments' interests, and some even had sections run by parts of the security state. In the Eastern Bloc, Communists turned the trade unions into a tool of the state to manage their workers, imprisoning dissidents. While in what we now call the Global South workers had to fight to keep their unions, which had helped rid them of imperial rule and puppet leaders, from being turned into yet another way of controlling them.

While the ICFTU refused to work with communist state-controlled unions, other state-controlled unions were allowed to join. This included for example the Chinese Federation of Labour (CFL) in Taiwan, established by the Chinese Nationalist Party (known as the Kuomintang or KMT), which had

ruled the island since the communist-led revolution in 1949. The CFL was under complete state control and attempts to establish independent democratic unions were suppressed until the late 1980s.

The Women's Movement

Between the wars there was an attempt to set up an International Federation of Women's Workers. It merged into IFTU, but stopped meeting regularly- many of the men leading the international did not see it as very important.

"For every famous speaker or writer or delegate to an international congress, there was at least one woman, sometimes several, who shopped for and cooked three meals a day for that speaker, made his bed, cleaned his toilet, raised his kids, and tended to his ailing mother and father."

-Dana Frank, US labour historian

During World War II, millions of women had joined the industrial workforce. Although many were forced out after the end of the fighting, to make way for returning men, the post-war era saw growing numbers of women in the workplace. The growth of nationalised industries provided many more opportunities for women to get work and get involved in unions than ever before. Within the ILO, women unionists and their supporters passed two Conventions in 1951 and 1958 which called for equal pay for equal work, and for an end to workplace discrimination.

Soon after the ICFTU was formed, it began to look seriously at women's issues. In 1955 it set up a women's committee to look at equal pay and working conditions, and make sure ILO Conventions were being followed. However, there were disagreements among the members. Some wanted laws which protected women to make sure that they could be mothers as well as workers, while others had a more radical vision of equality.

These different ideas about what sort of women's rights unions should fight for were seen in national unions as well international unions. In France, the CGT in the 1950s said that better conditions for women workers were important so they could *"enjoy motherhood"*.

In some ways the idea of the 'family wage' lingered on. While women were accepted into the union movement, collective agreements often led to different wages between traditionally-male and female occupations. In 1967, women sewing machinists at the Ford plant in Dagenham, England, went on strike as a new banded pay-scale classed them as 'unskilled' and left them with 85% of the wage of their male counterparts on the same band. Growing numbers of women felt this wasn't enough. They thought the idea that they should be mothers first and workers second would always mean worse treatment for them. What's more, they wanted the union movement to tackle issues like domestic violence, sexual assault, and access to abortion. Feminists in the CGT were able to use the women's trade unionist magazine *Antoinette* to get their ideas heard by a larger audience.

In the 1960s and 70s, the women's liberation movement grew massively, impacting the unions. Many women activists organised women-only groups, both inside and outside the unions. These groups were less formal than branches, and they often had no official leadership positions. They were important spaces where women could talk about the problems they faced in work, in the unions, at home, and in society. It allowed women to share experiences, think about what kind of changes would help them, and call for changes in how the unions were working. Within the ICFTU, the Malaysian agricultural workers' leader, Palayil Pathazapurayil Narayanan organised a coalition which aimed to

get more resources to the women's committee. They were able to use the African Labour Centre in Uganda to train a new generation of women leaders from across Africa in the 1960s. In the 1970s they ran education and training for many Asian women so that they could take part in the movement. In the early 1980s they were able to change the ICFTU rules so that the women's committee could run more programmes of its own accord.

The ITS's also established women's committees. The International Metalworkers Federation set one up in the early 1960s. Since the 1980s, most of the ITS's have done the same, and brought in quotas to make sure that women have a say on the leadership bodies. In the IUF, the Women's Committee grew from five to over thirty members and has become an active participant in the governance of the organisation. It was clear that women were becoming an ever-larger part of the workforce, and often

Unions for Women Workers

In some countries women workers created their own unions, for example in Denmark, when the General Workers' Union, led by men, refused to accept women into membership. The first union of women workers in Denmark was established in Copenhagen in 1885, and the Danish Women Workers' Union (Kvindeligt Arbejderforbund i Danmark - KAD) was established as a national union in 1901 with about 1,000 members, representing at first mostly cleaning and laundry workers, and from 1890 also factory workers. The KAD affiliated to the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) and also affiliated internationally to several ITS's. In 1920 it represented about 20% of the women in the trade union movement. By 1997 it had 88,232 members and in 2004 it merged with the General Workers Union (SiD), which in the meantime had started organising women workers on its own. The two unions formed the United Federation of Danish Workers (3F), more recently joined by others. With nearly 270,000 members, it is the largest union in Denmark.

In the USA in the 1970s, women flight attendants were hired to appear 'young, slim, and sexually alluring', and were often sacked if they gained weight. Airline adverts displayed them as sex objects, causing widespread in-flight sexual harassment. Their bosses gave them temp contracts and low wages, arguing that one day their husbands would support them.

The attendants' union officials were willing to fight for better wages, but were unconcerned about the harassment and objectification these women faced. So they formed their own organisation, called Stewardesses for Women's Rights (SWR). Many left the major transport unions and set up a host of small, independent attendants' unions.

SWR launched a press campaign emphasising that they were there for passenger safety, not titillation. As one leader put it "*We're in the business of saving tails, not serving them.*" Alongside the new unions they threatened strikes, slow-downs, and mass use of sick days unless things changed.

Within a decade the industry had completely changed. There no more weight requirements. New, professional uniforms were introduced, and airline adverts no longer portrayed staff as sex objects. SWR disbanded in 1976 due to a lack of funding, but made important improvements for the conditions of women workers in the sector during its short life.

were not organised. Training up women activists to take leading roles, and making sure that women's rights are taken seriously by unions, has become vital for unions to grow.

The Unions and Post-War Migration

After World War II, some of the biggest movements of people in human history took place. There were several reasons for this – many had fled the advance of the Nazis and now wanted to return home; others left Eastern Europe fearing political persecution; millions of ethnic Germans and Poles were forcibly transferred by the Soviet state; prisoners of war and active soldiers returned to their home countries; the devastation of war and huge loss of life left governments looking to bring more workers into their countries.

The ICFTU at first encouraged a liberal approach to borders and migration. But representatives from several of the national centres of wealthier countries soon started objecting. They worried that migrants from poorer countries would accept worse wages and conditions, bringing down standards for all workers. For example, there were large numbers of Italian migrants in post-war Europe, and Belgian, French, and German unions complained that they should not be encouraged to leave Italy. Instead, they said more work should be brought to Italy.

The Swiss and French unions between the 1950s and 1970s opposed high levels of migration but sought guaranteed equal treatment for migrants to prevent a race to the bottom. In the UK, racist opposition to immigration led some within the trade union movement to campaign against the employment of migrant workers. Local TGWU leaders opposed the employment of non-white workers on the buses in Bristol in the 1950s, only changing policy after a successful boycott and protest campaign led by the city's black residents.

Migrant workers did not just passively accept being excluded. In the 1970s, a wave of strikes led by South Asian and Afro-Caribbean migrants in the UK challenged the second-class treatment they got in the workplace. In 1974 Asian workers at the Imperial Typewriter factory in Leicester struck to get the same bonuses as their white colleagues. They got no union support, but the community backed them. The experience encouraged black and Asian trade unionists and anti-racists to challenge unions' inaction. Two years later, when the South Asian women workers of Grunwick Film Processing Labs struck to get a collective bargaining agreement, they received union backing. By the 1980s the TUC was producing anti-discrimination training and education materials which unions in other countries translated and used. Important steps forward had been made due to the pressure of migrant trade unionists, black and Asian community groups and anti-racist groups.

Within Germany, the DGB's policy of preference for German over foreign workers was challenged by the growth of organisations within and without the unions, as well as pressure from unions in other countries. By the late 1960s, over 20,000 workers were organised into 'associations' which often worked with the DGB on political campaigns (for example to put pressure on the Fascist Spanish state or the right-wing Greek junta), but would organise workers themselves.

A wave of wildcat migrant strikes broke out in the early 1970s. In 1973, over 300 Turkish workers were dismissed from their roles at the Ford Factory in Cologne. This triggered a wildcat strike, during which workers occupied the factory. German shop stewards in the factory had opposed the representation of a Turkish workers' leader on the works council, and supported the police's violent storming of the

factory to end the dispute. The unions at a national level responded by setting up committees in which migrant and German workers could meet and discuss issues, helping to create bridges between communities.

Europe and Social Partnership

After World War II, leaders of several European states decided that their countries could recover better if they started working together. They also hoped that by making their economies more connected, a major war within Europe would become less likely. The US encouraged this, hoping that a well-connected Europe would create a powerful trading partner and prevent Soviet advances.

Throughout the 1950s and 60s, new institutions were created - the European Coal and Steel Community, The European Atomic Energy Community, and finally the European Community. These organisations helped to create common standards and regulations, which made it easier for firms to trade across Europe and laid the foundations of the European Union.

Many of the European governments involved were governed by social-democratic parties, or at least accepted a consensus that unions had an important role to play as partners with democratic government. There was a core 'social partnership' principle, where issues could be discussed and solved together by government, employers, and unions, rather than through industrial conflict.

As the European project developed, and more power and influence shifted from national governments to the new European institutions in Brussels, it made sense to establish a structure where trade unions could engage with government and employers at a European level.

Yet the main European structure at the time was the European regional organisation of the ICFTU, known as ERO-ICFTU, which excluded union federations that were affiliated to WFTU, WCL, or were independent. This was a problem. Some union leaders were strongly opposed to a European structure that would accept non-ICFTU members – particularly the Americans. The majority wanted to overcome ideological differences and create a new inclusive federation. The AFL-CIO left the ICFTU in 1969, in part due to the prospect of the door being opened to collaboration with communist unions in Europe, and only re-joined in 1982.

In 1973, The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) was formally launched. Although one line in its constitution referred to the ICFTU, in practice it was a totally separate body. The WCL-affiliated Christian unions joined within a year, as did some of the former WFTU affiliates, including the Italian *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* (CGIL), Spain's *Comisiones Obreras*, and Portugal's *Confederação Geral dos Trabalhadores Portugueses*. This new European unity was widely celebrated.

The ETUC's creation led to some serious problems, however, which were to have long-term consequences.

Firstly, the ETUC created European Trade Union Federations, their own version of ITS's, but with an important difference. Unlike the independent and autonomous ITS's, these industrial structures were under the control of the central organisation (ETUC) and dependent on its finance.

The new European federations also left the ITS's without a European regional organisation fully integrated in, and accountable to, the global democratic structures. In some cases, it took years to find a compromise solution. In others, it remains unresolved as of the time of writing (between the

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Public Services International and the European Federation of Public Service Unions, for example). Even in those sectors which managed integration there are continual tensions.

Moreover, ICFTU unions from non-European Community (later EU) states were excluded from the Federations, creating a new East-West divide (some ITS's, such as the IUF, made significant efforts to include them, however). Some European multinational corporations seized the chance to refuse to discuss or negotiate with the ITS's, choosing to work exclusively with the ETUC organisations.

As 60-80% of the ETUC's budget comes from the European Union, it is dependent on governments' support for their activities. State funding for the ETUC is not without ideological strings attached, and inevitably concentrates effort on institutional relationships in Brussels based on the social partnership model, which some argues distracts effort away from the fundamental task of building strong industrial union organisation and solidarity between unions on the ground across Europe.

More fundamentally, the European Community and the European Union are based on an exclusive political relationship – 'Fortress Europe', now dominated by the right wing, with restrictions on freedom of movement and protectionist trade policies between European member states and the rest of the world, as a post-Brexit British trade union movement is perhaps about to discover.



As the EU marches further to the right, and takes harsher measures to keep out migrants and refugees, can an EU-controlled trade union body play a progressive role?